THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

WHAT IS THE CAYC?

The Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC) grew out of the Council for Childhood Education and was officially recognized in 1974 by the granting of a Federal Charter. It is the only national association specifically concerned with the well-being of children, birth through age nine, at home, in preschool settings and at school. Members of the multidisciplinary association include parents, teachers, caregivers, administrators, students and all those wishing to share ideas and participate in activities related to the education and welfare of young children.

MISSION STATEMENT

CAYC exists to provide a Canadian voice on critical issues related to the welfare of young children, from birth until the age of nine years. It is the official voice of the Canadian Association for Young Children. CAYC is a non-profit organization with a membership of over 2000 individuals, including parents, teachers, child care workers, administrators, researchers, and students.

THE AIMS OF THE CAYC

1. To influence the direction and quality of policies and programs that affect the development and well-being of young children in Canada.
2. To provide a forum for the members of Canada’s early childhood community to support one another in providing developmentally appropriate programs for young children.
3. To promote and provide opportunities for professional development for those charged with the care and education of young children.
4. To promote opportunities for effective liaison and collaboration with all those responsible for young children.
5. To recognize outstanding contributions to the well-being of young children.

IMPLEMENTING THE AIMS OF THE CAYC

1. The National Conference:

   a. The National Conference is a highlight of the CAYC. The conference includes lectures by internationally renowned authorities on children, workshops, discussion groups, displays, demonstrations, school visits and tours.

2. Provincial and Regional Events:

   a. The organization of members at the local and provincial level is encouraged to plan events to deal with the issues and concerns pertaining to young children. These events may take the form of lectures, workshops or other events.

3. The Journal:

   a. Inside CAYC provides information on Association activities.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MEMBERSHIP

ABONNEMENT ET COTISATION DES MEMBRES

Membership fees are payable on application and renewable annually on an evergreen basis. To be considered a voting member, fees must be paid no later than 60 days prior to the Annual General Meeting.

SA MISSION

L’ACJE s’est donné comme mandat de faire entendre une voix canadienne sur les questions essentielles ayant trait à la qualité de vie de tous les jeunes enfants et de leur famille.

3. The Journal:

   a. Inside CAYC provides information on Association activities.

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EXÉCUTION DES OBJECTIFS DE L’ACJE

1. Le congrès national:

   a. Le congrès national est le grand événement de l’ACJE. Des sommités de renommée internationale en matière de petite enfance y prononcent des conférences et y participent à des ateliers, des débats, des expositions, des démonstrations, et à des visites guidées d’écoles. L’ACJE encourage ses membres à organiser des conférences, des séminaires ou des congrès au niveau local et régional afin de débattre des problèmes relatifs aux jeunes enfants.

2. La revue:

   a. La revue Inside CAYC envoie des articles écrits par des experts de renommée nationale et internationale.

3. Les cotisations:

   a. Les cotisations doivent être réglées au moment de l’adhésion et celle-ci sera prorogée de 60 jours avant l’Assemblée Générale annuelle.

4. Promouvoir des occasions pour une meilleure coordination et collaboration entre tous les responsables des jeunes enfants.

5. Récompenser et souligner les contributions exceptionnelles faîtes en faveur des jeunes enfants.

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SPRING / PRINTEMPS 2013

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Cover Photo by: Alexis Buckshot of Mae Mae (Harmony) and Ling Ling (Sterlings). Taken at Watopi Island Elementary School.

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© 1996: The Canadian Association for Young Children ISSN: 0833-7519

© 2013: The Canadian Association for Young Children ISSN: 0833-7519

SPRING / PRINTEMPS 2013

Vol. 38 No. 1

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Canadian Children is the journal of the Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC), the only national association specifically concerned with the well-being of children of preschool and elementary age in Canada. The journal is published twice yearly and contains articles, book reviews and announcements of professional conferences.

Canadian Children is a multidisciplinary journal concerned with child development, child studies and early childhood education. Authors from across Canada, and elsewhere, are invited to submit articles and book reviews which reflect the variety and extent of both research and practice in early childhood education and child well-being.

CONTENT:
Submissions should appeal to an audience that includes parents, professionals in the field of childhood education and child services, as well as teachers and researchers. Most issues are multi-theme in nature and the editor will attempt to balance articles that are research related with articles of a practical nature relating to programming, curriculum, classroom practice or child well-being.

FORM, LENGTH AND STYLE:
ARTICLES may be of varying length, written in a readable style. Style should be consistent with an acceptable professional manual such as the Publication Manual (6th Edition) of the American Psychological Association. Articles should be sent as an email attachment to the email address below. Authors are to obtain releases for use of photographs prior to mailing. Please include a brief biographical sketch including the author(s) full name, title, professional affiliation, and other relevant information, such as acknowledgements, grant support or funding agency. It is expected that authors will not submit articles to more than one publisher at a time.

ACCEPTANCE AND PUBLICATION:
The editors will acknowledge receipt and will review all solicited and unsolicited manuscripts received. The final publication decision rests with the editor, and will be communicated within three months.

SUBMISSIONS:
Accepted on an ongoing basis.
Children in a kindergarten class had difficulties with physical movement—bending awkwardly to tie shoes, going downstairs using two feet for each step, standing disengaged during exercise time. Debbie wondered whether she could design an emergent curriculum responsive to the movement potential of these children, promoting more fluent body awareness. She wanted to try supporting the children with Reggio-inspired pedagogy using documentation, changes to the environment, and adding many graphic materials. The entry point was an argument after recess about who could run fast. The children’s interest in how bodies work, and strong engagement probably contributes to the environment that the context has been so carefully prepared, organized, and structured that it is rich, generative practice that allows children the full range of their capacities. She is the author of many articles on emergent theories of what permits children to communicate. Many were cared for by Urdu the main languages spoken. Some children’s principal route to development is through movement (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009), a fact of which outdoor sculpture with every part of themselves. Debbie compared these children to her own kindergarten class and how carefully they were, struggling to explore their world. One child could scarcely sit up at the beginning of the year, his stomach muscles so weak. Others made great efforts to bend over to tie their shoes, and walked on their toes when they ran. Climbing stairs was a challenge: Tim (all children’s names are pseudonyms), for instance, took one step up and brought his other foot up beside it for each stair. Some children stood disengaged and unhappy during daily exercise time. Debbie wondered what kind of relationships the children had with their own bodies. Did they think at all about how they moved? Most of these students were from non-English linguistic and cultural backgrounds, with Punjabi or Urdu the main languages spoken. They were still silent in March, using gestures to communicate. Many were cared for by elderly grandparents. We also see a link between the belief that self-regulation by children, rather than intelligence, determines school success (e.g., Shanker, 2003) and children’s participation in ownership of their learning. We believe strong engagement probably contributes to strong self-regulation. Debbie had tried to design an emergent curriculum project (Barnett & Halls, 2008). For her current project, she wanted to gain some insight into the idea of “the hundred languages of children” (Malaguzzi, 1998) in terms of children might express themselves; she also wanted to consider the use of “the environment” as a third teacher (Gandini, 1998) and try out documentation and its revision by children (Edwards, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998). 

“The hundred languages of learning” is a metaphor for the idea of all the various modes by means of which humans create symbols to communicate—whether it be through body movement as in dance, sports, or exercise, using the hands as in drawing, painting, or constructing with wire or blocks, using the imagination as in writing or telling stories, problem solving, building, singing, using the throat to sing, chant, or speak, using the hands and mind to cook, sew, make pots with clay, and so forth. The notion is that the entire body, not merely the brain, is full of intelligence that creates symbols in multiple forms and places. Fraser (2006) notes that this understanding has been a major contribution of Reggio educators and recognizes the importance of multiple modes for learning for children learning English.

We consider ourselves students of the Reggio Emilia experience, inspired by Reggio educators’ holistic and democratic way of being with children and families (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 2012), so that we try to alter our own practices each in our own setting. Debbie teaches in an Ontario school system and Carol Anne teaches at York University. We value Reggio educators’ emphasis on participation, subjectivity, and difference (Rinaldi, 2001) and the sense Reggio educators convey that children have the right to their own sense of ownership of their learning. We also see a link between the belief that self-regulation by children, rather than intelligence, determines school success (e.g., Shanker, 2003) and children’s participation in ownership of their learning. We believe strong engagement probably contributes to strong self-regulation. Debbie had tried to design an emergent curriculum project (Barnett & Halls, 2008). For her current project, she wanted to gain some insight into the idea of “the hundred languages of children” (Malaguzzi, 1998) in terms of children might express themselves; she also wanted to consider the use of “the environment” as a third teacher (Gandini, 1998) and try out documentation and its revision by children (Edwards, 1998; Malaguzzi, 1998). 

The Reggio phrase “the environment as a third teacher” is a concept that Carol Anne thinks many teachers have difficulty grasping because of their teaching. They arrived and processes are centred in controlling uses of time through scheduling. To speak of the environment as part of the learning, as a teacher means, in her interpretation, that the context has been so carefully prepared, organized, and structured that it scaffolds children’s emerging interests and multiple interactions. It builds complexity of thinking by its very complex structure so that it is possible for children to make multiple connections in multiple directions. Rather than learning focused on one relationship and one content, children are encouraged to explore along the path of their understanding, following their first attempt at emergent curriculum (Barnett & Halls, 2008). She knew that Malaguzzi had said that children “become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved” (Katz & Chard, 1996, p. 102). She was curious as to whether creating documentation for the purpose of revisiting would extend and deepen the children’s involvement with body awareness.

The Project Begins

How do teachers begin such projects? Debbie said: “Every day I carefully observed the children, following their lead, yet I seemed to be in a period of waiting for something to unfold. Nothing significant happened. Time was ticking away.” But then one morning, John bounded into class, out of breath, saying, “Mx. Halls, we were racing outside and we won! Boys can run faster than girls!” His comment sparked a heated discussion about who is faster, with both sides adamantly about their speed. Debbie noticed the wonderful provocation but did not want to emphasize the gender competition. We note that children around age five cannot bear to lose in a competition and will simply change the rules; at this age, they are not yet ready to believe in their own power to succeed. Debbie wrote the question “What makes a runner run fast?” on chart paper and posed the question to the children. They came up with responses like these:

You can run fast ‘cause your shoes make you run.
Your head tells your legs to run fast.
If you think about your legs as wheels on a motorcycle then you can run fast.
My body makes me run fast.
Canadian Children

May it has to do with the blood running to your feet.

Debbie found the children’s ideas far more advanced than she expected for kindergarden children, and she noticed that they were genuinely theorizing about many possibilities in making their bodies run fast. By this time it was spring, and she invited the children to go outside. She said: “I always marvel at how children react when exposed to the outdoors. It looks like an awakening of every part of their bodies. The school doors open and it becomes a natural instinct within them to run, and off they go.”

“Tim forced me to reflect on some of the unconscious decisions I make as a teacher. I knew I had to let go of some of my traditional teaching practices that confined Tim’s need to move. I decided I would try to stop myself from saying ‘no’ unless I saw someone’s safety was at risk. Would it be okay if he climbed on structures he built? Bitting my tongue, I watched. When he began building steps with the blocks, climbing up and jumping off, he would look over at me waiting for me to stop him. When I reassured him he could continue, he built steps on a daily basis. His interest in building steps intrigued me, because he was unsure on our school stairs. Was building stairs with blocks his way of mastering stairs?

Children Running

Debbie showed the children images of themselves running, both still images and video on the TV monitor. They all wanted to see themselves, noting differences in individual movements as they ran.

On this occasion the children ran and ran and ran. Debbie took photographs and videotape of each one running, exploring sprinting and jogging. She notes: “I always marvel at how children react when exposed to the outdoors. It looks like an awakening of every part of their bodies. The school doors open and it becomes a natural instinct within them to run, and off they go.”

One of the most awkward children simply loved being outdoors, running with a smile on his face, giggling out loud, and not wanting to stop. The other children loved watching him run and laugh. Debbie wondered: “How could I create a way for him to experience moving inside our classroom in a way that would elicit the same joy and provide him with needed movement activity?”

Inside again, Tim, who loved to build in the block centre, began to build stairs and to climb up and down them. Debbie said: “I always marvel at how children react when exposed to the outdoors. It looks like an awakening of every part of their bodies. The school doors open and it becomes a natural instinct within them to run, and off they go.”

Debbie suggested that the children choose an image and draw themselves running, using white paper and pencils to enable fine detail. To support their efforts, she added two movable mannequins to the drawing table so the children could put a mannequin in their own poses as an aid to drawing. Some children enjoyed posing the mannequin and referred to it, and some used their own images. Debbie found it intriguing that some children who normally drew stick figures were able to capture a clearer representation by using their photograph.

Debbie purchased plaster bandages so the children could make casts, sparking much discussion. Ava’s school with a broken arm in a plaster cast, was enchanting to see. They loved working with the plaster material. The sculptures hardened quickly and the children compared the hardness with Ava’s cast.

After the children had tried drawing an image of themselves running from a still photograph or video image, Debbie invited them to show their theories about how we run fast on the drawing. She wanted to control the palette to make the theories show up well and thought it would ask the children to draw their theory in red pencil. This invitation made the children think intentionally about their theory and how to represent it on their drawing. We share examples of five of the children’s theories to convey their approach to this invitation, and the clarity of the presentation with the controlled palette of figure pencil drawing and theory in red.

Figure 2: Attempt to represent movement

Around this time, one child arrived at school with a broken arm in a plaster cast, sparking much discussion. Ava’s misfortune led to increased interest in bones and investigation of books on the body. Because of the interest in casts, Debbie invited Vanessa Barnett, an instructional leader in visual arts, to work with the children to create three-dimensional figures in running poses. The drawings would work as plans for these figures. First the children made an armature with pipe cleaners, then covered it with masking tape (this part the children needed adult help with). Debbie purchased OrthoTape plaster bandages to coat the figures.

Figure 3. Tim: The wind goes inside me.

The day the children began working with the plaster of Paris bandages was one of those moments in teaching when learning emanates. The children were so excited to see how their rather delicate pipe cleaner figures were transformed—first wet, then drying into a solid with strength and weight. The hand of an artist, guiding, over the hand of a child winding, was enchanting to see. They loved working with the plaster material. The sculptures hardened quickly and the children compared the hardness with Ava’s cast.

Debbie introduced many other activities connected to movement and body awareness throughout this period, from yoga poses in the gym, to daily exercise with a Grade 3 class whose members guided the kindergarten children through the movements in pairs. A mother with a baby visited and sparked much discussion.
about development and movement. About two months into the project, in late May, the children visited a water park, playing freely in its fountains, spouts, and puddles. Debbie writes:

This encounter with the water park was a revelation for me. The children seemed free to be themselves. They were running, jumping, shouting, and skipping, gleeful. It reminded me of watching the videotape on making a portrait of the lion (Municipality of Reggio Emilia, 1987) in which the Reggio children were so fluid and effortless in their movement. Watching my own children caused me to wonder. Was I restricting them from being natural and fluid by following the structure and prescribed rules of a school system? Was this ease in motion buried within the children, dampered down by school, and by changing the context they were able to display more natural movement? Or was this new fluidity developed over our experience in the past two months?

In June, Debbie and the children tested out their theories about what makes us run fast, returning to their favourite grassy area where they had been running on many occasions during the spring. Debbie asked the children, “Have you thought about how you could test out your theories of what makes a person run fast?”

As so often happens in scientific research, the children found a way to test—and find evidence to confirm—their own theory. Hailey returned to Debbie, ecstatic after running hard, saying, “Mrs. Hallis, feel my chest. My heart is beating fast! My blood is racing through my body!” Smirna had theorized that it is our brain that makes us run fast, and tried different running speeds, saying afterwards, “When I think about running slow, I slow down. When I think to run fast, I run fast. My brain makes my body work the way I tell it to.” Carol Anne can’t help but notice the marvellous self-regulation that this brain was developing (Shankar, 2013), controlling her body to her own directions and intentions.

Creating Documentation

Debbie wanted to create documentation that would attract the children and reveal their theories in a way that was easy for the children to understand. She wanted to investigate what happens when children are invited to revisit experience and reflect on it. She also wanted them to be aware of other children’s theories and to offer their own interpretations. The instructional leader, Vanessa Barnett, helped her plan a striking documentation presentation with the drawings of theories mounted on red paper to highlight the red theories, a black and white image of each child running alongside the drawing, and text below encapsulating each child’s theory.

The bones have muscles and the food helps them to get stronger.

You know the food helps the bones and heart get stronger.

Look. Smirna says her bone is telling her to run fast.

Food gives energy to your brain, you know.

But the brain is at the top, and your legs are at the bottom. How can it tell them?

You think about it and your legs do it.

You have to like to run.

No. If you have to run, you will run, even if you don’t like it.

If you’re not happy about running, then you won’t do it well, so you won’t go as fast.

I think shoes make you run fast.

I think it’s everything! Shoes can’t run by themselves.

Yes, but your feet can make your shoes run. Your legs and feet have bones and the blood goes up to my heart and runs down again and then I can run faster.

We can see how the documentation held the theories stable so the children could consider their logic and debate them.

Debbie had wanted to investigate three areas of the research inspired practice when she began this project—the hundred languages of learning, the potential of the environment as a third teacher, and documentation. In drawing themselves in a running pose and working from observation of an image, the children were both reconnecting with their actions of running and connecting what they could see in their photographs to what they could represent on paper with pencil. There is a relation to their past experience of running, a new relation of seeing their running in an image right in front of them, and their relations with the materials used in trying to reproduce that image/experience in drawing. These relations run in multiple directions, strengthening the possibilities for the development of thinking and memory. Adding their theory in red pencil later meant that their theory was expressed in drawing in addition to being expressed in speech. Seeing their theory in drawing, their still image, and their theory written down as text in the documentation gave the children more sets of relations to explore, and their thoughts became more differentiated and sophisticated.

We can see how the documentation held the theories stable so the children could consider their logic and debate them.

In working with her environment, Debbie used the outdoors as a regular part of activities throughout the spring and added centres and materials in response to children’s interests indoors. For instance, she made a dance centre to engage a child who walked away from the running experience; she discovered that the child loved to dance and led the other children in the new movement centre with music. Changing the rules in the block centre helped Tim take risks in mastering stairs in his own way, at his own pace. He changed, during this project, from a quiet, unresponsive child to a vibrant, happy child.

It is always difficult for teachers to document sufficiently when their classrooms are only partly set up to support the construction of the children’s comprehensive emergent curriculum. Carol Anne argues that many kindergarten classrooms do not have adequate materials, or design and organization of those materials, to keep children engaged for long periods of time. It is not the children’s fault if they are not interested; it is a lack in the context. When environments are sufficiently structured with complex and intriguing materials, the children can hardly wait to be active, and teachers then have time to document seriously as the children work. Many teachers who attempt documentation struggle with getting documentation on the walls during the activity itself. In this case, we admit that the panels we discussed earlier were created at the end of the project itself. Even so, we can see that the children’s engagement with them and further conversation pushed them to refine their theories, and they had not reached, and we were certainly pleased by the sophistication of their thinking and expression.

Did this emergent curriculum on movement change Debbie as a teacher? She said:

As an educator, I had a tendency to impose structure and unnecessary rules on the children, curbing their natural movement in the classroom. Further, I conformed to the norms of conventional teaching embedded in me instead of questioning their validity. When I became sensitive to the fact that many children in our community are living in small dwellings, without street-level play, and are cared for by the elderly, I realized they have too few opportunities to experience physical movement. As a teacher, I realized part of my role is to be a “dispenser of occasions” (Edwards, 1998, p. 181), and by observing and listening to the children I was able to offer many more movement experiences.

Carol Anne thinks that Debbie is unusual as a teacher in that she was able to put the children first, rather than the patterns of school routines. Getting past the expectation of quiet classrooms, still children, and highly controlled movement patterns in schools is not easy. Yet children from birth to age 7 or 8 learn primarily through their interactions with the environment, and these cannot happen without the movement of their bodies in relation to that environment (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Lack of understanding of children’s right to move in order to develop when in early childhood may be
Using Photographic Picture Books to Better Understand Young Children’s Ideas of Belonging: A Study of Early Literacy Strategies and Social Inclusion

By: Yiola Cleovoulou, Heather McCollam, Erica Ellis, Lauren Conmeford, Isabelle Moore, Annie Chern, and Janette Pelletier

This study examined the ways young children (3 years 11 months to 7 years 9 months) talk about and demonstrate their understanding of social inclusion through the use of self-produced family photograph books. One hundred eighty-seven children from the Greater Toronto Area participated in the study by first sharing their personal photograph books with a small group of peers and then exploring books produced by children unknown to them. A mixed methods approach was used where children’s understanding of vocabulary was documented and small focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed. This article focuses on the study’s qualitative findings that children spoke about and conveyed their understanding of concepts surrounding social inclusion (inclusion, diversity, respect, acceptance, understanding) based on (1) their learning of the social inclusion vocabulary, (2) their personal experience with social inclusion, and (3) their talk of social inclusion in relation to social identity. These themes and their implications for early childhood education are discussed.

Our world today is more interconnected, dynamic, and socially conscious than ever before. The crossing of borders through immigration, leisurely travel, and internet browsing have made the recognition, acknowledgement, and appreciation of diverse experience and existence more apparent. Canada’s population has rapidly changed in recent decades (Malenfant, Lebel, & Martel, 2010). Statistics Canada reports an increase “in the proportion of persons born abroad, persons whose mothers tongue is neither English nor French, and persons belonging to visible minority groups” (Malenfant, Lebel, & Martel, 2010, p. 3). Issues surrounding multiculturalism and our responses to diversity have never been more relevant to our everyday lives. Increasingly diverse populations and urban demographic shifts toward more multicultural integration have resulted in an increased awareness of the value of social inclusion. Our classrooms are mirror reflections of larger society, and it is children’s understandings of social inclusion that illustrate the essence of multiculturalism in a learning community. For example, in the Greater Toronto Area it is common to have over forty languages and an equally wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds represented in a school. It is important that children understand and recognize their contributions to diversity and inclusion. Educational research has begun to explore the role and value of social inclusion through understanding children’s perspectives (e.g., Pelletier, Morley, & Messina, 2010).

Our study was based in Toronto, Canada, one of the world’s most diverse cities. More than 200 different ethnic origins were counted in the metropolitan area of Toronto in the 2006 census. A major factor contributing to this diversity is the high number of immigrant families living in the city, most of whom (81.9%) belong to a visible minority group (Statistics Canada, 2006). Toronto moves toward even greater multiculturalism, school populations mirror this diversity. Children from diverse families and social identities come together in a classroom to interact and learn from and with one another. Teachers in communities across Toronto work with students from a wide range of cultural, racial, cognitive, gender, linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. Within this diverse context, many teachers spend a great deal of time and thought creating inclusive environments where students are affirmed, engaged, and respected.

Social inclusion is a key component in developing social relations and a strong self-image among students. The Ontario Ministry of Education and school boards long ago established equity policies on social inclusion in educational settings, which it is hoped, will result in children feeling included, valued, and appreciated. To understand and support this process, our study focused on educational settings in the early years with the goal of gaining
For these reasons, researchers and practitioners alike have called for further inquiry into young children’s understandings of social inclusion. A recent report titled “We All Belong: The Effects of Photograph Books to Enhance Literacy and Social Understanding in Early Years Classrooms (Pelletier, Morley, & Messina, 2010) examined children’s understandings of social inclusion through the use of family photograph books. The report included quantitative measures of children’s language and literacy related to social inclusion and terms and general comprehension. The findings suggest that through explicit and intentional instruction of concepts related to social inclusion using family photograph books, young children can enhance their understanding of social inclusion. The findings include informal educational practices and the integration of social inclusion into the curriculum. In this article, we share qualitative, descriptive findings gathered in the report in the form of children’s expressions of their understandings of social inclusion. We consider the children’s words to explore what social inclusion means to them and parents—can do to support children’s understandings of social inclusion. The findings shared here extend the findings of the Pelletier, Morley, and Messina report by adding detailed insights directly from the children’s voices and connecting those details to the literature on social inclusion. Thus this study contributes to the literature on diversity, early childhood education, and inclusion by analyzing children’s discourses of inclusion.

Social Inclusion

Until recently, the term social inclusion has been used to describe integrated schooling in a special education setting (Evans & Lunt, 2002). As Topping and Maloney (2005) state, “all commentators now agree that inclusion should mean much more than the mere physical presence of pupils with special education needs in mainstream schools” (p. 5). The present study follows the path of many scholars in the field who conceive of inclusion in this broader sense (Ainscow, 2008; Dei, 1996; Kosnik & Beck, 2009; Kumashiro, 2002; Melnick & Zeichner, 1997; Topping & Maloney, 2005; Verma, Bagley, & Jennings, 2007). In our study, social inclusion now encompasses a much wider social context, including any individual who is vulnerable to exclusionary pressures (Ainscow, 2008). The increasing level of diversity in our communities, coupled with the revised interpretation of social inclusion and related terms and traditions of others.

Acceptance: Willingness to welcome people and to like them for who they are; all people can be themselves.

Understanding: Knowing that we are different; that we belong to someone else’s choices and thinking (perspective taking); wanting to know about what other people think and do.

Theoretical Perspective

Building on the definition that social inclusion is a broad concept that considers any person vulnerable to exclusionary pressures (Ainscow, 2008), we bring critical theory to our discussion of this investigation’s findings. Critical theory adds to the definition of social inclusion by its emphasis on the issue of power as it relates to the qualitative, anti-oppression framework for thinking critically about the “other”—“other” being any marginalized group or person—provides a broad theoretical frame for considering the ways young children talk about aspects of inclusion. Kumashiro’s framework also provides pedagogical opportunities to teach young children about inclusion and exclusion while maintaining the natural and authentic discourses that young children experience daily. In addition to Kumashiro, we include Ladson-Billings’ (1994) and Gay’s (2000) work in culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy to discuss how institutional curriculum can be altered to be inclusive and to support the learning of social inclusion, and how educators can foster children’s consciousness of issues of social inclusion.

Bringing a critical theory framework to early years learning about social inclusion adds a complexity and layering of thoughtful decision making on the part of the teachers. For example, decisions around use of words, choice of language, exposure to explicit sensitivities that may or may not be realized by the children, and responses to children’s thoughts play a role in framing the study and the analysis. Overall, a focus on social inclusion was used to capture the understandings of young children’s ideas surrounding inclusion, and a critical frame was central in the analysis and discussion to explore more deeply and profoundly the case for social inclusion in the early years.

The Study

Methodology and methods

Initially intended as a quantitative study that looked at social inclusion vocabulary acquisition in the early years, the study also generated qualitative data that went beyond the scope of the quantitative findings. As researchers interested in the qualitative findings, we studied, analyzed, and discussed, through a critical lens, the descriptive accounts of children’s talk during the focus group discussion. This article provides an in-depth analysis of the children’s talk and shares the details of two of the research questions from the larger study. The questions we explored and report on were:

1. How do children talk about social inclusion using family photograph books?
2. How do children in the early years understand social inclusion when referring to specific vocabulary?

There were three stages involved in the study. In the first stage, team members developed a research plan designed to examine young children’s understanding of social inclusion. To extend previous research involving the creation of photograph books to foster home literacy and discussion, it was decided that the same quantitative methodology would be used to help children pay attention to—and, in doing so, a deeper understanding of issues of social inclusion.

Junior kindergarten to grade one children from six schools in the Greater Toronto Area varying widely in their sociodemographic profiles were invited, through information and consent letters sent home to parents, to participate in the research study. The parents of 187 children consented to the research (95 boys, 92 girls with an age range of 3 years 11 months to 7 years 9 months). The sample is relatively large and includes children from a wide variety of social backgrounds (race, ethnicity, economic status, language, religion) and classroom settings.

Two of the participating schools are associated with a university; one of these offers a reverse integrated kindergarten program that integrates typically developing children with children who have physical challenges in a unique learning environment and the other is a private school. The public schools in the study varied in demographic location, from subsidized housing communities to middle-class suburban neighborhoods. When describing and analyzing the findings, we refer to the dominant and
Most common responses as “the children’s responses.”

The second stage of the project also involved qualitative methods. A vocabulary measure pertaining to social inclusion was used to observe how the primary school teachers from one of the participating schools. “Inclusion” terms were generated during collaborative meetings with the research team and then were ranked ordered by the group of primary teachers. The teachers selected terms they felt would be important for young children to understand and manageable to track and record. The top five ranked terms—

inclusion, diversity, respect, acceptance, and belonging—were discussed in detail, and a shared definition was established for use by all the researchers. A teaching protocol for introducing and discussing these terms with the children while using the family photograph books was created. This was done to assess children’s understanding and learning of particularly vocabulary.

The third and last stage of the project drew in the qualitative methods. The family photograph books were used as part of a focus group discussion that targeted the five inclusion terms and drew children’s attention to their own and other children’s books. A series of photographs was collected from each child to construct the family photograph books. The photographs, along with their layout and design, were printed and bound. Additional copies of some books were made for the children in the book study group received books that were from children from different schools during the second session. The children who participated in this study were divided into two distinct groups: book study and control. It is important to note that the groups were not randomly assigned. The specific collaborative nature of this study necessitated the involvement of the university-associated classrooms in the partnership research. Seven groups participated in the focus group discussions.

On the first day of the focus group discussions, the children were given their own books to look through while the researcher drew attention to similarities and differences among the books, following a detailed script. These books were designed to represent a wide range of items that may be significant and easily identifiable to young children. These items included name, family, favourite animals and toys, neighbourhood and shopping places, favourite activities, toy preference, favourite place, favourite pet or animal, and dreams. A photograph represented each item and each photograph was specifically linked to a particular inclusion term. For example, the term "inclusion" was explicitly discussed while viewing the photographs pertaining to neighborhood places and shopping; the term "diversity" was explicitly discussed when viewing the photograph of the child and their family. All group discussions were recorded and transcribed.

On the second day of the focus group discussions, the children received books belonging to children from other schools. A detailed script was once again used to ensure consistency and structure throughout the duration of each discussion. The children discussed what they noticed related to their own books compared to the other children’s books. The detailed script directed the children through a meaningful review of the family photograph books, which involved the explicit discussion of the five inclusion terms. Group discussions were transcribed and detailed field notes were taken by the researchers to capture children’s talk of social inclusion.

Analysis
Since this article reports on the third stage of the study and the findings related to it, we will only mention here the analysis for the third stage. The analysis involved multiple reviews of the transcripts and the detailed observational notes taken by the researchers. Fifteen interviews (one transcript was unuseable) were completed and used for the qualitative analysis. After the completion of the interviews and the transcript processing, the researchers organized the transcripts according to grade, taking into consideration their focus (grades 1 and 2), and school. Once the data had been organized, researchers read and reviewed the transcripts repeatedly to gain a deep understanding of the data and to discuss strategies by which to further organize the data. The data were further arranged based on the five inclusion terms by assigning each term a colour code and highlighting the sections of each transcript where the term was explicitly discussed. Repetition, description, and explanation of the vocabulary were highlighted and coded.

Once the text had been identified by inclusion term, each researcher was randomly assigned to a term and proceeded to examine that term independently through a cross-analysis (across schools and grades). Each researcher repeatedly reviewed the notes associated with their assigned term. Descriptive observational notes were made, which drew attention to emerging themes. The emergent themes are reflected in this paper’s discussion. The researchers met several times over the course of several weeks to discuss findings and emergent themes across each of the terms. The terms were later analyzed as a whole, through group discussions, to identify and address shared themes and patterns as well as interrelationships between the terms. The themes that emerged from the text helped the team to develop interpretive theories and understandings about the data (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005).

Limitations
The large nature of this study offered benefits and constraints in relation to the third stage of the qualitative focus groups. On the one hand, this study affords strength in its large number of interviews; one transcript repeated to four inspectors and young children in small focus groups, across six different schools and with a four-year age span across participants, (one transcript was unuseable) provided several opportunities for comparison and discussion. We were able to explore what children of different age groups said about the various social inclusion terms and compare what children across school settings had to say about social inclusion. The large number was helpful in acquiring more data by way of more children participating in the focus group, which offers strength in transferability. On the other hand, the constraint of such a large-scale study was that its original nature, a quantitative methodology, limited the time and scope of the qualitative methods. For example, because there were so many focus groups, less time was spent with each group.

The first two stages of the study were designed and conducted using the five methodology from a developmental psychology background. This provided an inherent tension when it came to engaging in qualitative analysis through a critical lens in stage three. Nevertheless, there is much to be gained through this research because the critical lens used in the framework and analysis of the findings offers a great deal of information to the fields of psychology and the early years with regards to how children talk about social inclusion in a natural social setting.

"to take my hand and walk me all the way to the golden section … where there are pears."

Another limitation of the third stage specifically is that the interview script limited the number of opportunities children and researchers had to explore additional themes. The structure of the interview script was very helpful for the quantitative findings, posed limitations to the qualitative findings given that interviewers did not veer away from the script or probe children’s responses. Also, the brevity of the focus groups resulted in limited opportunities to explore and confirm the themes that emerged in the discussion.

Examples of children’s understandings of concepts of social inclusion
Children have a good sense of what inclusion is and is not, and are able to describe their understandings of term related to inclusion with ease. Many of the children’s comments about their understandings of social inclusion were described through personally relevant examples. We organize and describe their talk here according to the five terms of social inclusion (inclusion, diversity, respect, acceptance, and belonging).

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The following describes the terms we discuss implications.

Inclusion
It means it doesn’t matter if you’re from a different country.

It means we don’t exclude anyone.

Inclusion means that you don’t, that you let people join, and if you don’t, then you’re not doing inclusion.

I would welcome you in.

Bringing people into your favourite places.

Everyone can come.

If you have a soccer ball and they ask you to play, you say yes for first, second, and third recess.

You can go with me and come to Wal-Mart.

It’s pretty much like being nice to people and welcoming them into our space.

Be nice, welcome them, and show them around. … If you’re playing a game with someone else you should let everyone play because if you want to be by yourself and you’re playing with someone else it wouldn’t be nice.

If you had a house, if someone lived in Vancouver, if you didn’t allow them to come over but if you did it would be inclusion.

You don’t need to include him because we already go to the same place.

In an interesting example, on the page about a favourite store is a picture of a grocery store. The interviewer asked a child how the boy who made the book could make them feel welcome at the grocery store. The child replied: “to take my hand and walk me all the way to the

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They are the same because they are all family.

“...a different because she has a brother and I have a sister.”

That’s your family? Only your mom and your dad.

Our families have different names.

Their families have lots of family. Other people have more people in their family and some people have hour people in their family.

Some of their parents broke up with their real dad and met another dad that is our step dad. This is my real brother (points to his photo). I have two step bothers, and my dad’s girlfriend is having another one right now in her tummy, she has two babies.

Pictures are different and families are, too.

Two children were exploring a photograph book in which the mother had a boyfriend, both children laughed and placed their hands over their mouths. In keeping with the premise of equity, diversity, and inclusion, the interviewer asked: “What is funny about that? Moms are allowed to have boyfriends and this may mean the parents are not together anymore and that’s okay. That is what makes families diverse.” Another child responded, “That’s so weird.”

The ways in which children demonstrated their understanding of respect most closely resembles a less critical perspective. Similar to literature in the area of character education, children describe respect through a set of universal values (Licikona, 1991). Licikona (1991) draws attention to universal moral values such as treating all people justly and respecting their lives, liberty, and equality. “We have a right,” he claims, “even and even a duty to insist that all people behave in accordance with these universal moral values” (p. 38). Ideas of sharing, fairness, and the need to build community by playing nicely with one another’s games were reflected in the children’s responses.

Acceptance

Accept the things that other people say.

You like it but you might not want to play with it all the time. [You can show acceptance] ... by being nice.

By letting people come with you to the park and store.

I would say “hi” and introduce her to everyone and I would let her play a game if she wanted to be by herself I would let her.

Understanding

You can understand people and if you’re really smart you can understand people’s brains.

Understanding means I understand your pictures. I understand your hair. I understand everything.

To understand about someone else.

Listening. (This was repeated several times by several children at different schools.)

Understanding school rules.

Making people happy.

If parents say “go clean your room,” you go clean your room. To understand someone, what they want, and listen to them.

A child kissing their book “momma” and again states “I understand about my mommy and daddy.”

The last two terms, acceptance and understanding, were less about social inclusion based on social identity and difference and more about understanding the actions for fostering social inclusion— to be understanding and accepting. Children demonstrated their knowledge of these words in relation to their own lives and made clear assertions of what they should do. Much of their understanding is similar to more traditional views of what it means to be socially inclusive, that is, to employ universal values of fairness, listening, sharing, and being nice, as suggested in the work of Licikona (1991).

Overall, children demonstrated a complex understanding of the five terms of social inclusion. They were able to define the terms and, in most cases, provide examples of what. What is less evident is students’ ability to relate notions of social identities, such as those outlined in Topping and Maloney’s (2005) framework (race, class, gender, ethnicity), while talking about social inclusion. Children did share their understandings of some socially constructed identities, and those understandings are discussed next.

In addition to children’s ability to define terms of social inclusion, a closer look at the ways in which they talked about social inclusion in relation to themselves and others further demonstrates the complexity of their understandings. The results show that, across the five terms, students were able to identify their own social positions—their likes and dislikes and their personal belongings and experiences. When students compared themselves to others it was often based on the similarities students shared.

Additional analysis led us to an understanding that young children are able to talk about specific attributes of themselves in relation to others. On the second day of discussing the family photograph books, children shared some insights of their understanding of social inclusion based on social identities. There are several ways people socially identify; the social constructs that children made were mainly in reference to family structures, race/ethnicities, and religion.

Family

This family has glasses and this family doesn’t.

They are the same because they are all family.

“Our" is different because she has a brother and I have a sister.

That’s your family? Only your mom and your dad.

Our families have different names.

Their families have lots of family. Other people have more people in their family and some people have hour people in their family.

Some of our parents broke up with their real dad and met another dad that is our step dad. This is my real brother (points to his photo). I have two step bothers, and my dad’s girlfriend is having another one right now in her tummy, she has two babies.

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Respect

I could show how I respect someone’s pet. I would ask if I could see it for a long time. If you want me to show respect you could come to the house and have a play date and show my favourite toy. I would play with others’ toys nicely.

How you show respect is you have to look after the toys. Even if you don’t like it don’t say that because they would feel bad.

You could do a white lie and say you do like it.

Not laugh. Say you like it. You can lie. If it wasn’t respect you called it stupid pet, that wouldn’t be nice. But if you called it a lovely pet that would be nice.

Say “I like your hair.”

It doesn’t matter what you look like.

By supporting everyone else in your family and all your friends and all your cousins.

Don’t rip the toys.

Give the fish some food.

[Even though people’s toys may be different from your own I would just love to play with them and have fun and try new stuff.

If you have a pet and you don’t like another one, you don’t have to say it, you can respect it.

You show respect for someone’s game when you say it is the same game as mine and everyone’s game is fun.

Respect was the most described and defined of the five terms. The children defined respect by treating both things and people nicely. Children stated that respect was about saying nice things, being careful with other people’s things, not breaking things, and not hurting people’s feelings.

golden section … where there are pears.”

Children’s understandings of inclusion focus on the idea that others are welcomed or are actively part of the larger social group. For example, many of the definitions and examples provided by the children surround the idea of allowing or welcoming someone into a physical space, such as a department store or someone’s home. In a couple of statements, children described a geographic place. Children did not provide particular reasons as to why other children would not be included, but they did provide a number of examples based on their contextual understanding of place. In other words, students did not articulate that inclusion was important regardless of social difference or identity, just that inclusion was important and the nice thing to do. One young student stated, “You don’t need to include him because we already go to the same place,” suggesting that inclusion only matters when exclusion occurs or could occur.

Diversity

Some families come from different countries.

Some are tiny families, some were Chinese, and some are purple like hair.

It means different.

Diversity means a lot of different things together.

Diversity is what it is when there are a lot of differences.

God made everybody different.

Jesus makes us different.

Like “Bill” where we don’t match (their shirts) so we have something different.

Mom and dad don’t look alike because mom came from different family and dad came from different family.

Short discourse among students and interviewer:

Student 1: They’re [people in two photograph books] not the same ... why?

Student 2: Because they are not the same age.

Student 1: And they are not wearing the same clothes.

Interviewer: Different from our families?

Student 1: They are different, yes.

Student 3: Some are dark and some are light.

Interviewer: Are we all different in this room?

Everyone: Yes.

In most instances of talking about diversity, children demonstrated some understanding of the term as defined in this study. Children understood the term diversity to mean that, while things are not the same, they do come together. Children noted differences between themselves and others in a variety of ways, such as the clothes they wear, the number of letters in their names, and the colour of their skin. Children recognized social identity as a factor of diversity among other traits such as different toys and letters in names. This could be attributed to the nature of the script, and the discussions from the photographs on the page. The family photograph books allowed children to learn about others and to celebrate their similarities. This practice is similar to Kamishiro’s (2002) principle of educating about the other as a way of developing affirming communities: “By increasing students’ knowledge of the Other, and perhaps helping students see similarities between the groups, this approach challenges oppression by aiming to develop in students an empathy for the Other” (p. 42).
Some have blue eyes, some have green eyes.

In her book, her mom is not wearing a hijab and in mine, my mom is.

Religion

My favourite place was my church, this person’s was Baskin Robbins. God made us different.

In her book, her mom is not wearing a hijab and in mine, my mom is.

Children’s learning of social inclusion vocabulary

Each social inclusion term (inclusion, diversity, respect, acceptance, understanding) was taught both implicitly through natural discussion about the children’s family photographs and books and explicitly through standard teaching script. For example, while looking at the books children were explicitly asked, “Can you show us how your family is different from this family? How does that mean that we can be the same in some ways and different in other ways?” Children were then asked to give other examples of diversity using their books. The results showed that the terms diversity and inclusion were less understood by children at the pretest in contrast to the terms understanding and respect. In other words, the participants had the tendency to learn about the terms diversity and inclusion. The quantitative results also showed that targeted teaching of these terms in conjunction with the use of family photograph books significantly increased their knowledge of these terms. This finding suggests the value of explicit, intentional social inclusion instruction as well as the importance of “teaching the terms” to young children knowing which words children know and need to know in order to better understand social inclusion. The finding is consistent with the work of Cummins (2002), Kumashiro (2000), and others who work directly and explicitly to end the exclusion of groups and individuals who experience marginalization. The aim is to foster inclusiveness through reference to social characteristics of what is dominant and/or normal. In his work that builds a framework for anti-oppression pedagogy, Kumashiro (2000) advocates for explicit discussion about the “other.” He defines “other” as “those groups that are traditionally marginalized, othered (i.e., violated, i.e., othered in society. . . . They are often defined in opposition to groups traditionally favored, normalized, or privileged in society and as such, are defined as ‘other than’ the idealized norm” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 32). Kumashiro (2002) describes four principles of anti-oppressive practice: (1) education for the other; (2) education about the other; (3) education that is critical of privileging and othering; and (4) education that changes students and society. This family photograph book study addresses several of Kumashiro’s principles in relation to children in their early years and demonstrates how explicit teaching of key concepts related to social inclusion can develop children’s understandings of themselves and others in relation to issues of inclusion.

A unique finding emerged specifically in the kindergarten program. When a cross-school comparison was carried out, there was an unusual pattern for the word inclusion. The results were part of the school community based on the integration of children with and without special needs had a significantly stronger understanding of inclusion in the pretest than did those in the other schools. Yet, surprisingly, while all other schools included children through the focus group, the integrated kindergarten program decreased. This suggested to us that the children’s very deep but specific understanding of inclusion in their setting had been confounded by the focus group discussion that suggested a much broader definition of inclusion. This finding may indicate the importance of explicit instruction and the need to be aware of references to the concept of inclusion when considering social inclusion, specifically, the background knowledge of our students.

In addition to considerations of explicit discussion of social inclusion, the study demonstrates a consideration of student background knowledge and beginning points for discussing inclusion. Children from the school community based on their book knowledge that word in a very particular context that differed from children from other school communities. This finding leads us to consider the works of Ladson-Billings (1994, 1995) and Gay (2000) on culturally relevant and responsive pedagogy and how children in the early years may best acquire deepened understandings of social inclusion. Gay (2000) outlines four critical aspects of culturally responsive teaching: caring, communication, curriculum, and instruction. In explaining instruction, she argues that culturally responsive teaching includes multiple ethnic perspectives. According to Gay (2000), culturally responsive teaching means respecting the cultures and experiences of various groups, including socially excluded groups as resources for teaching and learning. This approach appreciates the existing strengths and accomplishments of all students and enhances these strengths through instruction. Therefore, consideration for the social and schooling experiences of particular groups of students indicates that the classroom needs integrated school community, religion-based schools, low-income community, racial-ethnic groups, and others. Areas for exploration could include how young children form and understand first impressions, kindergarten
Canadian Children Canadian ChildrenChild Study Child Study

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Deep exploration of children’s understandings of social inclusion could include additional group and dyad sharing of books and discussions, as well as open-ended interviews that invite critical perspectives to surface and be explored.

While many students come to school with various ideas on the topic of social inclusion, it is important to note that young children have the ability to understand its complexities and are able to form opinions. It is through exposure to materials dealing with social inclusion and the subsequent discussion that takes place that students are able to develop their own social identity and become aware of the social identity of those around them. The findings in this study open the door for further research in how young children’s understandings of social inclusion can be developed using concepts of critical theory. The findings also present in the right context and support for both ECEC and classroom teachers would allow conditions for such change. Providing the right context and support for both ECEC and classroom teachers would allow children to delve into the complex and important topic of social inclusion.

Using a critical discourse approach (Fairclough, 2003; Foucault, 1972; Lake, 1997; 2002, Rabinow, 1984; van Dijk; 1993; van Leeuwen, 2008) this paper presents findings and implications for the students and the basis of children’s stereotypes. In the context of pre-service preparation. In part 1762 educational treatise Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s novella Émile. This treatise written in the 18th century includes the idea that children are prepared to explore learning communities and the necessary combination of natural and “progressive” approaches recommended to raise children as moral citizens. In our analysis we discuss the ways Rousseau portrays the image of a child—unruffled, calm, and intellectually for school. Advice ways the child can be prepared emotionally and intellectually for school. Advice ways the child can be prepared emotionally and intellectually for school. Advice ways the child can be prepared emotionally and intellectually for school.
contends that it asserts truth and constitutes knowledge that becomes a powerful agent in the creation of social and psychological identities. Children may find themselves ill-prepared and behind, even unsuccessfully. Ironically, this message can become self-fulfilling, as parents try to gain a competitive edge and teachers try to prepare children for the years to come. Less obvious are the secondary messages, or, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) suggest, the so-called “metaphors” that are created discursively. In early learning, even innocent-sounding words such as preschool, kindergarten, school readiness metaphorically suggest that early life experiences are merely a staging ground for formal education and that the role of parents and early, learned, or special preparation to make the child “ready” for the more important experiences yet to come. When we take this discourse uncritically, we are conceptually agreeing with the values, beliefs, and assumptions that these assertions are premised on. Dangerously, in this context we have lost other ways of viewing learning and other ways of seeing children’s capabilities. Our concern is is no longer with who the child is at present and what he or she is capable of; our concern becomes preparation and protection, as the child is judged against the expectations of tomorrow. In this view, today’s child suffers in the somewhat indifferent care of his watchmaker father, who, as a single parent without his wife’s higher social status and endowments, was often financially restricted and socially marginalized. Rousseau Sr. taught Jean Jacques to read and write, and mostly attended to his education until the boy was 10, at which time he fled Geneva to avoid the law. Jean Jacques was left in the care of his uncle, who paid for his formal education. Rousseau Sr. often sent him to apprentice with an engraver. His apprenticeship was unhappy, and within two years Jean Jacques ran away to the outskirts of the city and eventually to France, where he entered into a series of employment and educational pursuits, including studies of music, religion, and mathematics.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical discourse analysis has been described by Luke (2002) as a “repertoire of discourse strategies, argument structures, reading positions and practices for the critical analysis of the place and force of language, discourse, text, and image in changing contemporary social, economic, and cultural conditions” (p. 97). According to Fairclough (2003), the process of critical discourse analysis examines how language is related to the order of the discourse and the ways in which the language is socially structured. This analysis pays attention to the content of the text and the style the authors use. By viewing the discursive processes as social events, we are able to position the author and readers relationally to uncover assumptions, values, practices, and beliefs. This process involves, according to Luke (2002), a conscious switching back and forth in the analysis between the normative reading of texts and the normative reading of the social world. In this paper, we take up this view by examining how messages are couched in words conveyed in Rousseau’s text itémis, but to the images and deeper conceptual meanings created throughout the text. We do this to better understand and to critically evaluate the relational and pedagogical implications of Rousseau’s advice to mothers and educators and to better understand how this discourse continues to preoccupy our educational discourse.

Critical Discourse Analysis

Rousseau’s essay on the corruption of civilization was later published as the “Discourse on Political Economy” in the 1755 Encyclopédie. It easily found its audience among an industrious, active working class who were critical of the state, privileged higher echelon. Following his initial successes, Rousseau worked concurrently on The New Heloïse, The Social Contract, and Émile all published in 1762. As Ballinger (1965) applies describes, in these books, Rousseau found his place as a social critic by articulating his often contradictory thoughts with a passionate rhetoric that fuelled many revolutionary ideas.

Rousseau’s Émile

Rousseau’s novella Émile is divided into five books: the first three dedicated to the child Émile, the fourth on the adolescent, and the fifth on Émile’s female counterpart, Sophie, as well as to Émile’s domestic and civic life. Rousseau’s early childhood experience of being raised and educated largely by his father and his uncle (Hillisseme, 2002), in addition to the social norms of the day favouring women caregivers, may have contributed to his veneration of motherhood, including his construction of an image of the ideal mother whose sole purpose was to breastfeed, nurture, and protect her young from the corrupt influences of society. In Rousseau’s early adulthood, creative urge, an experience which, by his own admission, was a failure, but which undoubtedly shaped his thinking and the advice he later prescribed. As do the magazine images described in the introduction, Rousseau aimed to provide advice for wealthy upper-class citizens. Throughout the novella, Rousseau built many images as he assumed the voice of the child Émile, projecting on and through his own rhetorical questions. This discursive style exudes a force that leaves no space for the reader’s own ideas, values, and beliefs or the views of others, nor does it promote reflection and the ability to construct other ways of thinking about a given topic. Although Rousseau himself was very disciplined in his self-study and intellectual pursuits and he described the importance of his own reflective practices, the training style he adopted and recommended for the tutor was didactic, simultaneously treating the reader and the novella’s fictitious child Émile as intellectually passive and limited in their ability to summon independent thought and reflection. According to the novella, Émile, and by implication, all boys and girls age, need guidance and direction. In this belief, Rousseau was much influenced by his predecessor, John Locke (1632–1704), who believed that children were tabula rasa (“blank slates”) ready to be filled with information (Locke,1689). In this view, children were thought to have no innate abilities to gather their own information or perceptions or direct their own learning. Tabula rasa

In keeping with Locke’s view, Rousseau saw Émile as an intellectual blank slate, a perspective that leads to a binary tension that is qualitatively different than if we begin with a conceptual image of children as needy and wanting. As do the magazine images described in the introduction, Rousseau aimed to provide advice for wealthy upper-class citizens. Throughout the novella, Rousseau built many images as he assumed the voice of the child Émile, projecting on and through his own rhetorical questions. This discursive style exudes a force that leaves no space for the reader’s own ideas, values, and beliefs or the views of others, nor does it promote reflection and the ability to construct other ways of thinking about a given topic. Although Rousseau himself was very disciplined in his self-study and intellectual pursuits and he described the importance of his own reflective practices, the training style he adopted and recommended for the tutor was didactic, simultaneously treating the reader and the novella’s fictitious child Émile as intellectually passive and limited in their ability to summon independent thought and reflection. According to the novella, Émile, and by implication, all boys and girls age, need guidance and direction. In this belief, Rousseau was much influenced by his predecessor, John Locke (1632–1704), who believed that children were tabula rasa (“blank slates”) ready to be filled with information (Locke,1689). In this view, children were thought to have no innate abilities to gather their own information or perceptions or direct their own learning.
as tabula rasa may not appear so bad. In many ways it makes the teacher powerful and important, knowing that they might shape, fill, and endow knowledge upon the child’s mind, but when we examine this image critically, we also see that it is a dangerous ploy, a passive, disengaged student alongside an omnipotent teacher who doesn’t provide the pedagogical space for children to construct their own knowledge. This is taken further in Rousseau’s discussion of a so-called negative education from age 2 to age 12, when instruction is purposefully withheld from Émile so that he can develop his physical qualities and senses without the interference of intellectual or moral instruction. In this view, little room is left for other realities, such as a child’s ability to generate her own early understandings or pursue her own questions. In this thesis there is no room for the social role of peers as co-constructors in a learning process, not importantly, for the role of extended family members and learning communities. No alternative moral, intellectual, or social possibilities, are presented.

Child as naïve and helpless

Closely following this image of Émile as a blank slate is a companion image of Émile as naïve and helpless without his mother or tutor. This image extends to mankind, who is said to be in the need of education. Rousseau (1979) writes:

We are born weak, we need strength; we are born timid, we need courage; we are born stupid, we need knowledge; we are born cowardly, we need principle. If we are not medically prepared, we are born weak, we need strength; if we are not morally prepared, we are born cowardly, we need principle. (p. 38)

This image is simultaneously posed as a problem for the child’s old age as well: “One day an adult will say to him: ‘You will reward your care.’ By implication, if the mother is unsuccessful, she is to blame.

In this scenario the stakes are high and the assumption is that she (or the tutor) is alone in this educational task. Emile has no siblings; no mention is made of peers, family or community outside his immediate nuclear family and there is no sense of a communal responsibility for the care and education of young children. This stance follows from Rousseau’s assumption that society’s influence is corrupt and that the child should be protected from all extraneous forces. This stance, in turn, reflects the values and assumptions that mothers are less equipped to care for the intellectual and moral needs of their older children. Emile is the only individual who is ill prepared to engage relationally with the needs of infants and younger children. This perspective also creates a binary with no middle ground for situations where fathers may support mothers in their nurturing role or vice-versa. Although we could argue that this stance concerns learning communities, we still see a majority of mothers caring for infants and young children on a daily basis and a majority of women teachers in early childhood education. Additionally, no consideration is given to parents’ individual strengths or to the temperament, gender, or other individual differences of the child. The descriptions easily become archetypes of mothers, fathers, children, and tutors, with no perceivable distinguishing qualities and no middle ground for different approaches that might best suit the fit between them. The danger of such archetypes is that we very quickly learn who we should be or what others should be through that archetypical image, and often we are restricted in our ability to learn who others truly are or who we might be outside this dominant image. The parents who drop their children off at school become archetypes of mothers or fathers, not Hémi and Andrew. The children we teach become boys and girls, not Christy, James, Carleen, or Hié. Can we ever really reach a point of co-inquiry and collaboration with archetypical images? How can we truly get to know these children and families?

Tutor as selfless expert

This sets the stage for a theme taken throughout Emile where Rousseau adopts the voice of “expert” through his creation of the tutor role. This role assumes responsibility for the provision of Émile’s mental, moral, and physical education and is seemingly omnipotent. This creates the image of education as an impossible-to-attain ideal for the nurse, mother, or tutor given the magnitude of the task. In Rousseau’s (1979) words, when education becomes an art, it is almost impossible for it to succeed, since the conjunction of elements necessary to its success is in no one’s control. All that one can do by dint of care is to come more or less close to the goal, but to reach it requires luck. (p. 38)

In addition to describing education as an art that is impossible to master or succeed in, Rousseau (2011b) adds that education in general is to protect the child from the evils of the world. Initially the educator or nurse is charged with this task and later the tutor takes on this role. This approach is also reminiscent of the advice given to parents about how to “convince your kid to let you do even the things they hate” (Points, 2011, p. 46) by combining the dreaded task with affection.

Rousseau’s Views on Education

Education as behavioural problem solving

Several of Rousseau’s examples liken early childhood education to behavioural problem solving. In one example, the educator rationally “teaches” Émile not to be afraid of masks. In his description, Rousseau (1979) writes,

All children are afraid of masks. I begin by showing Emile a mask with a pleasant face, then some one puts this mask before his face; I begin to laugh, they all laugh too, and the child with them. By degrees I accustom him to less pleasing masks, and at last hideous ones. If I have arranged my stages skillfully, far from being afraid of the last mask, he will laugh at it as he did at the first. After that I am not afraid that people frightening him with masks. (p. 20)

In this example, the reader is presented with a rational, behavioural approach to solving the “problem” of childhood fears associated with masks. To counter this deficit, we are presented with a lesson in desensitization where the tutor is advised to model the pairing of the mask with laughter so that Emile associates the dreaded object with a pleasant response and eventually fears are replaced with laughter.

Rousseau is not alone in his reasoning, where the educator is to counteract the fears and anxiety he associates with it. Moreover, this strategy is intended to protect Émile and assure the tutor or parent that others won’t be afraid of what Émile is afraid of, which is that common in children. This theme of bolstering the individual innocent, naive young student against a corrupt and evil society is repeated continually, with the assumptions that the role of educator and education in general is to protect the child from the evils of the world. Initially the mother or nurse is charged with this task and later the tutor takes on this role. This approach is also reminiscent of the advice given to parents about how to “convince your kid to let you do even the things they hate” (Points, 2011, p. 46) by combining the dreaded task with affection.
Rousseau saw society as a corrupting influence, even going so far as to denounce the role of books as unnatural and miseducative. He felt that man was born with the capacity for good, but once contaminated by the hands of others. A consistent theme throughout Émile was that he found fault in the educational practices of the day including rote memorization and separation of learning from the student’s own direct experience. The 1st half of the book discusses Émile’s “natural” education apart from other children and away from the imitation of adult social duties and etiquette (a common practice among the elite). Instead, because he believed that young children were predisposed to being good, it was more important to allow their predispositions to emerge and find their natural expression. This could only happen, according to Rousseau, away from the corruption of parlor life and other social influences that misshape childhood.

Contradictions found in Rousseau’s notion of a natural yet engineered child
Rousseau’s treatise calling for a natural education describes an approach to learning that is individually tailored for Émile according to each stage of his development. Rousseau also acknowledged childhood as a separate and unique phase in life which should be cherished and appreciated. This perspective has contributed to our understanding of childhood as unique and valuable in and of itself rather than as a holding place prior to adulthood. Importantly, this view has also led to the establishment of children’s rights and a disruption of the common view that children are lesser beings.

Through Émile, Rousseau contributed the idea of the developmental stages of infancy, childhood (boyhood), preadolescence, adolescence, and adulthood which have implied that a natural education would attend to these stages. His theory suggests that one cannot force knowledge, but that we must allow children to naturally develop and enjoy the early years of their life before they are ready to be formally educated. Since Rousseau’s time, this stage approach has been furthered by evolutionary psychologists and developmental theorists like James Mark Baldwin, Jean Piaget, and Arnold Gesell in their theories of genetics, maturation, and the mental growth of children. These theories have also been used to support the idea of developmentally appropriate learning where formal instruction is delayed and introduced at a timely point in maturation so that we avoid “hot housing” children and treating them as miniature adults. In Émile’s treatise he illustrated this by suggesting that reading instruction should not be attempted until after the age of 12. Children younger than 12 should not exercise their primary senses and directly experience the world around them. Such basic sensory experience will become the foundation of later abstract thought. In this way, Rousseau viewed experience as prerequisite to reason and abstract thinking, which he believed would come later. He viewed the child’s development before age 12 as best suited for an “education of the senses” that required a “negative education” even in the assumption that the child’s visual and receptive powers remain latent for the first twelve years of life and should not be corrupted by moral or intellectual instruction.

"Uncovering the roots of these images of teacher as expert, learner as passive, and mother as vulnerable, tender, and anxious, and critically evaluating the way we have distanced children and families and separated them from "educational experts" may help us to construct a more developmentally sound and engaging "authorship" of our positions so that they may be collectively reimagined."

Although there is good reason to see childhood as a qualitatively separate phase in life, Rousseau’s stage theory can be problematic and is not necessarily “natural.” Seeing our current approaches like those generated by Rousseau, theorists such as Margaret Donaldson (1978) have since successfully argued that young children are in fact capable of abstract thought and reasoning well before age 12, and that when children are evaluated on their ability to think in a more theoretical and analytical way, it is often a test of language comprehension that takes place. In Children’s Minds (1978), she also argues against the traditional link of egocentric behaviour to young thinking, pointing out that egocentric behaviour is often demonstrated throughout adulthood (we will see this particularly in Western cultures).

From age 12 until 15 Émile is considered to have developed physically into a tough, resourceful, self-reliant individual whose powers of reasoning emerge and develop. Rousseau’s “natural” education is no longer independent, self-reliant thinker (latent or otherwise) is not a value shared by all cultures, and it also poses a problem if we adopt it unquestioningly. In many collective cultures and/or cultures that acknowledge the necessity and value of interdependence, the separation of the individual from the group is thought of as unnatural. Part of the appeal of seeing the individual educated outside the group, from Rousseau’s point of view, was that it could offset the social and vicarious learning that would take place and, importantly, the corrupting influences of society. Rousseau says nothing in the novel about the value of the extended family, clan, or community. As part of Rousseau’s celebration of individual rights, he saw the individual as having the right not to be used as a means toward an end (i.e., the global citizen). The pupil is regarded in this way as an end in himself and her/himself and not part of a nationistic, economic or political plan. Again, this value has been highly prized in North America, but it is important to note that it comes with a set of responsibilities that we barely consider when we let the learner is situated within the collective. Perhaps more importantly, it should be noted that these values are not universally shared.

Gender
When comparing Rousseau’s careful articulation of the process of Émile’s development and his discussion of Sophie (in Book V of Émile), we see another contrast in educational values, in this case values related to gender. According to Jane Martin (1985), the majority of interpretations of Rousseau’s educational theory have been taken from Books I to IV in which he discussed education solely for boys and “his fictive ideal” Émile. Sophie is introduced in Book V essentially to complete or complement Émile’s life, given that in Rousseau’s (2011a) works educational experts are a men-only phenomenon (Book V, para. 2). In Rousseau’s blunt descriptions of the essential social and moral virtues that women should possess, he states:

The children’s health depends in the first place, their education; for, beyond the fact that they might become social security in a time of need, Rousseau (1979) paints a true picture of society in that era as he writes:

What might happen if we were to view any education that women receive is done for the betterment of her offspring, taking us full circle to an image of women as being charged with the care and wellbeing education of their young children.

Overall Rousseau’s novella provides a blueprint for “natural” and “progressive” approaches to successfully raise boys as moral beings and buffer them from the influences of a corrupt society. As part of our analysis, we see many strong images created by Rousseau that continue to linger as discourses in our current educational habits and practices. We also suggest that many of Rousseau’s so-called natural approaches are contradictory and deeply embedded with a set of values that they and others hold in that culture and era: that men had proprietary rights to women and children. Conceptually, Rousseau also asserts that education should be a particular way, consistent with the culture and beliefs of Rousseau’s era. The images, however, of teacher as expert, learner as passive, and mother as vulnerable, tender, and anxious all seem to linger in our current discourses and practices, which may be collectively reimagined. Using a critical discourse approach, we can see that images bring up a number of conceptual metaphors that lock us into ways of thinking about children, pedagogues, and maternal roles that should be questioned and examined critically as they relate to our current world views and aspirations.

Conclusions
Uncovering the roots of these images of teacher as expert, learner as passive, and mother as vulnerable, tender, and anxious, and critically evaluating the way we have distanced children and families and separated them from “educational experts” may help us to construct a more developmentally sound and engaging “authorship” of our positions so that they may be collectively reimagined. Using a critical discourse approach, we can see that archetypical images presented in the popularization of Rousseau’s theories exist in many examples throughout Rousseau’s writing that illustrate a common view held in that culture and era: that men had proprietary rights to women and children. As explained by Martin (1985), while it is true that she is by nature so fashioned but when Émile’s authority Rousseau makes it both necessary for her to remain in the traditional female role and impossible for her to become a successful and independent woman. With this view of women and children as property, we can reason that the education of girls and young women in Rousseau’s day could never be as freely determined as that of the education of boys and young men. Conceptually, Rousseau also asserts that any education that women receive is done for the betterment of her offspring, taking us full circle to an image of women as being charged with the care and wellbeing education of their young children.

We might happen if we were to view
Life Long Achievement of Excellence

It is with the greatest of pleasure that we announce that Susan Fraser has been given an award for Life Long Achievement of Excellence in Early Childhood Education and Public Service to the Province of British Columbia. Sue is the first recipient of this award. She has been chosen because of her lifelong commitment to young children and their families, not only in British Columbia but also in many other parts of Canada and the world. Many Canadian children readers will know Sue and understand that she is seen not only as a guide and mentor, but that she is someone who has been instrumental in changing teaching practices in early childhood education throughout Canada. Sue has been an early childhood educator, a college and university professor, and a staunch advocate for children. She also served for a number of years as the editor of Canadian Children. Susan Fraser receives Lifetime Achievement Award.

References


She is loved and respected dearly. Like all good leaders, she is loved and respected dearly. 

Sue has been an early childhood educator, has been instrumental in changing teaching practices in early childhood education throughout Canada. Sue has been chosen because of her lifelong commitment to young children and their families, not only in British Columbia but also in many other parts of Canada and the world. Many Canadian children readers will know Sue and understand that she is seen not only as a guide and mentor, but that she is someone who has been instrumental in changing teaching practices in early childhood education throughout Canada. Sue has been an early childhood educator, a college and university professor, and a staunch advocate for children. She also served for a number of years as the editor of Canadian Children. Susan Fraser receives Lifetime Achievement Award.

Zihan Shi is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education, University of Victoria. Zihan’s research interests are second language acquisition, English language learners, literacy development, heritage language maintenance, and home literacy environment.

Intended for educators and researchers in the field of early childhood education working with children from immigrant families, this article first briefly addresses the relationship between home literacy environment and English language learners’ literacy development in both their heritage language and English. Second, through surveying the literature, I identify three different areas in which a home literacy environment influences English language learners’ literacy development: (a) through language attitudes and parental beliefs; (b) through identity formation; and (c) through literacy behaviour of immigrant parents. Some helpful strategies learned from the literature are provided for educators to use with newcomer families in support of children’s literacy development.

Literacy development is essential to a child’s school performance and future success. Yet, literacy is not a single, monolithic, and autonomous construct (Street, 2000). Here, literacy is defined as a set of skills that is socially constructed in educational and cultural contexts, including skills in printed and nonprint-based texts and in critical thinking (Kahn & Kelner, 2005). This definition is in contrast to a singular, autonomous notion of literacy in which literacy development emphasizes decoding a text and studies involve the analysis of literacy rates, comprehension levels, ages, and reading and writing skills (Kahn & Kelner, 2005).

Multiple literacies consider literacy to be a social practice (Street, 2000), where context and meaning in groups of different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds need consideration. Just as cultural and linguistic backgrounds in families vary, literacy practices vary between and within cultures.

In addition, rapid development in technology has changed how we look at literacy; the idea of multiliteracies shifts our thinking about literacy from privileging the printed text to acknowledging various ways that literacy is practiced in a society (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). With the increasing use of technology, literacy is no longer restricted to an ability to deal with printed texts, but has expanded to include electronic and multimodal forms of communication.

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In this paper, an English language learner (ELL) will refer to preschool and early elementary grade children whose first language is not English and who are learning English as a second language in a North American setting (Shi, 2011). Learners of English as a second language may include children from Africa, Bangladesh, Hispanic regions, China, Laos, and many others (Shi, 2012). Although different terms appear in the literature to describe such learners, English language learners is increasingly utilized because it highlights the learning process instead of a deficiency of nonnative English-speaking students (Gere, 2008). Because literacy is a socially constructed practice, children who are learning English and whose parents speak another language and come from a culture different from that of the mainstream culture will inevitably be influenced by literacy practices at home. Therefore, I have prepared a representative (not comprehensive) review of published research on literacy of immigrant parents, which includes those from Africa, Bangladesh, Hispanic regions, China, Laos, and many others (Shi, 2012). Although different terms appear in the literature to describe such learners, English language learners is increasingly utilized because it highlights the learning process instead of a deficiency of nonnative English-speaking students (Gere, 2008). Because literacy is a socially constructed practice, children who are learning English and whose parents speak another language and come from a culture different from that of the mainstream culture will inevitably be influenced by literacy practices at home. Therefore, I have prepared a representative (not comprehensive) review of published research on literacy of immigrant parents, which includes those from Africa, Bangladesh, Hispanic regions, China, Laos, and many others (Shi, 2012). Although different terms appear in the literature to describe such learners, English language learners is increasingly utilized because it highlights the learning process instead of a deficiency of nonnative English-speaking students (Gere, 2008).
A child’s literacy development involves home, school, and community support. In this article, we examine how the home literacy environment influences children’s literacy development. The literature defines the HLE as either passive or active. A HLE also includes parental beliefs regarding literacy, the parental education level, the family socioeconomic status, the number of books in the home, daily literacy experiences in the social domains. Burgess (2002) argues that, given adequate exposure to a second language, concepts developed in the first language can be transferred across languages. Cummins (1981) proposes a framework of literacy practices to describe how literacy-related skills are transferable across cultures. Language attitudes have utilitarian goals and reflect on achievement personal success and status in society, while those with an integrative language attitudes can be characterized by a desire to be identified with a language-speaking group. Positive or negative, instrumental or integrative language attitudes towards a heritage language: (a) residence in Latino communities; (b) children in schools with common use of Spanish; and (c) previous experience of learning Spanish in a United States school. Parental language attitudes towards heritage language maintenance were strongly demonstrated through the fact that none of the parents valued heritage language learning for their children. Farruggio (2010). Most parents held integrative language attitudes towards heritage language learning, which will positively influence children’s heritage language maintenance. However, he did not specify the age of the participating children. Positive language attitudes are also shown in studies of Chinese, Japanese, Korean.
Canadian Children

Child Study

In addition to parental language attitudes toward heritage language maintenance, studies have shown that parents in immigrant families hold very different beliefs, largely based on their children’s exposure to English. When children are exposed to English, they may develop strong preferences for English while maintaining their heritage language (Liao & Larke, 2008). Over time, parents may diminish the importance of their children’s heritage language maintenance (Lee, 2002; Shin, 2005). As a result, negative parental language attitudes may inevitably negatively influence children’s heritage language maintenance. When parents think it is difficult for their children to acquire reading and writing skills in a heritage language due to lack of input and resources in the mainstream society (Liao & Larke, 2008). Some parents often want their children to totally immerse in English and, as a result, the children’s heritage language proficiency often suffers (Chumak-Horbatsch & Garg, 2006).

Lawrence (2009) suggest the need to design an instrument specific to immigrant parents that would include questions regarding their child’s heritage language and the influence of a first language on second language acquisition.

Similarly, in an earlier study, Li (2001) concluded that parents’ language beliefs were related to their cultural background. Immigrants, such as Chinese, who are more likely to maintain their heritage language, they have concerns with the positive effects of maintaining contact with relatives and links with their native culture. In addition, many parents think that children will have more professional opportunities if they maintain their heritage language; for example, one parent stated: “We believe that if you are bilingual, you have many job opportunities with private American and European businesses” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Bernhard, & Freire, 2001, p. 15).

Although the literature consistently reports that parents hold positive language attitudes toward heritage language maintenance, many immigrant parents face the dilemma of supporting their children in acquiring English while maintaining their heritage language. Even if parents hold positive language attitudes toward heritage language learning, they may behave passively and pass the responsibility of heritage language maintenance over to their children (Liao & Larke, 2008). Time, over pressure, makes diminishing effort and investment in their children’s language maintenance (Lee, 2002; Shin, 2005). As well, negative parental language attitudes will inevitably negatively influence children’s heritage language maintenance. When parents think it is difficult for their children to acquire reading and writing skills in a heritage language due to lack of input and resources in the mainstream society (Liao & Larke, 2008). Some parents often want their children to totally immersed in English and, as a result, the children’s heritage language proficiency often suffers (Chumak-Horbatsch & Garg, 2006).

In addition to parental language attitudes toward heritage language maintenance, studies have shown that parents in immigrant families hold very different beliefs, largely based on their children’s exposure to English. When children are exposed to English, they may develop strong preferences for English while maintaining their heritage language (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2008). For example, one mother said: “I am concerned that this can be pressure for her. I think it would be too difficult for her if I restrict her to use only one language” (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2008, p. 14). The participating mothers (and one father) in the Chumak-Horbatsch (2008) study reported anxiety and uncertainty about the continued use of the home language and wondered about its possible negative affects on the learning of English and future difficulties in school. One parent reported, “I am also wondering will her English be good enough when she starts school if we continue to speak Serbian at home. This is counteracted by a desire to Canada with their own understanding and cultural beliefs about literacy. For example, Chinese parents are more likely to hold a strong impact parental belief toward children’s literacy development. As one participant in the Li (2001) study noted, “It does not mean that education is good for children, and we are used to it, so we should parent our child in a Chinese way” (p. 485). She was particularly dissatisfied with weaker intellectual challenges in Canadian schools: “For me, I think that elementary and secondary school education in China is better than that of Canada. You know, children go to school to learn something” (p. 485). To fix their perception of shortcomings, they interject directly through teaching or tutoring at home (Li, 2001). In addition, Chinese immigrant parents are influenced by a Confucian ideology that emphasizes the authority of text, classics, and schools. Li (2000, 2006) maintains that literacy practices in immigrant families coming from a more traditional cultural background emphasizes role learning, homework, standardized material, and a transmission approach in education. Furthermore, the basis of a home literacy support environment for their children (Li, 2000, 2006b).

In summary, language attitudes and parental beliefs inevitably influence how parents view a heritage language and their role in children’s literacy development, which will inevitably influence their literacy behaviour. However, it should be noted that even when parents hold a strong impact belief toward their heritage language, they have concerns in supporting their children’s heritage language maintenance. Therefore, Rodriguez, Hammer, and Lawrence (2009) suggest the need to design an instrument specific to immigrant parents that would include questions regarding their child’s heritage language and the influence of a first language on second language acquisition.

Identity Formation

It is important to recognize that identities and literacy practices are linked and have a direct impact on how individuals perceive themselves. Identities are formed within relationships with others and are constantly subject to the influences of other people and institutions (Kendziora, 2005). As McCarthy and Moje explain (2002), “identities are always situated in relationships” (p. 231). I utilize Norton’s (1997) notion of identity, which presents the relationship between self and the world around self. Identity is defined as “how people understand their relationship to the world, how that relationship is constructed across space and time, and how people understand their possibilities for the future” (p. 410). Norton (1997) defined identity includes the relationship between oneself and the world and the relationship between oneself and the future. She maintains that identity is a process of continual emerging and becoming, a process that identifies what a person becomes and achieves.

Maintaining a heritage language is a way of constructing a learner’s cultural identity and, hence, his or her relationship to the world. Archer, Francis, and Mou (2010) draw on a qualitative study conducted in six Chinese heritage schools to investigate the relationship between heritage language maintenance and identity formation. This study found that parents valued heritage language schools as a means of encouraging and helping children to feel closer to Chinese culture (p. 411). They perceived Chinese heritage language schools were equipped with loss of identity or identity crisis. Similarly, with Spanish heritage language learners, Farruggio (2010) maintains that parents want their children to remember that they are “Hispanics” or “Mexicans.” Spanish was viewed as a loss of Latin ethnicity (Farruggio, 2010). In analyzing Korean heritage learners, Lee and Kim (2008) found that the motivation to learn Korean was tied to identity, family, and ethnic community. Students who identified with their ethnic background generally assessed their language proficiency as higher than students who identified less (Finch, 2009).
When children identify themselves as a member of a literacy club, they see themselves as the same kind of person as the proficient club member, except that he or she has different experiences. It is the same in all normal sports and recreation clubs. (p. 11)

In summary, immigrant parents face dilemmas concerning (a) demographics; (b) language proficiency is based on instructional years. It does not necessarily reflect the heritage language proficiency. In addition, this study relies on adult retrospective of childhood experience. A direct look at children who are learning a heritage language would better suit a study of how home language experience influences literacy acquisition.

“Maintaining a heritage language is a way of constructing a learner's cultural identity and, hence, his or her relationship to the world.”

In a phenomenological study of three immigrant children’s individual networks of linguistic contact, Zhang (2009) conducted research with children's first language books to their children; and (c) the child's attitude toward heritage language and English. Parents taught children how to use a bilingual dictionary, read them children's heritage language learning and catered to the child's interests in certain popular TV programs, such as classic Chinese cartoon videos. For example, while the child watched TV, his parents explained or discussed the program. Moreover, the mother read simple rhythms and poems to the child every day until he committed them to memory (Zhang, 2009). Each day, the children copied one poem several times to remember the characters. His mother explained the meaning of each new character and paraphrased each character for him. These examples indicate how parents transfer their beliefs to their daily home literacy activities and create a learning environment for children through interacting with them.

Chumak-Horbutsch (2008) examined four immigrant parents with heritage language practices of sixteen immigrant parents with children in a Toronto English-language childcare centre. She administered questionnaires separately to mothers and fathers in eight immigrant families. The questionnaire included questions concerning (a) demographics; (b) language attitudes, beliefs, and proficiency; (c) home language practices; (d) child’s language proficiency; (e) bilingualism; and (f) language-related concerns. The results indicated that immigrant mothers were more committed to their children’s first language development than were fathers. In addition, negative effects of early second language exposure on children’s first language competence were reported. These parents used a number of strategies at home to support children’s heritage language maintenance: using only the first language at home; reading first language books to their children; and direct first language teaching. However, even though the parents promoted home language use, they worried that even if their children developed and retained an understanding of the home language, they would probably never acquire literacy in the home language, which resulted in anxiety and uncertainty about the continued use of the home language. In summary, immigrant parents promote literacy engagement at home by providing a variety of literacy activities at home in both heritage language and English.

Recognizing Home Literacy Environment Strategies to Support Literacy

I briefly review the literature in both heritage language and English acquisition and identify how a HLE influences ELL literacy development. Chumak-Horbutsch (2004) argues that the starting point to support learners of different generations is understanding the “centrality and importance of their home contexts” (p. 21). Language acquisition depends on a number of factors, including a child's literacy in his or her native language, previous schooling experience, and family home literacy practices. YOU can support literacy development; those suggested here for educators and researchers who work with immigrant families are derived from the literature reviewed.

(1) Even if parents hold positive language attitudes toward heritage language learning, they may behave passively and have low expectations (Liao & Larke, 2008) and, over time, may make diminishing efforts and investment in their children’s language maintenance (Lee, 2002). Therefore, educators may consider reassuring immigrant parents regarding the possibilities of children’s heritage language maintenance. This will provide parents with confidence and they may become more willing to make contributions and investments.

(2) Parents still receive “subtle messages” (Pacini-Ketchabaw, Bernhard, & Freire, 2001, p. 16) from school personnel indicating that children having problems at school could be linked to the use of a heritage language. However, instead of giving subtle messages regarding the detriment of heritage language, it is important for educators to reassure parents that their children may become more willing to provide their children with confidence and they may become more willing to make contributions and investments.

(3) Although it is consistently reported in the literature that parents hold positive attitudes toward heritage language learning, immigrant parents face dilemmas in supporting their children in acquiring English while maintaining...
Some parents tend to perceive Canadian children and the culture that children bring connected, and these connections are his or her personal way of being in activities. In addition, it is important to reflect on new practices, children establish confidence and construct and reconstrue identities.

(7) Cummins (2011) argues that children can engage in literacy activities, one priority is to provide engaging books and other printed materials in either the children’s home language or English at home and in school. Therefore, Cummins (2011) suggests that schools could send such materials to students’ homes. These materials could include multiliteracy resources, such as recorded stories. By providing resources for parent involvement in both the heritage and second languages, one of the challenges that immigrant parents face—lack of resources—could be mediated.

(8) Chumak-Horbatsch’s (2008) study suggests that parents welcome specific heritage language maintenance strategies from childcare teachers. Therefore, early childhood educators could support immigrant families by communicating with parents how to support their children’s heritage language maintenance in specific ways.

(6) As Lee (2004) argues, “the challenge in many classrooms has been to how apprentice students into disciplinary identities that do not diminish existing identities that students bring individually and as members of different cultural communities” (p. 130). A number of studies show that when this challenge is met, resistance, rather than learning, is likely to result (Menard-Warwick, 2005). Therefore, educators could encourage children to develop identity through, for example, supporting children’s active participation in literacy practices and literacy engagement. By taking on new practices, children establish confidence and construct and reconstrue identities.

References


Retrieved from: http://hdl.handle.net/10142/106780


The Use of Play and Inquiry in a Kindergarten Drama Centre: A Teacher’s Critical Reflection
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The kindergarten drama centre is a place where children recreate familiar play scenarios, explore new ideas and feelings, and engage deeply in learning (Schwartz & Copeland, 2010). Miller and Almon (2009) suggest that play is crucial to children’s development. However, play is often contested as parents question its relevance at school (Ashiabi, 2007) and schools focus increasingly on academic achievement and school readiness (Bodrova & Leong, 2003; Miller & Almon, 2009). This paper explores the author’s learning through reflecting on the successes and challenges of a bakery centre created in her kindergarten classroom. The bakery became an excellent vehicle for strengthening students’ literacy and motor skills through play, but the impact varied greatly across students in the class. Further, assessment and planning enhancements to the bakery were significantly restricted by constraints on the time and attention the author could devote to them due to the dynamic classroom environment. The bakery also led to a rethinking of the learning agenda in the classroom.

The purpose of this article is to critically reflect on how I used play in our drama centre bakery to extend learning. Inquiring into my own practice using a teacher research lens opens up a space in which to reflect on and unpack some of the successes and challenges I experienced as play in the bakery unfolded. I sought at times to “notice what was outside of my agenda” (Wien, 2008, p. 25); I negotiated curricular goals with my kindergarten students and allowed them opportunities to plan, reflect, and set their own goals for learning through the drama centre bakery. Assumptions are that many of the practices for play and inquiry are already embedded in teachers’ practice in early years’ classrooms. In contrast, some teachers struggle with the practical implications of the focus on play and inquiry as vehicle for learning (Stuber, 2007). Stuber (2007) points out that “today, it is rare to see elementary school classrooms with a plethora of materials that children can use in multiple ways depending on their individual learning styles, needs, and interests” (p. 2). According to Stuber, some teachers feel that play takes away from academic learning in the classroom. On the other hand, Helt, Beneke, and Steinheimer (2007) argue that, through play, children’s interests and goals for their learning surface. Although there is a growing body of literature that supports play and inquiry-based learning, early years’ teachers continue to explore the role of play and embed it in their daily practice (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010).

Significance of the Study

Critical reflection can help teachers respond meaningfully to students while, at the same time, meeting the everyday challenges of teaching. The term critical is used in this context to refer to substantive and mindful thinking about teaching and learning as teachers examine what they do and say in the classroom from a variety of lenses aimed at improving practice. Teachers who are critically reflective seek ways to make changes in
Hughes (2003) defines play as the “freedom of personal choice, personal engagement, and focus on the activity rather than on its outcome” (cited in Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2008, p. 24). Children choose or help to choose topics to explore, and it is their interests that direct the choice of learning. As Seitz (2006) puts it, “in play, teachers are more of a collaborator than a teacher. The child’s interest becomes the key focus” (p. 1). Sometimes, children’s conversations and natural curiosity are the catalyst for a new learning experience. A teacher or an early childhood educator invites children to discover a new material or an interesting object. Lewin-Benzemah (2006) suggests that working with emergent curriculum moves the focus of teaching and learning away from a set plan, including an agenda determined by the teacher. She states: “Rather than sets of lesson plans and objectives, emergent curriculum is a process “teachers need to trust when planning for and creating learning experiences” (Lewin-Benzemah, 2006, p. 2). Following children’s interests by observing an interaction between the teacher and the children while learning, and with the classroom environment reveals children’s own agendas for learning.

As teachers critically reflect, they dig deeper to better understand the assumptions, beliefs, and values that shape their practice.

Play is also supported by communication with peers and the teacher. Youngquist and Pataray-Ching (2004) and Stuber (2007) suggest that play helps children to reflect and critique the world around them if they are given time, resources, and space to “shift from the level of solitary understanding” (Youngquist & Pataray-Ching, 2004, p. 174). Children learn to be flexible in their thinking and to accept multiple points of view as they play.

Play is a complex and layered engagement involving all of the learning domains: social, cognitive, affective, communicative, and physical (Goswami & Haas Dyson, 2009; Miller & Almon, 2009). Commonwealth of Learning (2007) suggests that play helps children to reflect and critique the world around them if they are given time, resources, and space to “shift from the level of solitary understanding” (Youngquist & Pataray-Ching, 2004, p. 174). Children learn to be flexible in their thinking and to accept multiple points of view as they play.

Methodology

In this study, I inquired into my practice and my students’ learning, drawing on teacher research and Anderson and Herr’s (2005) action research spiral of plan/act/observe/reflect. Hatch (2006) suggests that teacher research is important as it helps teachers to recognize that understanding children’s experiences in a kindergarten classroom are sparked by and can help support students’ interests and natural curiosity. According to Hatch (2006), action research can be an introduction to the methodology. In Ontario at the time of the study (2010a), inquiry incorporates four essential elements: initial engagement, exploration, investigation, and communication. Each of these elements lead children to question, notice, and observe the world around them (p. 19, 2007). Children solve real-world problems during play, develop self-regulation, acquire new knowledge and skills, and work on fine and gross motor skills. In particular, drama can help “isolate, capture, and simulate increasingly abstract and complex concepts” (Wien, 2008, p. 174). Play is an important vehicle for children to discover a new material or an interesting object. Learning goals are set for children to discover a new material or an interesting object. Learning goals are set for themselves.

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I planned a bakery in our drama centre with a mix of boys and girls. Size ranges yearly from 15 to 18 students. I wanted to create a drama centre that incorporated children’s prior knowledge to help scaffold our learning, while the drama centre bakery was organized to create a shared and focused environment, tease out meaning from children’s wonderings, and encourage the development of these skills in a real-life situation. Order forms as well as markers and bakery stationery were added.

New Practices Emerge

According to Wien (2008), new practices can emerge when teachers select a new material; and help students develop and use rich language related to a bake shop in order to deepen play. The drama centre bakery was open in the classroom for approximately one hour each morning, plus an additional shorter block of time in the afternoon. Although ample time was scheduled for play to unfold during the day, it proved challenging to observe and take notes. Small groups of students would play at one time at the bakery. Children were free to choose which centre they wanted to play in and could move to a different centre at any time. Children from another centre came over to ask a question, while at other times I had to leave the bakery to attend to other students’ needs. Most days, there were only short intervals without distractions or interruptions during which to gather information about students’ learning.

I used classroom observations to capture data about the children. At- a-glance sheets were used to take notes during play form, and paper bags for delivery. Play dough can also scaffold oral language development as students make meaning, play dough to extend play, and help students develop and use rich language, math, and science.

The majority of my kindergarten students are 4 and 5 years old and speak English as their first language. French immersion senior kindergarten is usually the children’s first exposure to French. By winter break, children had settled into our classroom routines and are beginning to use some French words and phrases to mean about the day. The class size ranges from 15 to 18 students with a mix of boys and girls. I planned a bakery in our drama centre for several reasons. A bakery fit well with our literacy focus on the gingerbread man story and it tied in with plans to bake cookies. Story time is an important part of our day together at school, as it is in kindergarten classes, and we bake once a month with a parent volunteer. I felt that a bakery offered a hands-on centre with many opportunities to interact with materials as well as provided students with multiple points of entry into play. Baking and cooking also had a long history of serving as an engaging activity for some children in the classroom.

I found that the learning at the drama centre bakery, adding new materials did help to extend the children’s play. Rather than taking orders verbally, children began to write down the names of their classmates and the number of cookies they ordered. A clothesline was soon erected in the centre for students to hang the completed orders. A hanging curtain normally used for a puppet theatre was reconfigured into a storefront window and paper bags were used to deliver cookies. Children were using the new materials to support learning, set their own agendas, and build relationships.

Saying, doing, representing

The children represented their new learning in several ways. Initially, when I added a cookie order form to the centre, the children drew happy faces on the cookie outline. To provoke deeper thinking about what other ways the form could be used. One day, I modelled how to use the form to record my cookie order. After modelling how to fill out the order, the children began to fill it out on their own and started to ask their classmates to write or spell their name and to list the type and number of cookies they wanted to purchase.

I found that the learning at the drama centre met students where they were by offering a variety of entry points into the learning. As a result, I began to add materials to the centre to encourage writing and reading. By taking orders and reading them out to the baker, the children could practice and encourage the development of these skills in a real-life situation. Order forms as well as markers and bakery stationery were added.

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play. For instance, some students were ready to write and record numbers on the cookie order form. Other students were interested in making the recipe and began to roll the dough, strengthening their fine motor skills. Students also engaged in conversations about their play, supporting oral language development. The play at the drama centre offered a unique opportunity to use some of the language they had heard during their field trip to their local bakery. I also observed that some students needed assistance in negotiating rules, taking turns, and developing self-regulation. The bakery play scenario provided me with an opportunity to individualize some of the learning in my classroom.

"...listen more carefully to our students' conversations, make flexible and open to new ideas, and embrace our own role of learner and co-constructors in the classroom."

Although I felt I knew the curriculum well, I found that, at times, it was difficult to name some of the learning emerging in the bakery drama centre and connect it to curricular expectations for our kindergarten program. In hindsight, backmapping (Harvey & Daniels, 2009) could have been beneficial in creating those crucial connections between the programme child and our own learning, and that was unfolding in the classroom. This difficulty challenged me to think more deeply about who was setting the agenda for learning at the centre, what kind of relationships were being developed in our classroom, and how learning was taking place. I began to see the connection between the bakery and the curriculum and that potential bump up against the children's own agendas and what that could mean for my own practice.

My daily observations and photos did help me to better understand some of the literacy and social skills that the children needed to work on further, such as letter and number formation as well as sharing. Perhaps these supports were more closely tied to the planning within our program's curriculum than with the children's goals for learning.

Critical Reflections

Linder (2010) argues that teachers can assess children's learning when they have extensive time to reflect and observe children at play. Teachers' observations uncover the strategies children use to learn and highlight potential gaps in understanding. Wien (2008) describes the importance of slowing down the daily routines to engage children in conversations, and developing deep insights about learning in the classroom. When I let go of the teacher's agenda, the interests and goals of the children at the bakery had the potential to become the focus of learning. Children take ownership of their own learning when they are given choices and are empowered to make decisions (Stuber, 2007). These dynamics unfolded in some ways at the bakery.

Lewin-Benham (2011) suggests that it is the relationships children develop in the classroom that help or hinder deep learning. She asks: "How will this arrangement, that experience, those materials encourage children to form relationships with the space, the materials, with one another or a sense of belonging with a child, a parent, a teacher, with ideas about what they already know and something new?" (p. 70)? The bakery fostered different relationships to support new learning and change practice. My students engaged in inquiry as they played with the materials that represented the bakery, used fake ingredients, and enjoyed the sense of being at the bakery. Drawing on the work of Wien (2008) and Pelletier (2011), I reflected on how our kindergarten curriculum might potentially bump up against the children's own agendas and what that could mean for my own practice.

My daily observations and photos did help me to better understand some of the literacy and social skills that the children...
time helped me to identify these strengths and weaknesses and to reflect on my own practice and agenda setting. Teachers assume a significant role in planning an environment and organizing learning experiences that support and emphasize both play and inquiry in the early years classroom. In fact, this shift in focus requires us to listen more carefully to our students’ conversations, be more flexible and open to new ideas, and embrace our own role of learner and co-constructor in the classroom. Although teachers may be “letting go,” a phrase frequently heard in our daily work, they are still, as Wien (2008) notes, integral to the learning that unfolds through play and inquiry in the classroom.

References


Sherri-Lynn Yazbeck is an early childhood educator and supervisor of a 3- to 5-year-old program at the University of Victoria’s Child Care Services. She strives to be in a state of exploration, wonder, and dialogue with the children, families, and materials, and her fellow educators at the centre. She finds joy in the ordinary moments of the day and loves to find comfort in those uncomfortable moments of inquiry and question.

I wondered how could we expand the children’s work with the ideas of materials and movement such as clay as a starting point in our environment.

Our program, like many other early childhood programs, is an environment of emergent and play-based programming for twenty-five-3- and 4-year-old children. In September 2008, we decided to introduce clay into our program. We had been moving toward presenting materials in our space that are open ended, rather than fixed or prescribed in meaning, and that allow for change. Materials that inspire imagination, creativity, and exploration. It was hoped that the introduction of clay would extend on and allow for a creative and divergent thinking process that only open-ended materials can provide for the children, families, and educators of the centre. What follows are my reflections on our work with clay: how this material led us to a state of inquiry, exploration, wonder, and dialogue. The story of how clay became alive in our space, our ideas, and our minds and ultimately led us to a line of flight we couldn’t have imagined, a place of new questions and changing understandings.

At the time of the introduction of clay into the centre, I was interested in the idea of movement—movement of children, materials, and time. Many strides had been made in our work with children and the idea of movement of bodies and time in our space, but I wondered about movement of materials. Specifically, I wondered if the children were reluctant to move materials because we educators had created both visible and invisible boundaries. Vecchi (2010) writes:

We must evaluate in everyday life how much environments allow for or forbid, how much they encourage or censor, how much they educate ways of seeing, exploring, or sensibility. The extent to which personal sensibilities and culture can grow on journeys of this kind is often underestimated, as are the effects it can have on our relationships with children, the surrounding environment and educational work. (p. 89)

During these initial explorations, nothing was added by the children. They did not move anything to or from the clay and clay itself was not moved from the table. After a month of presenting clay on the red table, alone with the materials chosen by the educators, Emily went to the shelf and picked up the sea creatures. We watched in silence as she swam the creatures through the clay sea, put them into their homes, and led them small pieces of clay and beach glass. Soon after that session, several items came to the table—knives, wiggly glue, cloth, pencils, and tree stumps joined the children and clay. The relationship between children and clay was changing, but still clay itself was not moving from the table.

We wondered why the children chose to work with clay only in the area we had placed it in. Did our environment forbid or censor movement? Had we put things into categories without realizing it? Kind (2010) suggests, “There is an incredible richness, variation, and eclecticism in what children do. In many educators limit this richness or provoke a narrowing of experience by what we think, what we expect, and the frames we use to interpret children’s artistic explorations” (p. 116). We are limiting the possibilities of clay with our thoughts? What frames were we using to question and make interpretations? To stimulate dialogue

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Canadian Children Directions & Connections

and reflection with the children, I printed through which we view children and process was happening before our eyes. I was left wondering if, while we were working to remove material-movement boundaries for ourselves. Why were we, the educators, so reluctant to move clay? As we talked about our experiences and inspirations to unfold, in this way? Would movement happen? What was it about the idea of movement that I couldn’t shake? Spools, jewels, and other small items could be found moving about the room, taking on new roles and responsibilities. Would small clay balls elicit the same response? A practiced student and I rolled close to 400 clay balls of varying size.

We gave them small cups of water, but done by the children. At the next session, clay was presented in the water table and buckets sat on the shelves for almost a two hours until slowly children moved clay into the block space. Initially, clay was put into plastic airtight containers in small stones, spools, jewels, and small forms. However, this experience was different. The children asked for water. We gave them small cups of water, but it wasn’t enough; they needed more. The children poured the water over the clay, rubbed the clay and smoothed it out, and after some time, had enough. Was this the end of clay for us? I looked at it my body tensed, I tried to break down. The containers also felt cold and unwelcoming. We had been thinking a lot about the aesthetic characteristics of our space, and the containers did not fit the direction we were going. Those buckets sat on the shelves for almost a month and clay never came out. Each time I looked at it my body tensed, I tried to ignore them, but each time I passed by the shelves I felt uncomfortable. Eventually, I couldn’t stand looking at them: Clay was not appealing to me or the children in this form. So I put the containers and clay away. Was this the end of clay for us?

Excited by this new turn of events, I was not yet ready to give up on clay. I had seen the relationship between the children and clay, and I knew that I had to find a way to explore more. We had a staff meeting before winter break and decided to continue with clay. I began to notice that some educators and children were not comfortable and may choose not to take part. We agreed that clay would be cied in the water table, allowing us to observe some of our findings. Based on my observations of the children exploring materials in our space, I suggested also presenting clay in a different way. The children had been showing an interest in small stones, spoons, jewels, and machines together; we discovered that it sticks to walls; we added water by way of wet, dry, or water; we made designs using our shoes, knives, straws, bamboo, glass beads, and pencils, all brought to the clay by the children. Dry clay became chalk and wet clay became mortar. Our understanding of clay was growing and changing once. Our relationship with the material was strengthening.

This year with clay has allowed us to let go of visible and invisible boundaries, boundaries within ourselves and boundaries we set up for children, materials, and our space. We have questioned both our practice and the design and aesthetics of our environment and we have opened ourselves up to be co-constructors of experience and exploration with the children. Now that we—children and educators—are working to make connections with clay and other materials throughout the room, clay is becoming a living part of the space. We wonder if a product can ever be finished or if it is always in process. We are working to make connections with other materials and technologies. As educators we are discussing how the process of exploration can lead to a product through understanding and relationship forming.

We wonder if a product could ever be finished or if it is always in process. We are considering Burginton’s (2004) thoughts on the importance of time for observing life, time for entering play, time for building relationships and time for revisiting ideas and experiences. It takes a long time to learn to use tools and to understand media. No person is born knowing how to write, how to move a paintbrush or dance or write music. No child enters the classroom asking to be told the story of the clay. We do not tell their stories. We do not tell them their questions with clay either. It takes time. And it takes teachers who honor that way of being with children—teachers who enter the natural time frame of children. (p. 84)

Letting go and seeing the children as protagonists and researchers and allowing myself to take on similar roles has given us all an opportunity to understand clay in a different way. Clay, like the other materials in our space, is a living part of our environment; it has become a language to express feelings and thoughts, a form of expression, representation, and state desire; understanding; and inquiry. Clay is all of this, with or without movement, alone or with other materials, and in many forms.

References


This Log: A Poem

By: Shelley Brandon and Anne Marie Coughlin

Shelley Brandon is a toddler educator at Maitland Early Learning Centre with London Bridge Child Care Services. Her strong commitment and passion for supporting children’s relationship with the earth has motivated her to create a toddler curriculum that is primarily focused on the outdoors. Email: shelbrandom@sympatico.ca

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At London Bridge Child Care Services we share in the belief that growing children deserve growing adults. One of our core professional development practices is to do for educators what we want them to do for children. In other words, if we want educators to foster curiosity and support deep thinking in children, we need to foster curiosity and support deep thinking with them.

One of the ways we do this is to support teacher research through our Master Educator Program. After two years, London Bridge educators are eligible to apply for the 18-month program, where they are supported by mentors in a year-long research project on a topic they are curious about.

Shelley Brandon, a recent graduate of the program, chose to do her research around the question “How can I support a toddler curriculum in a patch of grass?” Shelley’s research stemmed from her deep connection to the outdoors and her strong desire to offer young children meaningful experiences in a natural environment. Her idea was to study how toddlers engaged in an outdoor space that housed nothing but grass, stones, logs, leaves and other items that would naturally be found there.

Among other things, Shelley’s research deepened her appreciation for an old log bench that had been a quiet, forgotten part of the playground for years. Over the course of her research, her thinking was transformed as she watched this dried-up piece of wood come alive under the careful study of several two-year-olds.

The following is a poem Shelley wrote in response to the wisdom of those children.

This Log

This log used to be a tree. Perhaps it was one of many trees on a ridge, or perhaps it stood alone against the horizon—one will never know for sure. We know from its rings that its life spanned several years but we will never know the details of its existence. Who did it shelter from the elements? Who did it nourish? Who did it protect? Who did it inspire?

This log used to be a tree. Somehow at some time it was removed from its original home and altered from its original state. Now it takes form as a miniature bench and has assumed the position as part of our playground landscape. It blends well in its new setting, its potential unnoticed and unsolicited. It is just a log, after all.

This log used to be a tree. Years pass and its unwavering presence in our landscape make it increasingly difficult for us to ignore, so we accept this log as a permanent fixture in our environment. True, it is no longer a tree, but perhaps in time we would see value in its new form.

This log used to be a tree. We watch and we wait as this seemingly uninspiring log ignites a transformation. In an instant, this log becomes a hub for social networking, as toddlers form and strengthen relationships with their peers. This log becomes a place for children to test theories, explore boundaries, and take risks. This log became a place to exercise an active imagination and a refuge for solitary reflection—a place for rest, a place for quiet contemplation.

This log is alive...

This log used to be a tree. Now we see it as so much more. It has established itself as a place where our youngest citizens can challenge themselves—a place where they are free to ask questions and seek answers. It is a base camp for making discoveries about our world and a place we can go to.
According to Egan, Spencer “followed the mid-nineteenth-century conviction that the human race went through—recapitulated—all of the stages of development of our species, from a simple-celled creature, through gilled fishlike ancestors, and so on, to the present” (p. 27). Egan writes about Spencer’s casual and brutal racism and explains that Spencer’s theories were used to view other races as inferior. He argues that Spencer’s flawed “principle of evolution” (p. 34) and provides examples of influential educational thinkers who subscribed to the same racist thinking. These include G. Stanley Hall, father of the developmentalist, and John Dewey, both of whom took up recapitulationists discourses. Dewey wrote that there “is a sort of natural recurrence of the child mind to the typical activities of primitive people” (Gould, 1977, cited in Egan, 2002, p. 27). Egan also includes James Sully, the British leader of the child study movement, in this list. He reports Sully (1895) as saying, “As we all know, the lowest races of mankind stand in close proximity to the animal world. The same is true for infants of the civilized races” (cited in Egan, 2002, p. 91).

Recapitulation theory is used to construct ideas of racialization and perpetuate racist practices. I find this deeply concerning, and I am disturbed by Egan’s connection of Spencer’s racist foundations with educational influencers including Spencer, Hall, Dewey, and Sully. I am led to conclude that much of current educational thinking is grounded in structures founded on racist perspectives and that these structures perpetuate practices of racialization in contemporary educational practice. How, I ask, can we as practitioners of early childhood education become aware of, identify, and disrupt these dividing forces that are so insidious and invisible?

Egan proposes that richer educational experiences can be cultivated by doing the following: focusing educational research to intentionally gain insights into the cultural-cognitive tools that shape learning; working with an overarching theory of education; creating opportunities for children to acquire a wide base of intellectual resources; and eliminating the barriers to learning imposed by notions of ages and stages. These are ideas which, I find, present abundant possibilities for early childhood settings. 

Reference

Friends of Children Award Guidelines
The CAYC “Friends of Children Award” was established to give CAYC a way of recognizing outstanding contributions, by individuals or groups to the well-being of young children. If you wish to nominate an individual or group for this award, please see the criteria and procedure below.

CRITERIA
The Friends of Children Award may be presented to an individual or group, regardless of age, who:
• Has a history of commitment to the CAYC mission statement and/or aims.
• Has shown an outstanding scholarly, advocacy, innovative or practical contribution to the well-being of young children.
• May or may not be of Canadian citizenship.
• May or may not hold CAYC membership although it is encouraged.

PROCEDURE
• A nomination must be made by a member of the Board of Directors and be seconded by a member of the Board of Directors, Board members can, however, receive recommendations for nominations from individual CAYC members or from other organizations.
• Nominations will be brought forward at a Board of Directors or National Executive meeting by the board or executive member assigned responsibility for the award. The board or executive member will present and speak to the nomination.
• The nomination will be voted upon and passed by the Board of Directors with a consensus decision.
• The award will be presented promptly and in person when possible.
• Publicity of the award and the recipient(s) will appear in the journal, Canadian Children, and other publications where possible.
• The number of awards per year will vary.

Mary Caroline Rowan is a Vanier scholar and PhD student in the faculty of education at the University of New Brunswick. She completed her masters degree at the School of Child and Youth Care, University of Victoria, in November 2011, defending her thesis "Exploring the Possibilities of Learning Stories as a Meaningful Approach to Early Childhood Education in Nunavik."
Canadian Children

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION in CANADA: ARE WE IN MOTION OR ARE WE STEPPING FORWARD?

When children walk, very often they don’t walk with the purpose of getting ahead. So many things can happen on the way: something interesting found on the sidewalk—a snail or a branch, or there is a discovery of walking being done backwards or in circles, on jumping on one leg. ~ Olsson (2009, p. 5)

A History of Movements

Last summer I taught a course about the history of early childhood education. Even though I have been teaching this course online for a number of years, the course this past summer stood out as a unique experience because it was offered in a face-to-face format. The daily encounters between the students and myself, the critical engagement with an array of historical figures, events, and phenomena, and the birthing and clashing of ideas, memories, questions, and discussions created a rich platform for putting the past in dynamic conversation with the present and rethinking some aspects of our field’s history.

One word, in particular, seems to come back and haunt me after the experience of the history course. That word is movement. Those of you who are acquainted with the historical accounts of the field of early childhood education (ECE) will be familiar with the abiding theme of the movement terminology. For example, we frame periods of the field’s history as the kindergarten movement (indicating the spread of the Froebelian kindergarten model across Europe and North America in the late 1800s), the child study movement (1920s), and the progressive education movement (associated with John Dewey’s child-centred pedagogy of the 1920s). The more I reflected on the word movement, its meaning in the historical context of ECE, its connection with change, and its relation to current discussions within the field of ECE, the more I panicked. The term, which strongly conveys political flavour and fervour, seemed far removed from our present ECE experiences. For a while I could not think of what in our present day might be characterized as political movements in ECE—the kinds of movements that will be remembered and represented in the ECE history books of our era.

Contemporary Movements in ECE

Curious about what might be identified with movement in our contemporary ECE landscape, I entered the subject “movement in early childhood education in Canada” into a Google search box. To my surprise, when I hit the return key, the first link that came up was an edited book by Verónica Pacini-Ketchabaw and Alan Pence, two ECE scholars located in B.C. at the University of Victoria (Verónica Pacini-Ketchabaw is, of course, a co-editor of Canadian Children). Their book, Early Childhood Education in Motion: The Reconceptualist Movement in Canada (2005), is a collection of articles portraying Canadian interpretations, by way of research and practice, of the reconceptualizing early childhood education (RECE) movement that emerged in the early 1990s in the U.S. Scholars leading the RECE movement often ascribe to critical, feminist, and postmodernist theories, and have always confessed to upholding a political agenda. The challenge and chafing of ideas, questions to answer, and the birthing and clashing of ideas, historical figures, events, and phenomena, between the students and myself, the institutions and me, the teacher, the progressive education movement and the RECE movement, the more I reflected on the word movement, meant that ECE, its connection with change, and its meaning in the historical context of ECE, the kinder-garten movement, the child study movement, and the progressive education movement, are described by two of the movement’s leaders, Vertigo Blue Swadener and Gaile Cannella (2007), as follows:

The early work from reconceptualists in our field questioned the promotion of universal prescriptions for “best practice” and other “grand narratives.” Many of the reconceptualists based their work on the belief that the U.S. were doing anti-bias, full-inclusion or culture- and gender-focused research that sought to appreciate and support diversity in people, ideas, and ways of being. We shared a concern about privileging particular sets of beliefs or forms of knowledge that can create positions of certain groups of people and oppress others. (p. 25)

Along with the challenges posed to a universal view of childhood that is based on developmental theory and a critique of the idea of quality in ECE as a value-neutral concept, the reconceptualists also questioned the conventional idea of change as an upward, predictable evolution, based on the “natural” process of progress. For example, in the introductory chapter to the aforementioned book, Pacini-Ketchabaw and Pence (2005) comment that

the prevailing metaphor in Canadian ECEC history is an evolutionary spiral. Early childhood educators are seen as

having developed, since the days of the infant schools in the 1820s, even more sophisticated understandings of children and their development and appropriate care. The evolutionary spiral is consistent with the modernist view of “progress.” (p. 13)

Rather than thinking about change or movement through the metaphor of an evolutionary process (stepping forward or upward toward an assumed best practice), Pacini-Ketchabaw and Pence suggest taking a revolutionary approach to change that entails rethinking our practices and examining the assumptions underlying our pedagogies. This deconstructive approach with the RECE movement, like other movements in the topics addressed by RECE scholars are described by two of the movement’s leaders, Vertigo Blue Swadener and Gaile Cannella (2007), as follows:

We begin to ask questions about change and movement in such a way that it is, at least to some degree, free from the standards of the present that inevitably limit and constrain our thinking.

The Swedish RECE researcher Liselott Olsson also introduced new concepts for thinking about movement in early childhood practices. In her book, Movement and Experimentation in Young Children’s Learning: Deleuze and Guattari in Early Childhood Education (2009), Olsson engages with complex ideas from the French philosophers Deleuze and Guattari to think about change as something that happens at the molecular or micro-political level, and not at the administrative or governmental level. According to Olsson, change is not something that is willed as much as it is something that “snaks up behind one’s back” (p. 74). Change happens within the relational fields of our practice in

“little moments” when, for example, the curriculum plan breaks down and complex, unforeseen connections unfold in front of us. While curriculum involves a macro-political decision, when it encounters situations within the classroom, “an enormous creativity is released that completely and continuously transforms and defines the curriculum,” as something always “escapes” the plan in the actual encounter with the children (p. 75). The question about change, argues Olsson, has to change. Rather than asking how we can get from this predefined position to the next, we can ask: What are the conditions that most favour the continuous experimentation that releases creative forces in our classrooms? How can we remain open to such experimentation?

Setting Early Childhood Education into Motion

I believe that now is a good time to ask questions about change and movement because something else happened last summer. In July 2012, the travelling exhibit from Reggio Emilia, The Wonder of Learning: The Hundred Languages of Children, opened in New Westminster. The exhibit created an opportunity for a lot of movement here in B.C., including the CAYC national conference in October 2012. Yet, when this issue of Canadian Children is published, the exhibit will already be on display in another part of the world. And so perhaps it is time to pose the following question to ourselves: Do we want to take the Reggio Emilia approach, which has been an instigator of change within the Canadian RECE scene for almost 20 years, as a symbol for an incremental step forward—a destination, a yardstick to measure our “progress”—or, alternatively, can we challenge ourselves to see the exhibit as a provocation—an opening for questions for which we still do not know the answers, but towards which we can begin thinking and experimenting together?

In conclusion, I would like to go back to the quote at the beginning of this discussion, because I think that we can take our inspiration for a reconceptualized idea of movement from young children. While for us, as adults, walking becomes an automated, purpose-bound activity, supported by an illusion that we actually know where we are going, for a child, walking is not necessarily about stepping forward, but a continuous and mind. What keeps children moving is a constant desire for experimentation through which new worlds are discovered and new relations are generated. Clearly, we cannot simply set aside the need for a sense of direction and destination, but perhaps we could create the possibility (or the conditions) to experience moments in which change might sneak up behind our backs.

References


Call for Contributions

Special Issue on Professionalism in the Canadian Early Childhood Education and Care Sector
for Canadian Children, 2014 Online edition

Guest Editors: Jane Hersz, Early Learning and Child Care, Grant MacEwan University (Edmonton, Alberta)
Sonia Hooper, Early Childhood Development Association of PEI (Charlottetown, PEI)
Rachel Langford, School of Early Childhood Studies, Ryerson University (Toronto, Ontario)
Monica Lynack, Early Childhood Education, Sheridan College (Toronto, Ontario)

We invite submission of papers that focus on the state of professionalism in the Canadian early childhood education and care sector. Only recently through the research efforts of the Canadian Child Care Human Resources Sector Council have we learned more about the early childhood education and care sector (ECEC) in Canada. In provinces and territories, the sector has experienced varying degrees of professionalization through initiatives advanced by the sector and governments such as a regulatory college, early learning curriculum frameworks, higher educational qualifications, and increasing accountability measures. At the same time, ECEC professionals have sought to define their own sense of professionalism built from daily practice and/or their participation in professional associations.

We welcome conceptual or research-based papers that critically examine current and alternative understandings of professionalism and their implications for what it means to be a professional, for practice, for professional preparation, for on-going professional learning, and for policy making. The aim of the special issue is to open up a lively dialogue about the ECEC profession in Canada that broadens and deepens our understandings of professionalism.

Early childhood educators, researchers, curriculum developers and policy makers are invited to submit an abstract for this special issue of Canadian Children to Rachel Langford by September 30, 2013. If the abstract is accepted, the manuscript is due by January 30, 2014. Once the review process has been completed, accepted papers must be resubmitted by April 2014. Articles must then be finalized and submitted to the Canadian Children editors by November 1, 2014.

GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

Canadian Children is the journal of the Canadian Association for Young Children (CAYC), the only national association specifically concerned with the well-being of children of preschool and elementary age in Canada.

Form, Length and Style:

• Articles may be of varying length, written in a readable style. Style should be consistent with the Publication Manual (6th Edition) of the American Psychological Association.

• Articles should be sent as an email attachment to the email address below or on before the due date.
• Authors are to obtain releases for use of photographs (if any) prior to mailing. Please include a brief biographical sketch including authors full name, title, professional affiliation, and other relevant information, such as acknowledgements, grant support or funding agency. It is expected that authors will not submit articles to more than one publisher at a time.

• Text should be double-spaced in a font such as Times New Roman, size 12.

• Please submit your MS as a Microsoft Word file. PDFs are NOT acceptable.

• All manuscripts should include an abstract of 100—150 words

• A reference list contains only references that are cited in the text. Its accuracy and completeness are the responsibility of the author(s).

• If the MS contains tables, figures, illustrations or photographs, they should be placed in the MS where the author requires them.

• Final versions of accepted papers should be sent on or before the due date (November 26, 2013) to the editor along with an author bio of no more than 100 words.

• Articles need to be submitted with the appropriate permission form(s) as per journal’s guidelines.

Submission email address:

To submit a manuscript, email to cdnchildren@gmail.com, copied to Rachel Langford (see below).

Contact Information:

For further information or inquiries, please contact the special issue guest editor directly:

Rachel Langford
E: rlangfor@ryerson.ca

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