Sense of Place

What’s involved in learning

- Negotiating new spaces
- Identifying, creating, and using personal landmarks
- Becoming familiar with the sights and sounds, rhythms, and routines of new situations
- Generating a shared repertoire of narratives and memories
- Making connections between the centre, home, and broader communities

Naming

Name objects, places, and people

- Label personal spaces (hooks, cubbies, baskets, toothbrushes)
- Visually represent and explain daily routines (fire drills, hand washing)
- Develop a shared vocabulary (book time, reading time, circle time, story time)
- Identify and refer to local landmarks (the door to the toddler room, the weeping willow tree at the community park entrance)
- Draw attention to familiar sights, sounds, and smells (lunch preparations, arrival of first parent at pick-up, recess bells overheard at a neighbouring school)
- Explain new or unexpected events (an ambulance rushes by, a thunderstorm develops)

What makes your community unique?

Revisit local places and spaces:

- parks
- woods
- beaches
- farms
- fields

Create Landmarks!

Shared narratives and memories

Write and read, tell and retell stories of group adventures.

Belonging
Children seek out places...

Do families feel a sense of place within your centre?
What do you do to welcome families and friends?
How is a feeling of belonging nurtured?

Guest readers connect the centre with the community

Ask • Inquire • Wonder
- Where can we find...?
- What comes next?
- Where does this go?
- What do we need to do?
- Who was here before?
- Do you remember when?

How do you build connections with other places in children’s lives – homes, places of worship, play groups? Think about places to which YOU belong.

Books to read together
- First Tomato: A Voyage To The Bunny Planet, by Rosemary Wells
- The Island Light: A Voyage To The Bunny Planet, by Rosemary Wells
- Moss Pillows: A Voyage To The Bunny Planet, by Rosemary Wells

Children seek out places...

...personal, private spaces where they can be alone.
...communal, shared spaces where they can be together.

What makes a space special?
Think about what draws people to particular places.

First Tomato: A Voyage To The Bunny Planet, by Rosemary Wells
The Island Light: A Voyage To The Bunny Planet, by Rosemary Wells
Moss Pillows: A Voyage To The Bunny Planet, by Rosemary Wells
Sense of Place

Community Connections: Angela’s Walks

The 3-year-olds and I often walk from our centre to “The Point”. This is a favourite neighborhood playground for the children. I planned for today’s trip by packing dollar store bags full of wind toys. There is always a nice breeze at The Point. We take a route that includes a field of wildflowers. We pass this way often and I always talk with the children about what they are seeing. The children now name the flowers and note what is in bloom.

When tide is out the children see the clam diggers at work on the beach. My uncle has parked his truck by the shore. He buys clams from the diggers and the children stop to chat before continuing to the park.

Several children are interested in collecting stones, leaves and insects. I brought along some “just-in-case” bags for their use.

Knowing that interests and passions vary, I am always expecting children to want to do different things. There is another educator with me so we can share supervision of the children on the play equipment and of the children collecting in the woods.

An early summer storm is brewing as we head back to the centre. We talk about the rumbling thunder and the storm clouds. The children note boats returning to the harbor and can say whose boats they are. Back at the centre the children construct a fishing boat out of cardboard boxes. They use string to make fishing lines.

Here is the catch of the day.

Angela Little Passamaquoddy Children’s Centre

Why this matters:

Well-being includes a sense of belonging. As children move beyond the family and into the larger community they learn to feel comfortable with their environment and the people in it. Jane’s and Angie’s daily walks provide opportunities for children to become familiar with the world outside the day care centre, to begin to identify landmarks and to learn about the people and places that are part of their past and present communities. The walks also provide material for shared memories that strengthen the sense of belonging. “Remember the day we saw the squirrel eating the chestnut?” “Remember the time we heard thunder and had to hurry back from The Point?”
Community Connections: Jane’s Walks

I noticed that the town was having a display of Pumpkin People during the month of October. Several local businesses and the post office on the main street were sites for these displays. I planned a walk with my 2-year-olds, talking to them first about what they might see along the way. Although the path of the walk was planned ahead, I also took along plastic bags for collections of things of interest to the children. On the way back from the main street the children noticed a squirrel in a tree eating something. Prepared for the spontaneous learning that invariably happens, I stopped while the children watched and speculated about what the squirrel was eating. They found chestnuts on the ground around the tree, opened one up to look inside and then collected a few more to take back to the centre for further investigation.

Jane Beckerton  Passamaquoddy Children’s Centre Inc.

Other Possibilities:

Documenting Learning

While out on a neighborhood walk, the 3-year-old children at Unicorn Children’s Centre became very excited when two squirrels scurried past. Maria and Christa, their educators, recorded the children’s words and posted the documentation on the wall. Recognizing the children’s interests was an initial step in planning an investigation of squirrels.
Sense of Place

Home Connections: Jennifer’s Blocks

At the beginning of the year I was trying to think of ideas that would help children just starting at the centre feel more comfortable in their new surroundings. I thought that incorporating pictures of the children and their families into my homeroom would be a good idea. I had made similar picture blocks in the past, but I had used pictures that were connected to certain themes that I was doing at the time. Making the blocks with the children’s family pictures connects the centre with home.

Each child and educator in the room has their own individual block. When the children first saw their blocks they took immediate ownership of them. They carried them around and would often spend time sitting looking at and studying their block. The blocks helped give the children a sense of belonging in their new environment. The blocks also fast became a prize possession at daycare. The children often bring us their blocks and tell us who is on them. They also look at their educator’s blocks and talk about their families too. Now, the children always recognize our children and husbands when they come in to visit. The blocks have really connected the children’s families with their daycare family.

It is eight months later and the children still have an interest in the blocks. They now build more with them. They are not as possessive with them as they were at first. They share their blocks with their friends and we often see them working together to build towers. They still carry them around sometimes and will sit and talk about the pictures on them.

Jennifer Curtis  Chatham Day Care Center Inc.

How to make: Family Blocks…

- Use empty milk cartons that you can get from your local dairy. You could also save used ones and wash them out well.
- Stuff the cartons with newspaper. This makes them a little sturdier.
- Cover them with coloured paper.
- Glue pictures of your choice to the block. (I scanned borrowed family pictures and used them.)
- Use clear packing tape to cover the entire area of the block to protect it, and this makes them easy to wipe clean.
Each centre is situated in its own unique community. How do you help children to identify with the area surrounding the centre? Think about identifying and visiting local businesses, parks, and familiar landmarks. Think about community members who can participate in the centre or whom the children can visit.

How are daily routines made familiar to the children and how is their participation encouraged? How are changes in routines handled? Think about clean-up, diapering and dressing for outdoor play.

In what ways do you affirm families’ connection to the centre? Think about how families see themselves reflected at the centre — through artifacts from home, favourite recipes, family pictures and stories. How do you invite families to share hobbies and talents? How welcoming are your entry ways and your arrival and departure routines?

For Reflection

After Jennifer presented her family blocks at a curriculum workshop, the UNB Curriculum Team noticed similar blocks appearing at other centres around the province. A toddler at the Preschool Centre on Clarke St. eagerly shares his family block with us.
Respectful and Responsive Relationships

What’s involved in learning:
- Developing cherished as well as casual friendships
- Forming close relationships with a range of adults
- Growing in their awareness that their actions contribute to the well-being of others
- Participating in group initiatives

Relationship words to consider:
- cooperative
- amiable
- aware
- trusting
- consistent
- contributing
- friendly
- understanding
- questioning
- flexible
- willing
- compassionate
- open
- forgiving
- polite
- empathetic
- kind
- discussing
- appreciative
- tender
- sympathetic
- sensitive
- accepting
- playful
- supportive
- complementary
- negotiating

Building respectful relationships includes:
- Basic trust
- A safe and secure environment
- Time for uninterrupted play
- Freedom to explore
- Active involvement by the child
- Sensitive observation and consistency by the adult

Magda Gerber and Alison Johnson (2002)

Donna’s children (2 years) and Melanie’s children (4 years) wrote letters to each other. The two-year-old children asked the older children if they could see their block structures. The older children sent a response inviting their friends to join in their block play.

Melanie Allison and Donna Bailey
Just Kids Preschool Centre Inc.

Jared and Bilal (in 2 different classes) communicate with each other through drawing and letter writing. Their communications span several days in a row.

Jared and Bilal
(in 2 different classes)
communicate with each other
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Their communications span
several days in a row.
Each time we have a chance to respond to children individually in a caring, nurturing, and respectful manner, we build trust. Making the time to listen to a child, as well as giving the child time to respond back to you, is vital in building a strong relationship.

Donna Baisley
Just Kids Preschool Centre Inc.

Some infant programs have a ‘circle time’ with singing and simple movement games or activities, but such group times are more for adults’ enjoyment than for the infants’ entertainment or learning. Infants benefit most from group experiences that arise spontaneously. Janet Gonzalez-Mena (2008, 301)

It should be noted that the boundaries of physical contact should be established in partnership with the parents and the child and be respectful of different cultural norms.

Manju Varma-Joshi (2007, 7)

Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind. “Pooh!” he whispered. “Yes, Piglet?” “Nothing,” said Piglet, taking Pooh’s paw. “I just wanted to be sure of you.”

—A.A. Milne

Books to read together
Mama Do You Love Me?, by Barbara Joosse
Koala Lou, by Mem Fox
Meet Max and Roxy, by Karen Huszar
Knuffle Bunny, by Mo Willems
The Relatives Came, by Cynthia Rylant
A Chair For My Mother, by Vera B. Williams
More More More Said The Baby, by Vera B. Williams
Respectful and Responsive Relationships

Building Relationships: Donna’s Cubbies

Our daycare was painted and I had a new group of children and so I had no pictures of children’s families in the room. I decided to ask parents to bring in some family pictures from home. Due to the limited space for displaying things I decided to paste them to their lockers. To my surprise it was a huge success. The parents are engaging in conversation with their children and children are having lots of conversations with each other over the pictures. It also encouraged more parents to participate and bring in their pictures of the children. Parents are also talking with other children about their photos.

Donna Baisley  Just Kids Preschool Centre Inc.
Why this matters:

Recognizing the importance of having families represented in her new room, Donna asked families to bring in pictures. Her documentation encouraged conversations out of which new relationships developed. Children, adults, and families interacted, shared stories, and developed friendships. Children talked with children, families with families, and children with other children’s parents - a classroom community was created.

Other Possibilities:

What else have educators done to encourage families to share their lives with each other? At Unicorn Children’s Centre, Maria Gillis and Christa Kierstead:

- Asked the children: “How many people are in your family?” The children’s graphed responses and ongoing families’ discussions revealed many different ideas about what and who counts as family.

- Used white boards to invite families into their room to look at ongoing projects.

- Invited families to create posters about themselves. Maria and Christa encouraged the children to look and tell them their own stories about the events depicted. They then added the children’s words to the posters.
Respectful and Responsive Relationships

It's a bird! It's a plane! It's SUPER SAM!
Sam, often you come into the classroom and tell us which super hero you are that day. We have even seen you sign your name as ‘Superman’ on our sign in sheet! Many mornings you are involved in dramatic play where you pretend to be the hero with super powers. However, I believe you are a real-life hero. Lately, we have noticed your compassion, concern for others, kindness and encouragement...heroic traits indeed! Here are some snapshots of Sam McKinney’s heroic heart.

February 20 Sam is helping Gillian, his other educator, make pancakes for Pancake Tuesday. Gillian is showing Sam how they can cook three pancakes together so it resembles a mouse with big ears. Leigh, the afternoon teacher, arrives in the classroom and comments that the pancakes look and smell delicious! Sam pauses and ponders. Then, he says, “Gillian, if we have enough batter to make a mouse pancake, don’t you think we have enough to make Leigh a pancake?”

February 21 Today is bake sale day. Sam’s mom, Stacey, brings in a very scrumptious looking batch of cinnamon buns to sell. Stacey tells Gillian that Sam was quite concerned that Gillian will not be able to eat her cinnamon buns because Gillian is allergic to wheat. Sam thinks he and his mom should make a wheat-free treat for the bake sale sometime so Gillian can enjoy it!

February 22 While we are sitting at the reading corner as a class, Rosie is in the dramatic play centre sitting on a low table. As she comes off the table, she falls on the floor and the little table falls on its side. Sam rises to his feet immediately and makes sure Rosie is all right. He picks up the table and puts it back in place.

February 26 I have been known to lose things from time to time. Today is one of those days. I lost my computer memory stick and thinks it is somewhere in the classroom. During group time on the carpet, I announced to the class that it is missing. Curiously, Sam stands up and walks to the other side of the classroom. We are wondering what he is doing. When he comes back, he says to Jill sincerely, “Jill, I looked for your thing, but I didn’t have any luck!” Thanks, Sam (and by the way... I found it!)

February 27 By accident, today, Sebastian does not have a place setting for snack time. He was missing a nametag, napkin and cup. Sam was with some other friends, but he chooses to help Sebastian by finding him a napkin and a cup and giving them to him.

February 28 Isaac was water painting and was very excited about his painting. He exclaimed, “Look at my sun!” Sam said authentically, “Nice sun, Isaac!” What a positive encouragement you are to those around you, Sam! Nice words can make a big difference in the world.

Sam, looking back over the past while, it is clear that you can be a hero by being you. The way you look out for others’ needs, your helpfulness and thoughtfulness are noteworthy. We hope to see these heroic characteristics grow. They will be a fabulous example to the people around you, both young and old.

Jill McGuigan  UNB Children’s Centre
Reflections

As human beings, we are made up of a mind, a body and a spirit. As educators we often tend to focus on the children's minds and their physical bodies, but what about who they are as people? Could it be that a student’s character is just as important as how much they know academically or their physical fitness? I believe so. To ignore the child's personality or character devalues who they are as people which is crucial to how they see themselves and how they relate to others. It is difficult to objectively evaluate a student's spirit; it's simply who they are. Learning stories provide an opportunity to share even the very heart of a child.

One of the best things about the learning story approach is the children are the ones who create the stories; we simply capture their moments on paper. In this case, Sam acted kindly, so I wrote about acts of kindness. I remember being blessed every time I observed Sam act kindly toward others. He has such a heart to help others and I wanted to bring this part of Sam to light. I also thought it would encourage Sam to continue acting kindly toward others by valuing this part of his character. Sam had a real passion for superheroes. At times, he would “pretend fight” his enemies. Heroes do fight enemies of some sort, and I didn't want to discourage Sam's passion to be a hero by dictating how a hero should or should not behave. This learning story provided an opportunity to teach Sam that when true heroes fight, it is for good and not for evil; ultimately to help rather than hurt.

This story resonates in my mind as one of my best memories in the UNB Children's Centre. I remember before I had finished writing the story, I took Sam aside and we sat on the classroom stairs in the reading corner. Many times in my experience, when a teacher says, “I would like to talk to you about something,” it is usually for a rebuke of some kind. However, this meeting I had with Sam was simply to encourage him. I told him that I had noticed the many times he reached out to others to help or comfort. I connected Sam’s passion for heroes with Sam’s character. I told him that helping others is a big part of what makes a hero a hero. I could see in his face that he really grasped that lesson. What a privilege to be able to encourage and speak into the life of a child! To me, this is what teaching is all about.

Jill McGuigan
UNB Children's Centre

For Reflection

What beliefs do you hold about children’s participation in self-care routines? Think about snack time, dressing, toileting, sleeping, diapering. How might your beliefs shape the practices in your centre? How do these practices inhibit or encourage children to take initiative?

In what ways are children encouraged to help themselves? In what ways are children encouraged to help others? Think about your responses to children’s requests for help. Think about access to supplies, peer helping, and contributions to procedures.

How do you address children’s comments and questions about individual or family differences in self-care routines? Think about learning about families’ practices, having open discussions, and taking what children say seriously.

How are government health and safety regulations made visible in your centre and within centre policies? How do you negotiate these regulations as you plan for learning? Think about access to required posted information and responsibility for the management of regulatory information.