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CANADIAN

CHILDREN

JOURNAL OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

Fall / Automne 1998 Vol 23 No2

INVITATIONAL ARTICLES

Reggio Emilia - An Impossible Dream?
Gretchen Reynolds

Revoir l' environnement extérieur : des raisons pour le transformer, l'enrichir, le développer
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Revisiting Your Outdoor Environment: Reasons To Reshape, Enrich, Redevelop The Outdoor Space.
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CHILD STUDY

Kindergarten in the Czech Republic: Tradition and Transition
Margie I. Mayfield

The Canadian Association for Young Children | L'Association Canadienne Pour Les Jeunes Enfants

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 this 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 quality of life of all young children and their families.

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

2. Provincial and Regional Events
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, seminars or a local conference.

3. The Journal
An outstanding multidisciplinary journal is published twice yearly. Articles by nationally and internationally known experts in early childhood education and child rearing are presented in the Journal of the CAYC. Inside CAYC provides information on Association activities.

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.

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND MEMBERSHIP

Members of CAYC receive newsletters and special rates for national and regional conferences (per annum; $40 - General; $25 - Student: $75 - Associations). Please direct all subscription and membership correspondence to CAYC, 612 W. 23rd Street, North Vancouver, B.C. CANADA V7M 2C3

ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE POUR LES JEUNES ENFANTS

QU'EST CE QUE L'ACJE

L'Association canadienne pour les jeunes enfants, issue du Council for Childhood Education, a reçu sa charte fédérale en 1974. C'est l'unique association nationale vouée exclusivement au bien-être des enfants depuis la naissance jusqu'à l'âge de neuf ans, dans leaurs foyers, les garderies et a l'école primaire. Les membres de l'ACJE-des parents, des enseignants, des employés de garderie, des administrateurs, des étudiants...-sont toutes des personnes intéressées à partager leurs idées en participant à des activités concernant le bien-être et l'éducation des jeunes enfants.

SA MISSION

L'ACJE existe pour faire entendre une voix canadienne sur les questions d'importance concernant la qualité de vie de tous les jeunes enfants et de leurs familles.

SES BUTS

1. Jouer un rôle dans la direction et las qualité des décisions et des programmes relatifs au développement et au bien-être des jeunes enfants du Canada.
2. Créer un forum pour les membres de la communauté de la petite enfance afin de susciter une collaboration active dans l'élaboration de programmes appropriés au développement des jeunes enfants.
3. Encourager et offrir des possibilités de perfectionnement professionnel aux personnes chargées du bien-être et de l'éducation des jeunes enfants.
4. Promouvoir des occasions pour une meilleure coordination et collaboration entre toutes les personnes responsables des jeunes enfants.
5. Reconnaître les contributions de caractère exceptionnel faites au profit des jeunes enfants.

MISE EN OEUVRE DES BUTS DE L'ACJE

1. *Le congres national*
Il constitue le grand événement de l'ACJE. On y entend des communications prononcées par des sommités internationales dans le domaine de l'enfance et on y participe à des ateliers et à des discussions ainsi qu'à diverses manifestations, des visites d'écoles et d'autres activités.

2. *Les événements provinciaux et locaux*
Nos membres sont invités à mettre sur pied des conférences, des séminaires ou des congrès à l'échelon local ou régional.

3.. *Le journal*
Publications mutidisciplinaire de premier ordre, le journal paraît deux fois l'an. Il regroupe des articles traitant de questions d'education et de formation des jeunes enfants et des écrits d'experts bien connus sur le plan national et international. La rubrique **Inside CAYC** vous tient au courant des activités de l'Association.

Les cotisations doivent être réglées au moment de l'adhésion et renouvelées chaque année. Pour vous prévaloir de votre droit de vote, vous devez régler votre cotisation au moins 60 jours avant l'Assemblée générale annuelle.

ABONNEMENT ET COTISATION DE MEMBRE

Les membres de l'ACJE reçoivent le bulletin de liaison et bénéficient de tarifs particuliers pour participer au congrès national et aux événements régionaux (40$ par année 25$ pour les etudiants: 75$ pour les associations). Addressez toute votre correspondance a: ACJE 612 W. 23rd Street, North Vancouver, B.C. CANADA V7M 2C3

CANADIAN CHILDREN

JOURNAL OF THE CANADIAN ASSOCIATION FOR YOUNG CHILDREN
Fall / Automne 1998 Vol 23 No2

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From the Editor

Once again the theme of Reggio Emilia runs through many of the articles published in this issue of the Journal. Having been to Reggio Emilia myself with the first Canadian delegation in 1993, I am always excited to hear more about the approach from writers and people who have visited Reggio Emilia more recently. Visitors all seem to come back inspired by what they have learned, and it is interesting to hear about it from their different perspectives. We have published many articles about Reggio Emilia in recent issues. Rebecca New in the Spring, 1997 issue of the Journal described the socio- cultural perspective in *Reggio Emilia's Commitment to Children and Community: A Reconceptualization of Quality and DAP.* Brenda Fyfe, in *Questions for Collaboration: Lessons from Reggio Emilia* outlined a process, "the three D's;" design, documentation and discourse, which the ECE students at Douglas College, have found to be helpful in learning how to do documentation. In the same issue, Spring 1998, Carol Anne Wien, describes her impressions of Reggio Emilia from excerpts written in her diary during the 1997 Spring Study Tour. The richness of the program had such an impact on her that she described it as "a bolt from the blue." Her beautiful descriptions of the environment and her vivid descriptions of principles such as relationality, reciprocity and transparency are so realistic that when I had finished reading it, I felt I had visited Reggio again myself. In this issue of the Journal, Gretchen Reynolds in the article *Reggio Emilia - An Impossible Dream?* includes many of her observations of children's play in the classrooms in

Reggio Emilia. She says she went to Reggio with some questions, particularly concerning play. She asked one of the teachers whether they document play? The answer she received was to my mind profound, but like often happens when you encounter Reggio Emilia, it was unexpected. The discussion in her article deepened my understanding of the role of play in the Reggio Emilia approach.

Many people have commented to me how difficult it is to facilitate the same level of conversation as one sees documented in Reggio Emilia. The difficulty in achieving 'in depth' conversations among young children during group or circle time is addressed by Barbara Gerst in the article, *Further Reflections upon the Applications of the Reggio View in a Kindergarten Classroom.* She describes some strategies she used to promote natural conversation in her kindergarten which I think members will find helpful.

In this issue of the Journal, Margie Mayfield takes us on a visit to the Czech Republic to learn how kindergarten has fared since the communists lost political control of the country. It is important to remember what deep roots early childhood education has in Czechoslovakia, dating back as they do to Commenius in the 17th century. It is also reassuring to discover how the same principles that Commenius stressed so long ago such as; the whole child, education for promoting culture and the integration of subject areas in ECE curriculum are principles similar to those seen in the Reggio Emilia approach today.

We return to Canada to read in both French and English an article by Anne Mauffette about playgrounds in early childhood settings. The inclusion of an English translation of a French article is a first for us since I became editor! There is also an article about parents' and caregivers' perceptions of children's transitions from kindergarten to Grade One followed by an article by Marlene Asselin and Ann Bishop which discusses teacher's queries about gendered reading in beginning readers.

Vera Goodman gives readers some words of wisdom about early literacy in her article "The Power of Voice" in which she writes how early experience in learning language creates "pools of knowledge as unique as fingerprints." I will carry that image with me today to share with my early childhood education students who are learning about language development. Members, I know, will all find something of particular interest in the selection of articles in this issue of the Journal.

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. 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 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 rearing.

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 rearing.

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** (3rd Edition) of the American Psychological Association. Articles should be supplied on a 3.5" IBM or IBM compatible diskette in either Microsoft Word or WordPerfect and mailed with four (four) printed copies on 21.5 x 28 cm. (standard 8 ½ x 11') paper directly to the editor at the address listed below. If appropriate, authors should send accompanying black and white glossy print photographs , tables, figures or illustrations with complete captions, each on separate pages. 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 persons assisting author, 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 editor will acknowledge receipt of , and review all solicited and unsolicited manuscripts received. The final publication decision rests with the editor, and will be communicated within three months. Manuscripts not accepted for publication will be returned only if a stamped self-addressed envelope is included.

Please send all correspondence and completed manuscripts for publication consideration to: Susan Fraser, 2820 Marine Drive, West Vancouver, B.C V7V 1L9 Fax #. 604-922-3456. or e-mail ATEK@dowco.com

GUIDE A L'INTENTION DES AUTEURS

Canadian Children est la revue de L'association pour les jeunes enfants (ACJE) la seule association vouée exclusivement aubien-être des enfants due préscolaire et de l'école primaire au Canada. Elle parâit deux fois l'an et regroupe des articles, comptes rendus de livres et annonces professionnelles.
Canadian Children est une publication multidisciplinaire traitant du dévelopment de l'enfant et de l'éducation de la petite enfance. Les auteurs du Canand et d'ailleurs sont invités à soumettre des articles et des comptes rendus de livres mettant en évidence la variété etl'étendue de la recherche et des approches en éducation de lat petite enfance et en formation de l'enfant.

CONTENU:
Les articles visent un public de parents, de professionnels dans le domaine de l'éducation de l'enfant et des services à l'enfance, ainsi que les enseignants et les chercheurs. En général chaque numéro comprend de multiples thèmes et le rédacteur en chef s'efforcera d'inclure à la fois des articles protant sur la recherche ainsi que d'autres de nature pratique traitant des programmes, des curriculums, des approaches en salle de classe ou de la formation de l'enfant.

FORMAT, LONGUEUR ET STYLE:
LES ARTICLES peuvent être de longeur variée et doivent etre rédigés dans un style accessible à tous les lecteurs. La présentation doit être conforme aux normes du **Publication Manual** (3e edition) de lAmerican Psychological Association. Trois exemplaires, dactylographiés à double interligne sur du papier de 21.5 x 28 cm (8 ½ " x 11"), devront être envoyés directement au rédacteur en chef à l'adresse indiquée cidessous. S'il y a lieu, les auteurs devront fournir toutes photgraphies accompagnant les articles tirées en noir et blanc sur papier glacé, tous les tableaux, figures ou illustrations avec leurs légendes, et nous les envoyer chacun sur une feuille séparée. Ils devront obtenir le permis de reproduction des photographies avant de les fair parvenir au rédacteur. Veuillez inclure une brève notice biographique incluant les noms au complet, titres, affilitions professionnelles et autres informations pertinentes telles que les nom des assistants, des supports financiers, des subventions. It est entendu que les auteurs ne soumettront leurs articles qu'à une seule revue à la fois.

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Le rédacter en chef accusera réception et considérara tous les manuscrits recus, qu'ils aient été solicités ou non, et soumettra les textes qu'il aura retenus à au moins trois lecteurs externes au comité de rédaction. La décision finale quant a la publication est sous la responsabilié du rédacteur en chef et sera communiquée dans un délai de trois mois. Les manuscrits refusés seront retournés seulement si une enveloppe adressée et timbrée est encluse.
Veuillex adresser votre correspondance et vos manuscrits à Susan Fraser, 2820 Marine Drive, West Vancouver, B.C. V7V 1L9 (Numero de telecopier 604-922-3456). ou ATEK@dowco.com

Reggio Emilia -- An Impossible Dream?

Gretchen Reynolds

a hundred worlds
to discover
a hundred worlds
to invent
a hundred worlds
to dream.
(Malaguzzi, 1997)

The trip to Reggio Emilia, Italy, is exhausting: an overnight flight to Paris, Air Italia to Bologna, and a trip by train past farm houses and through fields of glorious red poppies. By the time I arrive, the only thing my weary mind can handle is some rest. Sleep, a bath, and a spinach-ricotta cheese pie work their wonders, and with my camera for company, I wander out into the park. I am glad to have a day before the start of the May 1998 Spring Study Tour to explore Reggio Emilia on my own.

Just a short walk, across the public gardens from our hotel, is a rather ordinary- looking brown brick building, engulfed in shrubbery. On the front of the building are the words Scuola Comuna Dell'Infanzia Diana. In 1991 the Diana School was identified by a panel for Newsweek Magazine as the most avant-garde early childhood institution, one of the world's ten best schools. Two large potted plants frame the front door, and I smile at the large birds' nest on the windowsill - an invitation to a bird? My eye is drawn to a simple brick design embedded in the wall beneath the front window. Nine bricks, faced with mirror, form the shape of an arrow, reflecting bits of greenery and pebbles on the front walk. The arrow of mirrors points to a frieze of beautiful, hand-painted bricks. Each brick has been designed by a different child using bright enamels - pinks, reds, blues, yellows, and greens. What a pleasure to see children's art in a permanent place on the front of a school!

A short walk away I encounter an amazing 15' tall fountain. Its three tiers are entirely covered in thick green and yellow mosses. Here and there water trickles out, this probably being the only way it can escape from under the dense mat of moss. I notice that there are many small birds flying to and fro, and I realize they are disappearing into hiding places in the recesses in the moss. Suddenly, the story of the "Amusement Park for Birds," built for birds' pleasure by children at La Villetta School, makes sense (Forman et al., 1993). This fountain could have been the inspiration.

I leave the park and head in the direction of downtown. Today is Friday, one of the two days each week the market is open in the Piazza Prampolini. Some people ride scooters, many are on bikes, but most people are on foot. People are busy shopping and bartering for a variety of dry goods and foods, and there is an old-world feel to the place, just as there is a distinct Francophone Quebec atmosphere in Ottawa's Byward Market. Lacking confidence because my Italian vocabulary is limited to "buon giorno" and "grazie," and one Canadian dollar is worth about 1,180 lira, I clumsily manage to purchase a pear from a vendor. Later in the week on a tour of the city, a Reggio parent, our guide, tells us, "A majority of the people who come to the square on market days are men, here to talk shop. They come from the countryside to exchange cows, fields, houses, and now tractors. This is a tradition which still exists."

Wandering among the crowd through the market stalls, I come upon an old church, the Basilica di San Prospero, enshrouded in scaffolding and undergoing restoration. Out front are the two proud lions that I would know anywhere from the "To Make a Portrait of a Lion" video (Comune di Reggio Emilia, 1987). It pleases me to have a real image of the lions to replace my romantic one! They are standing in front of some graffiti-covered temporary siding, wonderfully elegant and old, with big teeth showing in a mouth that could be about to roar. Leaning their bikes against one of them, two adolescent boys sit down on the shaded steps to have a smoke. They grin at me somewhat self-consciously as I take their picture with the lion, but they do not protest.

The child
is made of one hundred
The child has
a hundred languages
a hundred hands
a hundred thoughts...
(Malaguzzi, 1997)

The first day of this year's study tour consists of several welcoming speeches and a presentation by Amelia Gambetti, who cautions us against trying to "take Reggio Emilia home." We return to this topic during the week, as it reappears in several different contexts. We learn that in 1967, the municipal government of Reggio Emilia began taking over patronage of some of the community-run schools opened at the end of the

Second World War. Presently, auspice of the 51 preschools in Reggio Emilia includes 19 schools managed by the municipality, ten state-run preschools, 19 religious preschools, two charities, and one private preschool, accounting for 94.7% of the total population of preschool-age children. Thirty-six percent of the youngest children attend 18 infant-toddler centres, in 13 municipal centres, three cooperatives, one religious centre, and one private centre (Reggio Children, 1996). In the afternoon there is time for us to introduce ourselves. The 135 participants in this year's study tour call six different countries home: the U.S., Holland, Israel, Hong Kong, Australia, and Canada.

Every day of the week includes visits to the schools. On several afternoons an "open house" format is provided, allowing us to browse in several schools and Remida, the recycling centre. Mornings are usually structured by a visit to one school, which includes a greeting and information on the history of the school, time in the program to observe children and teachers in action, and ending with an hour meeting to debrief and ask questions, enjoy refreshments, and take pleasure in each other's company. Seventeen of the municipal preschools and infant-toddler centres open their doors, and their hearts, to us.

A hundred always a hundred
ways of listening
of marveling of loving
a hundred joys
for singing and understanding...
(Malaguzzi, 1997)

The stories that follow contain the images I bring home from Reggio Emilia. They are about visits to three schools, Allende Infant-toddler Center, Neruda School, and the Diana School. The story of the Allende Center sets the stage. It is a description of a wonderful environment for infant and toddlers, in many ways typical of all the municipal schools of Reggio Emilia. From the visit to Neruda School I tell several short vignettes of play by 3-year-olds, documented afterwards for us by their teacher. The last story is of the play of two 4-year-old boys at the Diana School, and interventions by their teacher to scaffold their learning.

Allende Infant-toddler Center. Nido is Italian, meaning nest. A centre for infants and toddlers is called a nido, and the 13 municipal nidi are similarly organized. There are a total of 69 children in four rooms: 26 infants and toddlers, from 3 months to 18 months, and 43 toddlers, from 19 months to 24 months. The 11 teachers generally stay with a group of children as they move from one age group to the next.

It is late afternoon, intentionally timed so that very few children remain in the program. Fifteen of us, accompanied by a Reggio parent who is our guide and translator, make the trek on a city bus to the Allende Infant-toddler Center. Teachers and parents greet us warmly, and we enter a spacious foyer, made beautiful by children's artistry and large windows that face a central garden to "bring the outside in." None of the art work in this room is generated by adults, but their creativity is everywhere in evidence - in the beautiful displays of children's art, the care and attention that goes into arranging equipment and materials to stimulate creativity, and the ongoing documentation of children's projects. A teacher explains her role. "We try to create a space that welcomes individual differences and uniqueness, but also constructs this sense of relationship among children, with adults, and with the environment of the infant-toddler center itself."

The foyer is designed to serve as Allende's community space, a room with the flexibility for meetings, workshops, meals, festivities, relaxation, reading, art exhibits, and children's play. We are told that parents and teachers come together here for meetings, 6 - 9 evenings a year, to discuss topics requested by parents. The community room has spaces for children's play, expressive of the value that a child's needs are an integral part of community life, like a front porch, kitchen, or a family room, where, on the fringe of adults' activities, children play. To the right of the front door is a large platform for block building, and on the left is a hand-crafted wooden climbing apparatus.

Around the corner is an area specially provisioned for children's dramatic play. The small area is enclosed on three sides by walls 4' high, with mirrors and hooks for clothes, shoes, and hats for dressing up, and several shelves of items for pretend hair and face care. A small light on the wall above adds brightness and warmth. Because this area is in the hall, later I ask when it gets used. A teacher answers that children play and work in their classrooms in the early morning, and gradually move to the community space and/or outdoors by mid-morning. She adds this thought, "We believe in the freedom of the child to move out into the rest of the school. When a child requests to play elsewhere, a teacher will ask him why he wants to leave his classroom. The child must have a reason. It's a matter of mediation between the teacher and the child. Sometimes children here may wish to spend the whole day with a sibling to celebrate her birthday. This we allow."

We are invited to explore the school for an hour, and I am glad, because I want to see the infant

environment. The room is filled with natural light, and it is open and uncluttered, giving infants plenty of freedom to crawl, toddle, or walk about in their unsteady style on carpet and floor. Even here the children are surrounded by simple beauty, brought about because nothing sits in isolation (Wien, 1997). The rocker occupies space with a homemade mobile overhead that lowers the ceiling. A weaving of natural materials encloses and softens the area, and filters light, and a basket at the foot of the rocker is filled with a variety of cardboard tubes and plush animals.

The little members of this community are no mystery to each other. Photos of children and families, sometimes enlarged, are contacted down in places where they promise to surprise when encountered by a crawling or toddling child - on the floor, inside boxes, around a corner, on a step. There is a wonderful homemade wooden climbing apparatus in front of two low windows. Several broad stairs lead up to a long, low platform that is a window seat with pillows and books. Next to the steps, a wide slide with a gentle slope provides another way of getting down. I am fascinated that there are no high chairs. Twelve infant seats are attached to two tables, with stools stored underneath for adults. Placement of seats for infants around a table conveys the value that no child is too young to eat family-style with others. The sleeping room, in softened light, contains low cribs, each with one side open so a baby can climb unassisted, in and out.

I wander into a fastidiously clean, spacious bathroom. It is not limited to one group's use - there is a change table and a row of small urinals and toilets. Long, low community sinks, with little mirrors on the wall above the faucets, are for hand washing by three or four children at a time. Children's paintings, collage and clay work are artfully displayed around the room.

It delights me to see things that invite children's play in a bathroom! There are a couple of baskets of books, and several dolls sit perched next to a hand washing sink, with a nearby basket containing doll clothes. An area for dramatic play contains a table and chairs, mirror, several brushes and other hair care equipment, dress-up clothes, and blankets and dolls in a small bed.

The last room I visit at Allende School is a toddler classroom. There are posters of a Klee and a Miro on the walls, but there are no other purchased posters or photographs, or greeting card and movie/tv media images, and no endless rows of letters of the alphabet. Instead, one way the environment inspires, "as the third teacher," (Malaguzzi, 1994) is with an image of the shadow of a fern projected from a slide onto a white fabric panel that has been hung from ceiling-to-floor between two rooms. It is no wonder that young children produce breathtaking art, when they encounter beauty like this every day.

Teachers have prepared the room so we can glimpse the work children will engage with in the morning. One work space is a low table covered with a big sheet of heavy white paper. An untidy bunch of bright yellow daisies is on the table, with a big pot of paint brushes of various widths, and jars of matching yellow paint. Another work area is in the light by the window. Two companion easels stand at right angles. In a low container between them, jars of vivid colours of paint are arranged in the order of the color wheel, reminding me of a big paint palette. On two small tables, each with mirror surface, there is a large slab of potter's clay. At both tables is an array of objects that the children can use to explore the clay: beads, wire, straw flowers, shells, pebbles, dried grasses, and pieces of marble. We see documentation of children's earlier work with clay in panels and displays of their sculptures around the room.

I notice an 8" x 10" log book open on a shelf in the centre of the work area. Later, it is explained that teachers take notes throughout the day of children's activity and quotations that are a child's verbal impressions of the materials. This data becomes the information used in communicating with parents, curriculum decision making, and documentation of a project. A teacher tells us, "We are trying to document the little moments of everyday life. This is a memory of school life."

I bring home one such memory. It is a small book made by the Allende teachers of an earlier project with clay. The photos show infants and two-year-olds pinching, twisting, and smelling clay, and fingers and toes in slabs of clay. One child uses his arms and whole body to lift a large clay ball. In another photo, a toddler is gleefully testing whether a lump of clay can be something to sit on. One picture is labeled with Emanuele's (2.4) words. "Una grande una piccola, questa e'grande e'pesante e' piu' bella," (Nido Salvador Allende, 1996, p. 7), roughly translated as, "One big, one little, this one is big and heavy and more beautiful."

Neruda School is located in a residential neighborhood, 20 minutes on the bus from downtown Reggio Emilia. The 75 children are grouped in three classrooms by age, 3 - 4 - year - olds, 4 - 5 -year - olds, and 5 - 6 - year - olds, with two teachers in each group. One program has a child with special needs and an additional teacher. The director speaks to us of the pride everyone

feels for their recently-remodeled building. A staircase with wide hardwood steps connects the three floors. The school atelier is on the top floor, with a mini-atelier in each program, so that a child can continue his or her work from the atelier in the classroom.

The atmosphere on the day of our visit to Neruda School is alive with children's excitement and high energy. The presence of 20 strange adults in their school is undoubtedly working its spell! I have come with questions about the role of play in Reggio, so I decide to stay with the 3-year-olds and focus on the play that has captured their interests.

Observation 1 - In the 3's classroom, half the space in the main room provides for children's dramatic play. Semi-private space for dressing-up is created by a curved 4' wall that faces a large wall mirror. Along the wall is a long row of hooks for hanging a variety of unisex dress-up clothes. Nearby is a large, enclosed space that is abundantly equipped with props for housekeeping play. Next to this is a plush rug, a wonderful couch, and shelf with three tiers of books. Four boys are using the area actively, and several other children are ensconced in kitchen play. In my notes I write, "I feel as though I am looking at an Italian kitchen in miniature," and, "one child has a wooden gun stock, another, wearing a black cape, holds a play sword. They seem to alternate between flying around the space and flopping on the couch to look at books together."

Observation 2 - The 3's classroom has a back door which opens out onto a small porch. A large bunch of tall grasses and poppies, with scissors and packing tape, are out on a table. Two boys (one of them is the cape-wearing child in the first episode) are working intensely on a construction on one side of the porch. They are using long strips of packing tape, with grasses chaotically woven, to create a kind of a web, or maze. They talk excitedly as they work together.

Observation 3 - By 11 a.m. the focus of many of the children has turned to outdoor play. The yard is big, with tall, older trees on one side, and a maze of shrubbery on the other. There is plenty of grass and dirt, a set of swings, a couple of picnic tables, and two hammocks. The teachers have taken out a big basket of balls and paddles. Several children are still clad in dress-up clothes. I recognize the boy who had the gun stock inside. He is enjoying an intense game of chase with several other children. Then, crying loudly, he rushes off behind a bush. After a few minutes, a teacher joins him there, carrying him out gently. When he first returns to the yard, he is withdrawn and shy, but he quickly resumes the same high involvement in play.

Later, as is our usual routine these mornings at schools in Reggio, we have a debriefing session with teachers, the pedagogista, and the atelierista. Antonia, the teacher of the three-year-olds, joins us. My question is, "We have seen a lot of documentation of children's projects. Do teachers in Reggio document play?" She responds thoughtfully, telling us about the morning's events in a way that makes transparent the children's intentions. Here is the English translation of Antonia's story.

"We believe observation is an attitude. That attitude does not regard only projects. It's a way of listening that takes in the whole day. This morning in the playground some things were happening. I make ongoing observations of how the children move in the playground outside.

At the beginning of the year, we noticed there were three big groups.

We watched them. One group was looking for friends. They tried to insert themselves, and they would be accepted or used.

Today was a special day for D. His parents went on their honeymoon. So he brought his gun. The gun got broken. Other children were concerned.

They tried to involve him in their play. G asked D, "why do you want to be on your own?" The children started a solidarity network around D. His network was present even though he was upset. His strategy was to say no to their requests for play. L didn't ask him. He took him by the hand.

On the porch the children were creating Gotham City. N was proposing to make a long road because he has visited a lot of little towns. M and A were occupied attaching tape, and N was repeating this idea a few times. I asked them, "Do you agree with what he proposed?" And so they began to help M with his project.

I believe the role of the adult is to make sure children listen to themselves but also listen to others. Because what you observed are children who have been together a short time and need to learn to do this."

The play of the 3-year-olds and Antonia's reflections help me make meaning of the presentations by several educators on the philosophy of learning at Reggio Emilia. Sergio Spaggiari, of the Education Department, tells us that the Reggio community is inventing ways of working together to achieve solidarity. Parents, teachers, and children are building an education system based on relationship, dialogue, exchange, and

communication. By asking, "where does pedagogy come from?" they hope to make a difference in education. They are clear about the answer. "We should not be too far away from children. Stay close to children and teachers, so we can listen, reflect, and interpret. We give too little value to time spent with children."

Spaggiari continues. The meaning of documentation at Reggio is to make things visible. It begins with careful observation, so that what is essential does not "escape our vision." We need to be interested in children's learning that is often invisible to us. We need to tell others our images and stories of what children do, to give it value. "We need to make interpretations, conjecture, and hypothesize. Teachers need always to ask why and to make sense of what is taking place."

Documentation is fundamental to teaching practice at Reggio Emilia because it is how the thinking behind actions is explained. Carlina Rinaldi, pedagogista, explains that documentation is much more than making panels for the wall. To document is "to produce traces of your observation, to make visible, to create a culture." There are many ways to communicate the teaching/learning process in a classroom, at least one hundred ways. Carlina tells us that by watching children, teachers know how to teach, and parents learn to dialogue with their child. She says,

"School is a place of life, emotion, friendship, not because my mother has to go to work. The children, teacher, and parents are part of the system, learning, teaching, and living together. Documentation and storytelling give voice to the child. Parents, in turn, learn to be with the child. They learn to be in dialogue so they learn to listen. The documentation goes both ways. Parents do it too. There are many ways of documenting."

Antonia's explanation of the threes' play is one way of documenting. She watches play carefully, she reflects on its meaning so that she can understand the children's motivation, and she tells stories to explain it to others. As the children's teacher, Antonia is in relationship with them. Over the year a shared understanding has developed among them. From this particular place of understanding, Antonia knows her role as teacher is to observe, give comfort and coach when necessary, and to remain in the background of the play. As they learn to understand and support each other, solidarity and a strong sense of community develops among the children. Through the eyes of my Italian colleague, I am helped to appreciate how practices in the school reflect the culture and values of the larger community.

The values that these educators speak to us of - relationship, dialogue, exchange, and communication - are in evidence on several different levels during our week in Reggio Emilia. By opening their doors to the international community, Reggio educators are opening up a dialogue around the world about quality in education. They mean it to be a dialogue. During one discussion I ask a question that I explain is not intended to be taken as criticism. Tiziana Filipini, the pedagogista at Diana School, explains that Reggio educators hope different points of view can be exposed, because that is the beginning of dialogue. Her advice is, "Always ask about the thinking behind an action!" These words stay with me, posing a personal challenge in my life as an educator.

I visit the *Diana School* on the last day of the study tour. The weather is drizzly and gray. Like *Neruda School*, children here are grouped in the three classes according to age. Walking into the classroom of the 4- and 5-year-olds, one is greeted by a brilliant, startlingly beautiful image projected onto a large screen in the corner opposite the door. The overhead lights have been dimmed, and bright hues from the screen effuse out into the room. This breathtaking, almost surreal light is refracted from the light table, where a shallow glass baking dish contains an array of translucent objects in an inch of water. A child working there experiments with the effects of overlapping colours and making ripples. Nearby, children use Matisse-like brilliant blues and yellows to paint on huge pieces of white paper. For me, the warm glow of this brilliant image in the room has a calming effect.

It is 10 am, and children are working busily in pairs or groups of three in various places around the room. The children seem unconcerned by the presence of a group of strangers. I notice the activity of two boys by the window, and I decide to watch them for a few minutes.

Observation - A lightweight rectangular frame hangs from the ceiling, the base for a mobile. L and D are working together to construct the mobile. Their materials are centimeter-wide black and white paper strips. The design branches asymmetrically out and downward. Standing on a chair, L has staples and tape to attach strips to the frame and from other strips. He works calmly and methodically, sometimes pausing to sing sweetly or visit with his partner. L's companion, D, is occupied making meticulous accordion folds in a couple of strips. He hangs a few, and then invents the trick of holding a folded strip between his thumb and forefinger,

and releasing it to spring open like a jack-in-the-box. This amuses D and several nearby children for a few minutes. When the stapler is empty, the two show great interest in figuring out how to fill it. The teacher comes over briefly to speak with them, expressing pleasure in their work.

While L concentrates on the mobile, D tapes a long piece of scotch tape on the edge of the table top. He writes in pencil on it, DARIO - 5 - LEO - 4 - LAVORNO. D invites L to see what he has written, and D points and spells, letter by letter. The teacher joins them again, and D reads the writing to her. She brings D some white paper, and they discuss how he may want to use it. D tapes the white paper down on top of the writing and traces the entire piece, generating a more permanent recording of his writing. The teacher retrieves a box of small, multicoloured markers, and D uses them to trace over the pencil and to do additional writing. Twenty minutes later, when I check back, L is still working on the mobile. D has taped several strips end-to-end on the floor, and is producing strings of letters and words, adding a strip whenever he runs out of space for his writing. Again the teacher checks on their progress, and D reads proudly to L and to her.

In our discussion afterwards, someone asks "When do Reggio educators introduce letters and numbers?" A teacher answers that there is not a specific curriculum for writing and math. To help children learn to communicate, other expressive languages are emphasized. But there are many opportunities for children to use writing and math meaningfully, for example, they have individual mail boxes for private messages to each other. If a child were to announce, "two plus two equals four," the teacher would ask the child how she knows that, to reinforce the habit of explaining one's thinking, and to find out what it means to her. Teachers also discuss with parents those interests children are showing at home.

The teacher of D and L does not attend this debriefing session, so I cannot ask for her interpretation. From my perspective, her interventions in the boys' play seems to help D focus on a self-selected task - writing and reading meaningful print. She also supports the children's sustained involvement, and L's interest in D's work. She brings them interesting materials to make the activity more complex. She encourages D to write more, and she encourages D to communicate his writing to a peer, to her, and to other children, when later he hangs his work in a public place. I respect how difficult it is for a teacher in a room of busy 4- and 5-year-olds to be consistently attentive and supportive of everyone's engagement!

Earlier in the week, in a talk about pedagogy, Carlina Rinaldi describes the teaching practice known as "scaffolding," where a child's learning is guided in interactions with a community member in the child's activity. The practice of scaffolding is based on the theory that children (indeed, all people) construct their understanding of the world. Knowledge is not received, it is constructed, say Bruner, Piaget, and Vygotsky. Reggio educators observe and document how a child is capable, and they discuss and anticipate ways of working with the child in his or her zone of proximal development, where the child's abilities are challenged and stretched. In their discussions, teachers ask, "What can the child do if...?" before they design learning contexts. In creating a quality experience, Reggio educators look to the child's zone of proximal development.

"Scaffolding is reciprocal. It is not emergent curriculum. It's like a dialogue. It's like a dance. It's a process of learning together. We observe and support their own processes," Carlina explains carefully. The condition for it is a social interaction between people who have experiences in common and a shared understanding. Scaffolding is the support given a child that enables him or her to make a connection, solve a problem, or have a qualitatively different understanding of a concept, which he or she could not do unassisted. By staying close, observing carefully, and offering assistance in well-timed interventions, as I observed in the teacher's behaviour at the *Diana School*, teachers can successfully scaffold children's construction of knowledge.

Each school visit enriches my understanding and appreciation of the *quality* of the experience in Reggio Emilia for children, families, and teachers. Every matter is considered, questioned, and discussed. There is no action without intention, in the philosophy of education that guides decisions, the way discoveries and learning are documented and communicated, and in the respect that is given to parents, families, co-teachers, and outsiders with their "American" questions. I realize I can't "bring Reggio home," but I can share the inspiration of a quality that demands much thought as to how the resources of money, time, and people's energies can be garnered for the well being of children, families, and the community. The people in Reggio are political, they have to be. But their politics are guided by a vision of the child-as-capable, not by bureaucratic necessity, external standards, or preschool as preparation for university.

but they steal ninety-nine.
The school and the culture
separate the head from the body.
They tell the child:
to think without hands
to do without head
to listen and not to speak
to understand without joy...
(Malaguzzi, 1997)

An educator in the study tour wants to know how new teachers are evaluated. A teacher from Allende School gives this thoughtful reply. "Our role is to help teachers learn. We empower rather than evaluate. This is a pedagogy of helping learn rather than evaluating. The process is shared with teachers, it's mutual, is a common concern. The teacher is never abandoned. We do little bits of positive thinking together. Teachers expect it and want it. I ask myself, 'How can I help?' We continue to build a relationship."

The perspective of caring expressed by this teacher catches my breath. It embodies my week's experience in Reggio Emilia - of this as a community of people who care about each other, and where much of the care is focused on the quality of the learning experienced by every child, parent, and teacher, pedagogista, and atelierista. At the heart of the Reggio education is scaffolding, which is much more than a teaching technique. It bespeaks an attitude that learning is always working towards quality, a continuous process of moving forward, progressing and developing. I compare this to an attitude of controlling for quality, where the goal is to meet a standard and when it is met, complacency sets in.

The educators at Reggio are forward thinking. Quality depends on communication, dialogue, and reciprocity, for out of this, new ideas grow. The gift of Reggio Emilia is simple, really. We cannot transplant Reggio at home, but the dream that is Reggio Emilia can inspire us to begin the dialogue about how to achieve quality. Sergio Spaggiari says it well. "This is not a paradise of children. Make sure every day that quality takes place. Be original, be creative, be different, do your own thing. Invent your education system, don't 'do Reggio.' Instead of saying, 'we cannot do this,' start with the question, 'What if we do this?

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Revoir l' environnement extérieur : des raisons pour le transformer, l'enrichir, le développer.

Anne Gillain Mauffette

Plusieurs d'entre nous avons entendu parler des écoles de Reggio Emilia ou lu[1] sur celles-ci et avons envié leurs magnifiques environnements. Cela nous a rappellé que l'environnement a des effets importants sur les interactions et l'apprentissage et inspirées par ces images et descriptions dans des articles, livres, ateliers ou pour les privilégiées par une visite sur place, certaines ont commencé à modifier leurs espaces afin de les rendre les lieux plus agréables mais aussi plus formateurs.

Cependant, qu'en est-il de l'extérieur ? Avons nous inclus l'espace extérieur dans notre vision ? En lisant l'article de Carol Anne Wein dans le numéro d'automne de « Canadian Children »[1] j'ai été frappée pas les similitudes entre les caractéristiques de l'aménagement de ces écoles (visibilité, étagement, amples espaces, aires de circulation, éléments naturels, beauté, variété) et les principes reconnus dans la littérature pour l'aménagement d'espaces extérieurs de qualité.

Pour évaluer si des changements à notre espace extérieur sont nécessaires ou non, on peut se poser les questions suivantes :

L'endroit est-il invitant, accueillant, confortable, « amiable » ?
Est-ce qu'il reflète la philosophie de votre programme et vous aide-t-il à atteindre vos objectifs ?
Son aménagement est-il basé sur plus récentes connaissances en psychologie de l'environnement et de l'enfant (le jeu, apprentissage...) ainsi que sur les normes canadiennes de sécurité ?
Cet espace contribue-t-il au développement optimal des enfants ?
Est-il construit en fonction des caractéristiques et préférences des enfants ?
Est-il assez grand pour accueillir tous les enfants tout en leur offrant suffisamment d'espace pour exercer leur motricité globale et assez de choix d'activités ? Les enfants y jouent-ils pour de longues périodes ?
Est-il utilisable toute l'année ?
Y a-t-il une variété de matériaux que les enfants peuvent manipuler, transformer ?
Est-il sécuritaire ? Contribue-t-il à la croissance, la force, la santé des enfants ?
Favorise-t-il les interactions, la coopération ?
Est-ce qu'il permet d'apprendre sur la vie, la nature, les gens ? Est-ce qu'il provoque de nombreuses questions d'où l'émergence de projets ? Est-ce qu'il vous aide à connaître les enfants ? Contient-il des choses belles à regarder, à dessiner, à entendre et même agréables à goûter ? Les enfants (et parents) participent-ils à l'évolution de ce lieu en perpétuelle transformation ?

Si vous avez répondu non à quelques-unes de ces questions... vous pourriez décider de repenser certains aspects de votre environnement extérieur et inviter tous les intéressés à se joindre à vous dans ce projet.
Dans le cadre de notre étude sur la sécurité des espaces de jeu extérieurs au Canada, nous avons eu l'occasion de visiter de nombreux lieux éducatifs (centres de la petite enfance, écoles, parcs). Un petit nombre d'entre eux pourraient sans doute fournir des réponses positives à toutes ces questions mais dans bien des cas, des réponses négatives même à la question de la sécurité s'imposeraient. Notre recherche et nos observations nous ont amenés à identifier un certain nombre de problèmes et dangers potentiels[4] communs et à suggérer certaines mesures pour y remédier[5].

1. Réclamer plus d'espace.
Le problème majeur pour beaucoup de centres de la petite enfance est le manque d'espace. Notre étude des législations provinciales et territoriales régissant les services de garde montre une grande variation quant aux exigences par rapport à l'espace extérieur (de 4m^2 à 7 m^2) et révèle que l'espace requis est insuffisant pour offrir aux enfants l'ensemble des expériences nécessaires à leur bon développement. Nos calculs indiquent qu'un minimum de 13,5 m^2 permettrait d'inclure : un petit jardin, du sable et de l'eau, un coin pour creuser, des blocs et autres pièces mobiles, une maisonnette (deux serait mieux), un coin menuiserie, des endroits pour s'asseoir, une butte, des recoins où s'isoler, de la végétation et des occasions de motricité globale (espace ouvert pour courir, structure à grimper, balançoires...). C'est impossible nous répond-t-on ! Sachant qu'un espace pour garer une auto mesure environ 13, 5 m^2 on peut s'interroger sur nos priorités ! ! ! Si nous comparons avec les normes d'autres pays : en Angleterre on exige 9m^2 pour les centres préscolaires

(« nurseries ») et l'Australie demande de 15 à 25 m^2 (sans compter la terrasse obligatoire), 9 m^2 étant exceptionnellement toléré dans les endroits de très haute densité.
Ce manque d'espace a de nombreuses conséquences sur la valeur ludique et le degré de sécurité des espaces de jeu extérieurs dans les centres de la petite enfance. Les responsables doivent soit ignorer les normes (en positionnant les équipements trop près les uns des autres par exemple) ou éliminer certains équipement (exemple : les balançoires) et autres jeux (pièces mobiles). De toutes façons, les enfants sont privés de droits fondamentaux. Du point de vue de la sécurité, les enfants sont exposés; à des collisions avec des personnes ou objets (deuxième cause de blessures après les chutes) ou à des chutes plus dangereuses (dû à la présence d'objets, jouets et autres enfants dans l'espace où ils pourraient tomber). Du point de vue social, la forte densité et des matériaux en quantité insuffisante pour le nombre d'enfants présents peut entraîner des comportements agressifs ou une appropriation du matériel par certains enfants. Le manque de variété dans les expériences pourra occasionner des faiblesses dans le développement des enfants. Considérant le sérieux de ces impacts : vous serait-il possible d'agrandir votre espace extérieur ? Sinon, vous devrez compenser par votre créativité pour fournir aux enfants l'occasion de faire ce qu'ils veulent vraiment faire. Tenez compte dans vos décisions des ressources offertes dans votre milieu : si un parc voisin a des balançoires, celles-ci ne sont peut-être pas nécessaires dans votre cour...

2. Aménager en tenant compte des caractéristiques et préférences des enfants.

■ Caractéristiques

- Les jeunes enfants ne peuvent pas prévoir la vitesse et la direction des objets ; ceci les rend vulnérables aux collisions➔ Une haie ou barrière basse entourant les balançoires à l'extérieur de la zone de protection empêcherait les enfants de courir devant les balançoires. Les sièges ne devraient pas peser plus de 3 lbs. (voir les normes de l'ACNOR[9] pour plus de détails).
- Les jeunes enfants n'identifient pas toujours les dangers (profondeur, rue...) ➔ ils doivent donc en être protégés (clôtures...).
- Les jeunes enfants ne contrôlent pas encore bien leur corps : ils ont de la difficulté à s'arrêter, une fois en mouvement et à changer de trajectoire : cela aussi les rend prédisposés aux collisions ➔De larges aires de circulation et de grands espaces sont nécessaires.
- Les enfants développent leur coordination mais ne maîtrisent pas encore toutes les formes de mouvement ; ils trébuchent souvent , glissent, perdent l'équilibre en courant, sautant, grimpant ➔Des surfaces absorbantes les protégeraient des blessures.
- Les jeunes enfants ont des grosses têtes en proportion de leur corps d'où la fréquence des blessures à la tête et au visage ➔ Ici encore les surfaces absorbantes en cas de chute éviteront le pire et des sièges de balançoire des matériaux souples et légers également.
- Les jeunes enfants n'ont pas beaucoup de force dans leurs membres supérieurs : ils perdent facilement prise et tombent ➔ Des barreaux ou rampes de dimension appropriées et des surfaces absorbantes doivent être fournies.
- Les enfants sont proches du sol : ce qui est par terre les intéresse ➔ Le petit gravier n'est pas recommandé là où il y a des touts- petits qui pourraient en mettre dans leur bouche ou leur nez.
- Les enfants ont de moins en moins d'occasions d'exercer leur motricité globale à l'intérieur comme à l'extérieur[10]. Les études indiquent qu'ils ont de plus en plus de problèmes cardiaques et respiratoires et moins de densité osseuse, d'endurance, de coordination et de capacités de discrimination perceptive ce qui les rend plus à risque de blessures[11]. ➔ Accordez plus de temps quotidiennement aux activités de motricité globale. Si les enfants ne sont pas familiers avec une structure de jeu, prévoir une surveillance plus serrée (il y a plus d'incidents au printemps et en septembre alors que les enfants découvrent les équipements). Éviter les structures très hautes (pas plus de 6 pieds) ; elles ne sont pas nécessaires au plaisir des jeunes enfants.
- Les jeunes enfants sont curieux et imprévisibles. Un jour il ne savent pas faire une chose, le lendemain les voilà en train de tenter un nouvel exploit. Ils utiliseront aussi le matériel de façons inattendues. ➔ Soyez aux aguets.

Laissez les enfants être vos guides : les enfants savent ce qu'ils aiment ou n'aiment pas dans leur environnement ; ils savent ce qui les intéresse. Écoutez - les et ils vous « dicteront » des ajouts ou transformations tout à fait appropriés. Vous entendrez sans doute ceci :

■ Besoins des enfants → Implications au niveau de l'aménagement.

- Les enfants ont besoin de bouger : ils veulent courir, sauter, se rouler, crier.. La vie a l'intérieur impose bien des contraintes aux jeunes enfants et leur demande un grand contrôle sur leur corps et leurs voix à tout moment. L'extérieur leur donne une plus grande liberté de mouvement et d'expression. → Prévoir des espaces ouverts, des monticules, de l'équipement fixe pour grimper...
- De socialiser : de parler, de rire, de jouer ensemble →Fournir des endroits pour s'asseoir, des jeux coopératifs.
- D'être seul, ou avec un ami : les enfants ont besoin d'intimité, d'endroits où se retirer pour réfléchir, se calmer, observer les autres et le monde. Les enfants adorent les recoins, les cachettes. →Des espaces semi-privés qui donnent l'impression de ne pas être vus par les autres vont répondre à ce besoin. Ceci peut se faire par exemple en plantant des buissons bas qui donnent à l'enfant assis le sentiment voulu, tout en permettant une supervision de constante de l'adulte tel que stipulé par la plupart des directives provinciales.
- D'éprouver un sentiment d'appartenance, de fierté (« elle est belle ma cour »), d'être un partenaire actif (« c'est nous qui avons... »). Les enfants ont le sens de la territorialité et aiment s'approprier des espaces. →Impliquez les enfants dans les décisions concernant leur environnement : demander leur ce qu'ils aimeraient faire, changer. Laissez -les construire leurs propres cabanes, inventer, aménager des espaces...
- De se sentir grands. Les enfants aiment se percher, avoir une vue, dominer leur environnement. →Des buttes, tours, plates-formes donnent l'occasion d'observer d'une autre perspective et de voir au-dessus des clôtures leur donnant une impression de liberté plutôt que de se sentir enfermé. La vue sur l'ensemble de l'espace permet de décider où on veut aller.
- D'agir, de transformer, de créer, de faire, de défaire, de construire. Les enfants aiment sentir leur pouvoir sur l'environnement. → Des matériaux qui permettent de creuser, manipuler (du sable, de l'eau...) et des éléments mobiles (blocs, articles récupérés, déguisements, matériel d'art...) vont entraîner les enfants dans des jeux créatifs et des interactions complexes. Pour favoriser l'implication, permettre de longues périodes de jeu libre ainsi qu'un grand nombre

d'activités ou projets initiés par les enfants et soutenus par les adultes.

- De faire des choix.→ L'environnement doit offrir des occasions pour différents types de jeux (physiques, cognitifs, symboliques, énergiques, calmes...) exigeant diverses habiletés et niveaux d'énergie. L'espace devrait être divisé en plusieurs zones d'accès facile. Les activités ne devraient pas se nuire les unes les autres. Le nombre d'options devrait être assez grand pour que les enfants aient réellement des choix selon leurs intérêts et leur humeur et être de complexité variable (du simple : la balançoire au super - complexe : les jeux avec sable + eau + petits objets). L'espace doit être planifié afin que les alternatives disponibles soient bien visibles et que l'enfant puisse décider entre différentes possibilités, changer d'idée et se reposer entre deux aventures.
- D'un contact quotidien avec la nature. Les enfants sont fascinés par les animaux. Certains par contre peuvent avoir peur des insectes. Prendre soin d'un jardin, se détendre sous « notre » arbre aide les enfants à comprendre l'interdépendance de l'homme avec la nature ainsi que le concept de croissance. Pour que les enfants développent un attachement à la nature, qu'ils s'émerveillent et veuillent la préserver, il leur faut une expérience directe avec la faune et la flore pour mieux comprendre le monde qui les entoure.→ L'environnement doit contenir des éléments naturels : arbres, buissons, fleurs, légumes qui a leur tour inviteront les oiseaux, les papillons... Pensez à votre cour extérieur en terme de jardin. La végétation a un effet calmant sur tout le monde tout en offrant stimulation et changements subtils.
- De beauté. Les enfants aiment les fleurs. Ils admirent leurs formes, leurs couleurs et parfums. Ils aiment les choses belles et sont fiers si l'espace autour d'eux est beau. Ils sont également très sensibles aux messages de l'environnement qui leur révèle les valeurs des adultes et si ceux-ci tiennent à eux. Un environnement soigné est un signe de respect envers les enfants. L'inverse est également vrai.
- De sensations. → Des textures, des couleurs, sons et odeurs variés stimulent les sens des enfants.
- De défis : les enfants veulent se sentir compétents et ont besoin de prendre conscience de leurs

progrès. Ils ont besoin de se sentir en confiance pour oser et aiment qu'on applaudisse à leurs succès.➔Oui l'environnement doit offrir des défis progressifs, des risques mesurés! Mais pas des dangers ! Si le milieu n'offre pas de défis suffisants, les enfants vont utiliser le matériel à des fins non prévues pour combler ce besoin.

- De faire des erreurs. L'erreur fait partie de l'apprentissage. Les enfants doivent sentir qu'ils peuvent tester leurs habiletés sans danger.➔ Des surfaces absorbantes sous les structures vont réduire le risque de blessures en cas de chute.
- De sécurité.➔ Être assuré par un contact visuel de la présence réconfortante d'un adulte signifiant, savoir que l'environnement ne lui fera pas mal fait (asphalte !), qu'il ne sera pas bousculé, harcelé par d'autres enfants ou frappé par un ballon perdu... Le design de l'environnement (balançoires dans un coin loin des courses des enfants, endroits où observer l'action sans danger), son entretien, l'encadrement, le type d'équipement (pas d'espaces de coincement ou d'étranglement, une variété de manières d'accéder et de quitter les structures...), les surfaces sous et autour des équipements (de protection et de circulation)... jouent tous un rôle dans la sécurité physique et affective des enfants.
- De se sentir bienvenu. ➔ Un endroit confortable (ni trop chaud ni trop froid, protégé des vents dominants en hiver et offrant de l'ombre l'été. Des endroits doux, mous ou s'asseoir (un environnement dur crée de la fatigue et de l'hostilité), un espace accueillant.
- La cour doit aussi répondre aux besoins spéciaux de certains enfants. ➔ Des modifications peuvent être faites pour leur permettre de participer au plus grand nombre d'activités possible (ex. bac de jardinage surélevé pour l'accès en chaise roulante).

3. Intégrer l'extérieur dans votre planification.

■ Nos préjugés.

Pourquoi restons-nous à l'intérieur si souvent ? On me répondra sans doute : à cause de notre climat. Mais je pense qu'il y a d'autres raison non explicitées sous nos actions. J'ai l'impression que nous croyons que les apprentissages « sérieux » se font entre quatre murs et de préférence (en tous cas à 'école élémentaire) assis sur une chaise (demandez aux enfants de première année). Nous savons pourtant que ce n'est pas vrai et que les enfants ont besoin d'expériences directes avec l'environnement pour construire leur compréhension du monde. Étant donné que le monde est plus large qu'une salle et qu'il est surtout à l'extérieur, pourquoi hésitons-nous à nous y aventurer avec les petits ? Les activités devraient alterner entre l'intérieur et l'extérieur : un projet initié à l'intérieur se poursuivant dehors et vice et versa. En fait la plupart des activités vécues à l'intérieur peuvent, à certaines époques de l'année, être vécues dehors. L'extérieur semble aussi provoques certains types de jeux : les garçons par exemple font davantage de jeux dramatiques à l'extérieur.

■ Planifier l'extérieur comme on le fait pour l'intérieur.

Nous savons très bien aménager à l'intérieur des coins ayant des fonctions spécifiques (construction, peinture) tout en réservant des espaces ouverts pour les activités en grand groupe et les activités motrices. Nous prévoyons le nombre de places nécessaires dans chaque atelier : 4 dans la maison, 2 à l'établi... pour fournir des choix à tous les enfants de la classe. Pourquoi ne transférons-nous pas cette façon de faire à l'extérieur ? En design de l'environnement on parle de créer des zones, de planifier un grand nombre d'unités de jeu (il faut compter 2,5 unités par enfant pour assurer un éventail d'options) et des activités suffisamment complexes (activités où la combinaison des matériaux permet une myriade de variations).

■ Faciliter le foisonnement de projets et les soutenir.

L'émergence de projets est directement liée à l'environnement immédiat. Plus celui-ci est diversifié et plus il y aura d'explorations et de questions. Ceci ne signifie pas qu'on ne puisse pas vivre des projets même dans un environnement minimal (un projet sur les ombres peut bien naître sur la cour d'asphalte qui est le lot de la plupart de nos écoles). Cependant un environnement riche et varié permettra aux enfant de nombreuses observations et sujets d'étude. D'où vient le sable ? que mangent les vers de terre ?...

4. Inclure les enfants dans les décisions

Nous avons déjà mentionné qu'il fallait inclure les enfants dans l'évaluation et la planification des espaces qui leur sont destinés (en les interrogeant). Certains enfants aimeront sans doute dessiner un plan de l'espace tel qu'il est ou peindre leur endroit de jeu préféré de la cour. D'autres pourraient dessiner ce qu'ils aimeraient voir, entendre, sentir et faire sur la cour. Ils pourraient aussi modeler la cour

idéale ou la représenter en trois dimensions avec des matériaux recyclés. Mais surtout ils devraient pouvoir participer aux transformations (creuser l'espace jardin) ainsi qu'à l'entretien (retourner le sable, arroser...).

5. Personnaliser votre espace extérieur.
Vous pouvez rendre votre espace extérieur tout à fait unique et spécial pour qu'il reflète les intérêts et talents particuliers de votre groupe ainsi que son histoire. Pour ce faire, incorporez les travaux des enfants (sculptures collectives en papier mâché protégées d'un vernis ou autres matériaux, bannières, tissages...) et ceux des adultes (poteries..). Invitez des parents ou membres de la communauté à faire des présentations en plein air (tissage, musique, contes, fil de fer...). Faites en un lieu vivant !

6. Savoir prévenir les blessures.
Les réglementations des services de garde mentionnent l'importance qu'on doit accorder à la sécurité des enfants mais ne fournissent souvent pas de critères précis en vue d'assurer celle-ci. Quelques-unes cependant soulignent l'existence des normes de l'Association Canadienne de normalisation sur les espaces de jeu et les équipements et encouragent les centres préscolaires à les appliquer.
Notre sondage sur les contenus des programmes de formation en éducation préscolaire (Techniques d'éducation en services de garde, Baccalauréat au préscolaire...) dans les collèges et universités, indique que ce document bien qu'en circulation depuis 1990 n'a pas été diffusé assez largement. La nouvelle version de 1998 (disponible en français cet automne) est un outil indispensable pour développer et entretenir des espaces de jeu sécuritaires et chaque centre de la petite enfance devrait en posséder une copie. Ce document pourra vous aider à modifier progressivement votre environnement extérieur pour le rendre plus conforme et à élaborer des programmes d'inspection et d'entretien qui assureront la protection des enfants et la vôtre en cas de litige.
Les centres de la petite enfance ont un grand avantage par rapport à d'autres espaces de jeu extérieur tels que les écoles ou les parcs : leur ratio permet l'utilisation d'éléments mobiles, multipliant ainsi le nombre et types d'activités possibles et offre un meilleur encadrement. Cependant, on remarque que les adultes ont parfois tendance à se regrouper pour discuter pendant ces périodes (oui, nous avons besoin de socialiser ou de parler des enfants ; mais pas là !) tout en étant prêts à intervenir si un enfant crie ou qu'une bagarre se déclare. « Surveiller » sur la cour, c'est enseigner. C'est un processus actif qui exige de circuler , d'écouter, de questionner, d'encourager, d'applaudir, de rire, parler et jouer... comme on le fait à l'intérieur.
On devrait également inspecter tous les terrains utilisés par le centre et prévenir les parents des dangers potentiels des espaces de jeu extérieurs qu'ils fréquentent avec leurs enfants (parcs municipaux).

7. Aimer être à l'extérieur : les adultes comme modèles.
Si l'espace extérieur est trop petit, inconfortable ou stressant, les adultes vont l'éviter et passer le moins de temps possible à l'extérieur. Comme nous l'avons mentionné, ceci a des conséquences néfastes pour les enfants. Il est donc fondamental de rendre l'extérieur agréable pour tous. Prendre le temps de sortir en toutes saisons (même si c'est long de s'habiller en hiver) est essentiel pour l'équilibre émotif et physique des enfants. Notre exemple l'est tout autant. En racontant aux enfants les activités de plein air que nous avons faites en fin de semaine, en nous habillant de façon appropriée (chapeaux en été, vêtements chauds en hiver) nous sommes des modèles de joueurs actifs et prudents pour les enfants. En fait, jouer avec eux et témoigner de notre plaisir à le faire est la meilleure des démonstrations.
« Regarde Anne, il y a un mésange à la mangeoire ! Viens voir les couleurs dans le ciel ! » s'écrient les enfants. Mais pourquoi m'appellent-ils moi ? Parce qu'ils savent que cela m'intéresse, que je vais sincèrement m'extasier devant leurs découvertes. Cette année nous avons fait pousser des citrouilles au jardin à partir des graines de l'automne dernier : quelle ne fut pas la surprise des enfants (et même de certains adultes) de voir que celle-ci étaient vertes avant de devenir oranges.

Et vous, quels projets avez-vous pour dehors ?

Note : Au cours de notre projet, nous avons accumulé un bon nombre de livres, vidéos et articles sur les espaces de jeu extérieur que vous pouvez emprunter à la didacthèque de l'Université du Québec à Hull. Réservez par fax au nom de Diane Pépin au 1-819-59-4459. Pour plus d'informations, vous pouvez également rejoindre l'auteure au 819-771-3378 ou par courrier électronique : mauffett@magi.com

La section sur les préférences des enfants a déjà fait partie d'un article dans la Revue Préscolaire, Vol 36 No. 2, Avril 1998, p.14.

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Revisiting Your Outdoor Environment : Reasons to Reshape, Enrich, Redevelop the Outdoor Space.

Anne Gillain Mauffette.

Many of us have heard or read[1] of how beautiful the environment of the Reggio Emilia preschools is. We also have been reminded of the effects of the environment on relationships and learning. Some of us, inspired by the pictures, descriptions, workshops or (for the lucky ones) visits, have started to transform our settings to make the environment a better place and a better teacher.

But what about the outdoors? Have we included it in our vision? Reading Carol Anne Wien's article in the autumn issue of Canadian Children[1] I was struck by the similarity between the qualities she underlined in the schools in Reggio Emilia that she described and the principles of good outdoor design found in our North American and international literature (visibility, layering, generous spaces circulation patterns, vegetation, beauty and variety etc). If we think of the child's environment as a unity, we should be giving the outdoors as much attention as we do to the indoors. But this is rarely the case. Fortunately examples of successful transformations of yards (the American Washington Environmental Yard project[2], the British Learning through Landscapes[3] initiatives) can help us dream of the future of our outdoor spaces and bring these images to life.

The following questions should help you assess the necessity of changing some aspects of your outdoor playspace.

Is your outdoor area inviting, comfortable and "amiable?"

Does it reflect your program's philosophy and help you achieve it's goals?

Is it's design based on the most recent knowledge on development, play, learning and safety standards?

Does it contribute to children's optimal development?

Is the design based on the characteristics of children and their preferences?

Is the area large enough to accommodate all the children while offering them sufficient space for free movement and choices of things to do? Do children play for long periods of time? Can you use the space all year round?

Is there a variety of materials that children can use and transform?

Is the space safe?

Does it contribute to children's growth, strength and health?

Does it foster interaction?

Does it teach about life, nature and people?

Does it stimulate questioning by the children thus provoking the development of projects?

Does it help you get to know the children?

Are there beautiful things to look at and draw, pleasant things to feel hear and even taste?

Do children (and parents) participate in the evolution of this ever-changing space?

If you have said "no" to some of these questions, then you might decide to rethink these aspects of your outdoor space and invite all interested parties to join you in this project.

In the context of our research on the safety of outdoor play spaces we have had the opportunity to visit many educational sites in Canada (child care centres, schools, parks) some of which could probably answer "yes" to all of these questions. Unfortunately, in many cases, negative responses would apply to a number of these elements even to the issue of safety. Our research and observations have brought us to identify some common problems and hazards[4] and to suggest measures to counteract these[5].

1. **Advocating for space:**

The major problem for many child care centres is the lack of space. Our study of the provincial and territorial child care legislation show a large variation in the space required for outdoor space (from $4m^2$ to $7\ m^2$)[6] and that in all cases the requirements are insufficient to ensure the safe inclusion of all the elements necessary for the children's. development. Our calculations indicate that a minimum of $13.5\ m^2$ would provide enough space for such things as a small garden, sand and water play, a digging patch, blocks and other loose parts, a small house (two is better for visiting), a place for woodworking, sitting places, a knoll, small quiet places to retreat, vegetation plus opportunities for gross motor play (space for running, a climbing structure and a swing) and space to circulate. "We cannot afford so much outdoor space" is the response we get, but knowing that this minimum represents the size of a parking space...makes us wonder about our priorities. If we compare these requirements with those in

other countries, England[7] requires $9m^2$ for their nurseries and the Australian Standard[8] specifies 15 to 25 m^2 (not counting the mandatory porch), a $9m^2$ minimum being tolerated in very dense urban areas. This lack of space has a number of consequences on the educational and safety aspects of the playground. Operators either have to ignore the safety standards (by positioning pieces of equipment too close to each other for example) or eliminate some of the desired motor activities, (most of the time, swings) and other types of play (loose parts, manipulatives). Either way children are deprived of fundamental rights. From the safety point of view, children are exposed to potential collisions with persons or objects (the most frequent injury cause in young children after falls) or suffer more severe injuries from falls due to obstacles, toys and other children in the zone where they might fall. From a social point of view, crowding and lack of materials or choices can lead to aggressive behaviors or appropriation of the space and resources by some children. The lack of variety in the types of experiences available can bring an imbalance in children's development. Considering these serious consequences, the question we need to ask is if it would be possible for you to expand your outdoor playspace ? If not , you will have to compensate by using your creativity to overcome these space constraints so as to give the children the possibility of doing what they really want to. In the choices you make, consider the resources of your neigbourhood, for instance, if the children have opportunities to swing in a park close to your setting, then maybe you don't need swings...

2. Designing spaces that are based on the children's characteristics and preferences:

■ Characteristics

- Young children cannot anticipate the speed and direction of moving objects; this makes them vulnerable to collision. ➔ Design implication : a small hedge or fence could surround swings outside of the protective zone so the children do not inadvertently walk or run in the path of a moving swing. Swing seats should be of light material (see CSA Standards for more details)[9].
- Young children do not identify hazards, for example, street or depth ➔they must be protected from them by fencing or other barriers.
- Young children are learning to control their bodies and have difficulty stopping, turning and changing direction rapidly ; this also makes them susceptible to collisions ➔provide ample space.
- Young children are developing their coordination but have not mastered all forms of movement : they trip, slip, fall while running, skipping, climbing➔provide forgiving surfaces which give them protection from injuries.
- Young children have large heads in proportion to the rest of their bodies which makes them prone to head and face injuries in falls. ➔the provision of adequate surfacing is essential.
- Young children do not have much upper body strength ; they will easily lose grip and fall ➔ absorbent and well maintained surfacing materials (loose or unitary) should ensure safe landings.
- Children are close to the ground; they will notice and use whatever is on the ground ➔ pea gravel should not be used where toddlers play (they may put it in their mouth and nose).
- Children have fewer opportunities for gross motor activities inside and ouside[10].As a consequence they have more respiratory and heart problems, less bone density, less balance, less endurance, less coordination and perceptual discrimination which all make them more at risk for injuries[11] ➔ Time management : provide a lot more time in the daily schedule for gross motor activities. If children are unfamiliar with a structure, additional supervision will be necessary (there are more injuries in spring and September when the play space is new to the children and they experience unfamiliar settings). Excessive heights are also to be avoided and are not necessary for the enjoyment of the children : keep things less then 6 feet in height for preschoolers.
- Children are curious and unpredictable. One day they cannot do something , the next they will attempt some new challenging experience. They will use materials in sometimes the most unexpected ways. ➔ be alert

But most of all, children know what they like to do and what they don't like in their environment, they know what interests them. If you listen to them; they will "dictate" some very appropriate changes. This is what you will probably hear.

■ Children's preferences ➔ design implications.

- Children want to move : they want to run, roll, leap and shout. Life indoors has many constraints for young children and demands great control over their bodies and voices. The outdoors must give them freedom. ➔ Open space with flat areas and mounds, an active

space for climbing with some fixed and flexible equipment.

- To socialize : they need to talk, laugh and play together. ➔ Provide places where they can sit and materials that can be used cooperatively
- To be alone or with a friend : children need intimacy, places where they can retreat to think, quiet down, look at others, observe the world around them. Children like nooks, hide-outs, secret places, dens. ➔Provide semi-private places that give the impression of not being seen. This can be achieved by planting low bushes so the sitting child has a sense of seclusion while the standing teacher can still supervise as specified in most of the regulations.
- To feel ownership and partnership : children are very "territorial" and like to think that a place is theirs. ➔ Involve them in the decisions about the environment : ask them what they like and don't like, what they would like to do and plant, what they would change and how. Let them build their own houses, forts, tents etc.
- To feel tall, like a grown up. ➔ Build mounds, tree houses, platforms and give children a chance to observe what is going on by looking over the necessary hedges, fence and gate. This will give an impression of ample space as opposed to a feeling of being caged in. From these "high up" places, children can get a view of the different zones in the grounds and can choose where they want to go next.
- To act on, transform, create, do, undo, build. Children need to feel their power over the environment and be able to shape and reshape it. ➔ Provide digging patches, loose parts such as, blocks, junk materials, shovels, art materials, musical objects, props for dramatic play, and vehicles. A sandpit and water will get the children involved for long periods in complex and creative interactions,
- To make choices. ➔ The outdoor place must offer opportunities for different types of play (physical/creative/symbolic/cognitive/manipulative/quiet) requiring different abilities and levels of energy. The space should be designed so that the child can see the various zones and have easy access (clear circulation patterns) to all of these without interfering in other children's activity. The child should be able to choose between simple (swings) or complex (sand, water and toys), individual, parallel or collective activities. Children need places for observing, and relaxing. They need to be able to choose between a number of possible alternatives in choosing what to do next.
- To have daily contact with nature. Children usually love animals although some of them might be afraid of bugs and worms and find them ugly and dirty. Tending a garden, relaxing in the shade of "our" trees will help children understand our interdependence with nature and the processes of growth. For children to develop an emotional bond with nature, to marvel and appreciate and want to care for the environment, they need to have a direct experience of plants, animals, insects so they gain an understanding of the world around them. ➔ The outdoor space must contain trees, bushes, flowers and vegetables which in turn attract birds and butterflies. Think of it as a garden. Vegetation also has a soothing effect on everyone and provides continuous subtle changes.
- To experience beauty. ➔ Flowers are a favorite among children. They admire their shapes, colors and smells. They like pretty things and are proud if their space is beautiful. They are also very sensitive to the messages of the environment. A well kept and aesthetically pleasing environment tells the children that there are adults who care about them, and about the environment. Attention to the environment surrounding the children is a sign of respect for them. The reverse is also true.
- To fill their senses.➔ Provide a palette of textures, colors, smells will stimulate children's senses.
- To feel competent: Children need challenges, they need to feel that they are making progress. They need to be able to try things in a secure atmosphere (nonjudgmental, with teachers watching closely just in case, but especially to acknowledge and celebrate together their success). A feeling of satisfaction is achieved after conquering a perceived risk. ➔ Age appropriate experiences and equipment will provide for challenge and moderate risk...not hazard!
- To make mistakes: Error is part of learning. Children should feel that they can test their abilities without danger. ➔ Providing proper surfacing for example will cushion falls.
- To feel and be safe. Safety means that the adult keeps the child in view and provides an environment that does not hurt (no burning slides!), where the children are not being harassed or unintentionally hurt by the play of others (a lost ball or being pushed). ➔ Significant

and informed adults that can plan and inspect and maintain a safe environment that encourages positive creative and social behaviors. The overall design needs to have defined zones, boundaries and circulation patterns. Zones and equipment should be positioned carefully such as putting a swing in a corner or away from running children and avoiding placing conflicting activities close together. For instance, provide safe equipment, for example no entrapment spaces in guardrails or anywhere else and no entanglement hazards on slides, swings or elsewhere. Provide a variety of ways to access and egress from equipment. Proper surfacing, protective zones under and around equipment and additional no-encroachment zones around moving equipment (including exit of slides). Provide places for children to watch what is going on away from danger.

- To feel welcome. ➔ The play space should not be too hot or cold. It should be protected from dominant winds, offer shade in the summer and sun in winter. It should offer soft spots (hard environments create fatigue and hostility).
- A place that meets particular needs. ➔ Adjustments should be made so the outdoor space and the activities in it are available to all, for instance, if it is needed provide a raised sand box or garden bed.

3. **Integrating the outdoors in your planning**:

■ The indoor bias.

Why do we stay indoors so much? Some will say it is because of our climate; but I think there is another non explicit reason orienting our activities. There seems to be a belief that real (serious!) learning takes place between four walls and preferably (in the elementary school) sitting on a chair (ask first graders!). We all know that this is not true and that concrete and direct experiences are basic to learning for young children (and adults). Since the world is so much larger than a room; why do we hesitate to open the door and let the children explore? Activities should flow in and out of the centre: an activity or project initiated outside can be pursued indoors and vice-versa. In fact, weather permitting, most of the activities (and materials) can be carried outside. The outdoors also seems to trigger certain types of play for certain children for example, boys do more dramatic play outdoors than indoors.

■ Planning the outdoors as you do the indoors.

We know how to plan “areas” with specific functions, such as space for construction and art activities and an open space for large group activities or gross motor play. We know how to provide for choices (enough places in each corner: four in the house area, two at the workbench...for a whole group or class). We know how to encourage complex play activities like symbolic play inside the centre. Why not transfer this knowledge to the outdoors? In the outdoor design literature this would be called: creating zones for a large number of units of play (there has to be nearly or at least 2 ½ units versus the number of children to ensure real choices) and complexity (activities in which the combination of materials engender a myriad of variations).

■ Facilitating and sustaining projects.

The emergence of projects is closely related to the surrounding environment. The more diversified it is the more varied the investigations and explorations. This is not to say that projects cannot exist in even minimal environments, for example, a project on shadows can develop in the asphalt and Frost fencing environment of most schools. But an infinite number of projects will arise from the observations of children in a rich outdoor setting Where does the sand from our sandpit come from ? What do snails eat?...

4. **Including the children in the decisions...and in the work**.

We have already talked about including children in the evaluation and the planning of their playspace, maybe by interviewing them. Some children may be interested in drawing the plan of the space as it is, or making a painting of their favorite place or activity. Others might want to draw what they would like to see, do, hear and smell in an ideal playground. Some could model it in clay or make a model with recycled materials. But children can also participate in the transformations themselves by digging the garden and in the maintenance, for instance, by watering and raking the sand.

5. **Making your outdoor grounds into an authentic, special, personnalized place.** This becomes the trademark of your group's interests, talents and story and a place where novelty and familiarity reign. Incorporate children's (and adults') work on the grounds (papier mâché or wooden sculptures covered with a protective coating, banners, weaving, etc.). Invite parents or people from your community for demonstrations outside of music, weaving, story telling, tight rope walking, etc. Make it a living place !

6. **Knowing about injury prevention.**
Child care legislation and guidelines for child care facilities all mention the importance of safety but few of them specify what a safe outdoor playspace is by giving specific criteria or by mentioning the existing Canadian standards on equipment and playspaces. Our survey of ECE programs across Canada and our visits on sites indicate that workable knowledge of the Canadian standards for playspaces and equipment has not been widely disseminated in the day care community even though they have existed since 1990. The new 1998 version of the CSA document published this spring is an essential tool in the development and maintenance of safe playspaces; one to have on hand at all times. This document should help you gradually retrofit your playground to bring it up to the standards, and develop inspection and maintenance programs that will protect the children from injury and your facility from litigation.
The advantage of child care centres is that the type of supervision (ratios) permit a larger variety of activities (for example. loose parts) than in schools or parks. But sometimes during outdoor playtime, adults tend to regroup and talk among themselves (yes, we do need to socialize or talk about the children, but not now!) and will intervene only if a child cries or an argument starts. Supervision is also teaching, it is an active process: it means, circulating constantly on the grounds, listening, questioning, encouraging, clapping, laughing, talking and playing- just as we do inside.
Parents should also be made aware of the potential dangers in other outdoor settings (municipal parks) and all locations used by the centre should be checked before use.

7. **Loving the outdoors: adults as models:**
If the outside space is cramped, uncomfortable or stressful, adults will avoid it and spend minimal time outside. As we said this has devastating consequences for children. Making the outdoors more enjoyable for everyone is of utmost importance.
Taking the time to go outside in all seasons (even though it takes so long to get dressed in winter) is essential for children's emotional and physical health, as is serving as a model for active and safe play. Telling the children about your own outings over the weekend shows them you really like the outdoors. Dressing in appropriate clothing by wearing a hat in the summer, and warm clothes in the winter, encourages children to do the same. Playing with children and enjoying it is the best demonstration of all!
"Look Anne. there's a chickadee in our birdfeeder!"; "Look at the colors in the sky!"... the children call out to me. But why to me? Because they know I will respond enthusiastically. They can feel that I am really thrilled. Growing our own pumpkins from last year's seeds brought quite a surprise to the children (and some adults): pumpkins are green and later turn to orange! We will be harvesting them soon.

How about you... any plans?

Note: *In the context of our project we have accumulated a good number of resources on outdoor spaces (articles, books, videos, slides). A catalog of these resources is available. You can borrow these by faxing your order at: 819-595-4459 to Diane Pépin. For more information you can contact the author at 819-771-3378 or by* e-mail: mauffett@magi.com

The section on children's preferences has already been a part of an article in French in the "Revue Préscolaire", Vol 36, No.2, April 1998 p 14.

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Kindergarten in the Czech Republic: Tradition and Transition

Margie I. Mayfield, Ph.D.

Early childhood education in the Czech Republic has experienced changes and challenges since the overthrow of communism in 1989. Changes and challenges are not new in this country with a long and proud tradition of educational innovations and contributions to early childhood education. Comenius, a 17th century bishop and educator, was one of the first to advocate early childhood principles and his work has long been familiar to educators worldwide. The recent re-establishment of democracy has provided the impetus and opportunity for early childhood educators in the Czech Republic to re-examine early education. Some of the issues include what curriculum should be, who should teach young children, how should early education be delivered and funded, what is the role of parents, etc. – many of the same questions that are issues in Canada and other countries. It is interesting to see how other countries are addressing some of the same issues we face. However, what is different about the Czech Republic is the dramatic changes that have taken place in a relatively short period of time and the need for early childhood education to respond to these changes.

This article is based on my visit to the Czech Republic including interviews with individual teachers, government officials, parents, teacher educators, researchers, and a focus group of teachers from across the Czech Republic as well as on-site visits to a variety of kindergartens for children three to six years old. The following account is based on my observations and experiences and should be considered more of a snapshot than a comprehensive report. A brief overview of early childhood education, past and present, in the Czech Republic is followed by a description of current kindergarten programs and a discussion of recent issues.

Introduction to the Czech Republic

The Czech Republic, a beautiful country that borders Austria, Germany, Poland, and Slovakia, has a population of more than 10.3 million including the majority Czech and minority Moravian, Slovak, Polish, German, and Romany groups. In recent years, there has been a falling birth rate and family size, a high divorce rate, and the percentage of the population under 15 has dropped to 18% (Kotasek & Svecova, 1995; OECD, 1996). Similar demographic trends have also been experienced in Canada.

Before World War I, this area was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The first Czech Republic (1918-1938) ended with the occupation by the Nazis in 1939. After a brief restoration of democracy after World War II, there was a communist government until the peaceful Velvet Revolution restored democracy in late 1989. Four years later Czechoslovakia split into the Czech Republic and Slovakia. The Czech Republic, throughout all these changes, has maintained its "long tradition of national pride and a history of educational excellence" (Mays, Polyzoi, & Gardner, 1997, p. 37).

The Czech Educational Tradition

This rich Czech tradition of education is easily seen in early childhood education (Juva & Monatova, 1989). Czech educators usually trace the roots of early childhood education to the great educational thinker Comenius (1592-1670). Comenius set out principles of education that were considered highly innovative and even radical at the time. These principles are still relevant today and have formed the foundation of early childhood education. They are the education of the whole child, education for promoting culture, integration of subject areas, lifelong learning, learning for life, and teacher education (Capkova, 1991; Uhlirova, 1991). He recognized the role of the family in children's development, advocated hands-on learning, and wrote the first textbook specifically for children. As Lascarides (1991) states, "Comenius introduced many concepts of education which we take for granted today" (p. 121). Other great innovators in early childhood education such as Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Rousseau read his work, then incorporated and expanded upon his principles in their own work. The effects of Comenius' work can be seen in today's early childhood programs worldwide.

The traditional valuing of education in the Czech Republic has continued since the time of Comenius and education has been an important force in political reforms. According to von Kopp (1992), "the country has a long, unbroken tradition of esteem for education as the foundation of nationhood. In the nineteenth

century, the school was the very basis for the national 'rebirth' (p. 112). It was during this time that kindergarten began its "long tradition in Czechoslovakia" (Cerna, 1992, p. 81) with the establishment of the first kindergarten in Prague in 1832. Kindergarten was incorporated into the general education system in 1948. A majority of children have attended a kindergarten since the late 1960s (Misurcova, 1993). In 1995-96, 88.5% of children 3-6 years of age attended kindergarten (OECD, 1996). The peak enrollment was 98.5% in 1989-90; the subsequent decrease was due to closure of kindergartens because of economic downturn, declining numbers of women in the labour force, and privatization of state properties and cooperatives which sponsored kindergartens for their employees (OECD, 1996).

Current Kindergarten Programs

In the Czech Republic, school is compulsory from age 6 to 15 (although some districts now require compulsory schooling from age 5). Children under the age of three attend crèches that are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health. Women comprise the majority of the labour force; however, crèches are not very numerous as the Czech Republic has a very generous three year maternity leave (e.g., almost full salary for the first year). Most mothers stay at home with their infants and toddlers for a year or longer.

Kindergarten Education Today

Kindergarten in the Czech Republic, unlike in Canada, is for children from three to six years of age. In 1995-96, there were 6457 kindergartens that enrolled 333,433 children (OECD, 1996). Most (97.9%) of these are public programs and under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education. Kindergarten is free although parents pay for meals (i.e., breakfast, lunch, and afternoon snack) based on their incomes.

Private and special needs kindergartens are two other categories of programs. Private kindergartens include Montessori, Waldorf, Christian, and factory-based. The number of private programs is increasing with the liberalization of the Education Act, which now permits non-government schools. Another category is government-funded kindergartens for special needs children. These kindergartens usually enroll children with only type of special need (e.g., a kindergarten for the visually impaired). Children with serious health and medical problems attend kindergartens attached to hospitals and clinics. Some special needs children are integrated into public kindergartens; however, most children still attend separate programs.

Kindergarten Visits

The kindergarten programs I visited were usually housed in two-storey buildings in residential areas that typically consisted of five to seven floor apartment blocks. The classrooms were bright, clean, and colourful with lots of plants. There were often lace sheers on the windows, doilies under the plants, and one lunchroom had heavy white fabric tablecloths. Children's arts and crafts are prominently displayed as well as framed art, ceramic pieces, pottery, and examples of traditional Czech arts and crafts such as wood carvings. More than one classroom had traditional handmade furniture in the housekeeping corner including cradles and a spinning wheel. The kindergartens had modern institutional kitchens for meal preparation and were also used for children's cooking and baking projects (e.g., one group of children had made gingerbread sheep and were decorating them for Easter).

A "typical day" in a kindergarten began at 6:30 a.m. (although most children seemed to arrive around 8 a.m.) and continued until 5:30 (most children left between 4 and 4:30). Primary schools operated from 8 a.m. to 1 or 2 p.m. The day often began with physical activity such as PE, exercise, or games. Breakfast was served at 8:30 followed by semi-structured group activity until outdoor play around 10. Lunch was served at 11:30 and typically consisted of soup with meat, potatoes, vegetables, dessert, and milk with tea or cocoa. Naptime was from 12 to 2 p.m. (many children slept with "sleep pillows" which are small dolls or animals stuffed with a mixture of herbs such as chamomile, rosemary, lavender, and sweet marjoram). The afternoon was mainly free-play until the children went home. Some of the kindergartens I visited also provided English, computer instruction (games mostly), and swimming lessons. Field trips were also part of the programs.

In comparison to a "typical day" in Canadian programs for 3 to 6 year olds, the Czech programs I observed seemed to place more emphasis on the arts (especially music, movement, and traditional crafts) and physical activity. I visited programs shortly before Easter and the children were decorating eggs and gingerbread using traditional Czech designs. The morning exercises were teacher-led and often done to music. Physical activity and sports are important in the Czech Republic. A nation-wide sports and games event held every five years includes children's games and events. This importance is reflected in the name of the ministry responsible for kindergartens, which

is called the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports. There are extra-curricular programs for swimming, skiing, skating, gymnastics, etc. that are often based in nearby well-equipped and well-used sports centres. The individual kindergartens and classrooms that I visited were also well equipped for physical activities. Most of the kindergartens had a large room that was used daily for music, movement, and gymnastics. Many classrooms had climbing bars, balance beams, and other gross motor equipment.

The kindergartens I observed had three or four classes divided by age typically with 26 children in a group with one teacher and one aide. Kindergarten teachers may continue on with their class for the first two years of primary school.

Transition and Trends

The most significant changes in early childhood education in the Czech Republic since 1989 according to the professionals I interviewed were:

More decision-making at the local level.

More child-centered curricula

Increasing interest in inclusion of special needs children

More options for early childhood program models

Increased role for parents and delineating of parents' and families' rights

Increased professional training and in-service.

Decentralization of Kindergarten

Perhaps the most significant, and intensely debated, change in education in the Czech Republic since 1989 has been the provision for flexibility and options in education. Before 1989, the goals, curriculum, methods, materials, etc. were determined at the federal level. Now these decisions are made primarily at the local or district levels.

When I asked a group of 30 kindergarten teachers from across the Czech Republic if this change had been a positive one, there was great discussion and vigorous debate. In general, most of the group supported the increased freedom and choice to develop the programs based on the needs of the children and local communities. Some teachers commented that there had been quite a bit of this before 1989 in some areas of the country. Others disagreed and said that young children had been overloaded with demands of an academically oriented program.

The group was also divided as to whether kindergartens were better off before 1989. Most frequently mentioned were the good buildings, maintenance, and equipment provided by the central government before 1989. Others commented that the kindergarten environment is now more informal, more intimate, and reflects more influence from Austria and Scandinavia (e.g., the use of natural materials). Other positive changes mentioned were the possibility for diverse program models including private schools and the integration of special needs children.

Most frequently mentioned negative changes since 1989 included the increased class sizes in the urban areas. Although government policy is 20 children per kindergarten class and the government statistics show a declining average class size for kindergartens across the Czech Republic (OECD, 1996), one teacher reported having 38 children in her class and others said 30 or more were not uncommon in Prague. Teachers from the rural areas commented that they had the opposite problem (i.e., too small classes) due to the declining birth rate and unemployed mothers or fathers staying at home with their children. Small enrollments jeopardize funding. Some teachers felt that charging the parents for meals that were free before 1989 and for certain extra-curricular activities was not appropriate.

Overall, the majority of the participants in the group and most of the other teachers I talked with were excited about the new possibilities for early childhood education. However, at the same time, many were a bit nostalgic for some of the security and support of the old order.

Changing Kindergarten Curricula

Before 1989, the curriculum for early childhood programs was developed federally. This centralized curriculum specified the amount of time to be spent on the different subject areas. Since 1989, local initiatives in curriculum development have not only been possible but are being encouraged. Although the Ministry of Education sets broad educational standards and guidelines, the central government has been criticized for lack of specifics on how this new freedom should be translated into practice in the classroom (Safr & Woodhouse, 1996).

Early childhood educators did not receive training in curriculum development because it had previously been done centrally. Now that teachers are faced with the opportunity to develop innovative curricula to match the more child-centered philosophy, many said they felt unsure of what to do and how to do it. Many teachers stated that it was rather daunting to be able to plan and then implement curriculum. Although play has long been a feature of early childhood education in the Czech Republic, teachers and ministry officials frequently commented that current programs are less structured than before 1989

as there has been a shift to a more child-centered philosophy. The emphasis on learning through play has been a bridge between the old and the new approach. Other signs of change were that teachers asked about the role and prominence of computers and technology in early childhood programs in other countries I had visited. Most of the classrooms had large television sets although I never saw one in use.

Inclusion of Special Needs Children

Since 1929, early education programs for special needs children have been mandated in the Czech Republic (Gargiula & Graves, 1993). At present, there are 198 special needs kindergartens for specific specialties (e.g., hearing impaired). Although the integration of special needs children was mandated in 1989, progress has been slow. In my discussions, both parents and professionals had reservations about the concept of mainstreaming as well as the practicalities of implementing it.

Despite these reservations, the feeling among many of the teachers with whom I spoke was that although the special needs kindergartens had always been and were still, excellent programs some children should have the option for inclusion in regular programs. The major difficulty from the teachers' viewpoint was their lack of knowledge and training about the nature of special needs and the integration of special needs children into their classes. Questions on this topic were among those I was asked most frequently during my visit to both the Czech Republic and Hungary (Mayfield, 1997).

Options for Kindergarten Programs

A significant change in all levels of education in the Czech Republic since 1989 has been the possibility for program options. Government officials said the three fastest growing types of early childhood programs were Montessori, Christian kindergartens, and Waldorf schools. I visited a Montessori program where the children were using a combination of typical early childhood materials (e.g., Lego) and traditional Montessori materials. The school had a display of Montessori materials from the early 20th century that had been found in the attic of the school and were still in the original boxes. A teacher speculated that they may have been put away at the beginning of the communist regime and the standardization of kindergarten programs.

Early educators see the opportunity for more options and flexibility in early childhood programs as having both positive and negative aspects. The positive aspect is the provision of a variety of programs to better meet the needs of young children and the preferences of their parents whereas the major negative aspect is the teachers' perception of increased competition for limited resources. Because the initial legislation permitting private programs was written quickly after 1989, administrative problems and inequalities, especially in funding, have arisen.

Parent Involvement

A major change since 1989 has been the formal recognition of parental rights and roles and the encouragement of options for including parents in their children's education. In general, the role of parents in the schools was virtually non-existent before 1989 (OECD, 1996). According to one eminent Czech early childhood educator, parents were not considered to be partners, "but rather as voluntary labour" who contributed to the overall operation of the facility (Misurcova, 1993, p. 12).

In one kindergarten I visited in Prague, the director began promoting parent involvement with afternoon open houses for parents. These evolved into more active parental participation. On the afternoon I observed, seven parents in one class were helping the children make Easter decorations and projects. In another classroom, five mothers were participating in an exercise class with the teacher as leader. Other kindergartens have organized clubs and hobby groups for parents.

A program I had visited the previous day had a parent program in which seven parents (5 mothers and 2 fathers) did movement activities with sticks, ribbons, wooden spoons, etc., with their children to traditional Czech folk music. This was followed by a movement "story" on the Easter theme and then games such as Duck, Duck, Goose. After this, there was approximately 20 minutes of work with the children on gymnastics equipment such as climbing bars, ramps, tumbling mats, barrels, balance beam, etc. The parents served as coaches and spotters. The children and teacher then went into a connected classroom to do Easter crafts (colouring eggs) while the parents did aerobic exercises to music under the leadership of one of the mothers. The children hid their eggs and the parents searched for them after their aerobics and before changing their clothes and leaving for home. The director said this type of program was good for maintaining informal contact with the parents, easing the children's adjustment to kindergarten, and supporting the school philosophy that "if the children are happy, parents are happy, and therefore the school is happy."

In addition to parent-teacher associations and clubs, parents can sit on local councils of education that set local policies. Now that it is possible for parents to play a greater role in the education of their children, "one of the challenges for the immediate future is to accept parents being respected and serious partners" (Cerna, 1992, p. 81).

Teacher Education

The education of kindergarten teachers in the Czech Republic has also evolved. Until 1945, kindergarten teachers (only female) were trained from the age of 16 in two- year teachers' colleges. (The teachers and ministry officials I spoke with knew of only two male kindergarten teachers currently.) After World War II, kindergarten training was moved to the universities along with other levels of teacher education. Later when there was a severe kindergarten teacher shortage, due to the rapid growth of kindergartens and the increasing numbers of mothers in the labour force, kindergarten teacher education was moved back to the colleges. Most kindergarten teachers have been trained in kindergarten teacher colleges that combine some of the high school curriculum with college in a four-year program. Some kindergarten teachers, however, do the three-year bachelor's program at the universities. There has been a trend since 1989 to require all kindergarten teachers have a bachelor's degree. The teacher educators I spoke with, while supporting the idea of up-grading and higher requirements, thought it should be a long-term goal and be developed through extensive in-service and distance learning opportunities. For their part, many teacher educators commented that more resources are needed to implement additional teacher education.

Conclusion

Rapid and radical change for a country results in "a great challenge for the educational system" (Kotasek & Svecova, 1995, p. 259). The Czech Republic has been experiencing these changes and challenges since 1989. And although the country can still be considered to be in a state of transition, early childhood education has made many important changes (e.g., more local control, more child-centered curricula, more variety of kindergarten programs, etc.). Much of the continuing change has been from the grassroots up and is continuing. A recent international review of education in the Czech Republic commented "overcoming the legacy of acquired habits and approaches is a long and slow process" (OECD, 1996, p. 76). Many educators in the Czech Republic recognize that this change may not be easy; however, they do have some advantages in making changes such as their legacy and tradition of valuing early childhood education. Although the country has faced mixed economic circumstances in recent years (e.g., low unemployment, moderate inflation, declining gross domestic product, stable funding of education, high imports, low exports, etc.), the transition to democratic, innovative, and effective programs for young children continues (Boland, 1996; King, 1997; OECD, 1996). Early childhood education in the Czech Republic is dealing with many of the economic, social, and educational conditions also facing other countries including Canada. How they respond to these conditions and challenges will be an interesting comparison with Canada. Overall, the future of kindergarten in the Czech Republic seems bright and their rich tradition of early childhood education continues.

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INSIDE CAYC

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Maxine Mercer
President, CAYC

When we embark on a new academic year, we usually take time to reflect on the accomplishments of the previous one before setting new goals. Such is the case of CAYC as well. One of CAYC's exciting activities last year was the new focus on direct projects related to children with the hopes that benefits will be realized from coast to coast. Another successful venture was the development of a fact sheet listing initiatives, as a way to equip members with the tools to assist in the national membership recruitment program. We are really pleased to have a CAYC postcard to send to new and potential members, as a reminder to those whose memberships are expiring. Also, the national conference in Winnipeg, MB in February was extremely successful in bringing together hundreds of professionals with a common concern, young children. The position statement on play in the school setting is currently underway and will be ready for distribution soon. If you are interested in technology, be sure to check CAYC's web page at ***http://www.cayc.ca*** or if you wish to send us an e-mail, you may do so at **caycmeb@direct.ca** These activities clearly indicate that CAYC's Board of Directors is endeavouring to make the Association as accessible as possible to the membership.

The primary challenge for the upcoming year will once again be membership. The Board is aware that there are many professional associations to choose from, but it is the breadth and history of CAYC that makes it attractive to so many. To ensure that as many people as possible are aware of this, there are a number of recruitment and retention strategies being developed. Members are also reminded that feedback is instrumental to the success of the Association. Be sure to let us know what you think of the journal and recommend recipients for the CAYC Friends of Children Award. The Board is in the process of developing a member survey to make feedback systems easier for you.

The Fall Board meetings are planned for November 20 - 22, 1998 in Toronto to run in conjunction with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) conference. The Annual General Meeting will be a breakfast meeting on Sunday, November 22 at the Best Western Primrose Hotel. The Board hopes that as many CAYC members as possible, who are attending the conference, will be able to join us for this important meeting. There are three National Directors positions to be filled and six Provincial including: British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, New Brunswick and Newfoundland. Please be sure to contact the director in your area with any recommendations you may have to assist the Board in setting the direction for this year. CAYC has been actively involved in the coalition of like-minded associations who have been preparing to make a Canadian presence at the NAEYC conference. The outcome has been the development of a Canadian Showcase on November 20. Be sure to visit the CAYC booth at the Canadian display area.

Information is being finalized for the CAYC 25th Anniversary Conference in Montreal in 1999. This promises to be an exciting training event and an opportunity to celebrate outstanding accomplishments in our field. We hope to see you there.

ALBERTA

Judy Wainwright
Provincial Director,

As a follow-up to the Reggio Emilia "100 Languages of Children" exhibit held in Calgary last fall, Reggio Re-visited will be held in the Nickle Museum at the University of Calgary, from October 2nd to November 14th. The exhibit will showcase the work of local educators who are using the Reggio Emilia Approach with children. This exhibit is open to the public. In addition, guided tours and on-site workshops will be offered to interested groups. CAYC Alberta will hold an evening workshop on October the 6th at the Nickle Museum on "Documenting Children's learning and Thinking."

Two door prizes of membership in CAYC were given to Nahid Erfani, a first year student in the Early Childhood Education and Development Program at Mount Royal College and Elizabeth Rivas, mentor to a second year practicum student at MRC during Student orientation Week.

SASKATCHEWAN

Mary Cronin
Provincial Director

Our Spring Seminar, Laughing and Learning with Children, celebrated the role of humour and enjoyment in the lives of children, parents and teachers. We spent a truly joyous day with the two presenters: children's author and performer, Donna Caruso; and Jenny Chapman, former CAYC Provincial Director for British Columbia, who effortlessly transforms everyday objects and setting into play environments.

This Fall, we are planning two major events. The first is our annual coffee party where we get an opportunity to meet our members and others interested in the welfare of young children in a relaxed setting. Our second event is a presentation given by the Saskatchewan Deputy Minister of Social Services on the Saskatchewan Action Plan for Children and the Income Supplement. This public forum, sponsored by CAYC, marks an important juncture in CAYC Saskatchewan's commitment to become more visible on behalf of poor children.

BRITISH COLUMBIA & YUKON

Larry Railton
Provincial Director

Greetings from British Columiba. This year has been a busy year for myself as well as People like Jenny Chapman who just returned from Good Stuff in Roseville California. Jenny, as always, full of energy presents at Bev Boss conferences and always seems to come away with more ideas for Children's Environments. I think her and Bev sit up nights thinking up schemes and dreams of what children should be doing. Carry on Jenny your'e doing a great job.This year we will once again have our retreat at Thetis Island, as always it promises to be a great weekend. This year Pauline Wenn is coming to talk to us about story telling, what you need to know and how you can present it to children and families. I hear that Rehka Naik is going to Pacific Oaks College to further her education in a Masters Programme. Bravo, keep up the good work. Vera Goodman presented her workshop for members of CAYC in Burnaby earlier this year. We had a great turnout with a mix of teacher's, school aged and Early Childhood. Thank you for coming out and supporting our day and thank you for the Burnaby New Westminster Child Care Resource and Referral for co sponsoring this day.

Recently CAYC has put a web page on the Internet you can view this at http://www.cayc.ca We have also a new way of doing business. How about using your visa card to purchase a new membership? Check out the Internet it will tell you how to do this. For forty dollars a year that's $3.33 a month maybe a membership for a friend would be a nice Birthday Present.

I am looking forward to going to Nova Scotia in October to present at the Charting New Courses Conference in Truro. The Maritime Provinces are beautiful in the summer, so I am looking forward to seeing them in the Fall.

I would like to thank all the members that give support to CAYC and thank you for the meaningful connections that this movement has given me. As always, I believe that CAYC is a great way to connect our Country. Please use the email to connect with your provincial directors and let them know what we can do for you to further support your activities in your communities.

NEWFOUNDLAND

Wayne Eastman
Provincial Director

Greetings from the east coast! The past number of months can be truly termed the 'dawning of a new educational era' for this province. Even though there is a pending court challenge, this coming June will mark the transition from a denominational to a public system of education in our secondary schools. This poses challenges for future endeavors. A further initiative of note is the proposed new Child Care Act. This act is expected to include the licensing of group child care for children under the age of two years and the licensing of family home child care.

Plans are in the works for CAYC Newfoundland to host, a one day workshop entitled 'emergent literacy.' It is proposed that this event will be a collaborative effort between educators and parents. Look for more details in the upcoming weeks.

One of the challenges undertaken by CAYC Newfoundland was to better articulate the values, philosophy, and contributions of this organization. With this in mind, displays were set-up as well as talks given at several provincial conferences - for example, the Association of Early Childhood Educators Newfoundland and Labrador and Family Resource Centers.

Members are encouraged to contact me germane to any concerns they feel need addressing. You can reach me electronically or by mail. My e-mail address is

weastman@northatlantic.nf.ca

NOVA SCOTIA
Elnor Thompson
Provincial Director

Our CAYC members in the Truro area have been very busy getting the upcoming provincial CAYC Conference "fine-tuned"! We are all looking forward to a busy, informative two days, October 23 and 24 at the Conference.

We are pleased to be able to offer child-care for a limited number of children during the workshops of the conference and we will make every attempt to have care givers available at other times on request. A small fee will be charged.

It is good to know that Larry Railton, our BC Director, is conducting one of our workshops.

From this conference we will be receiving a number of new members for CAYC from those attending the Conference, and we will do our best to promote our aims and our ways of implementing them.

I will be pleased to hear from our members (old and new!) of any concerns or questions they have re CAYC, which I will do my best to address

NEW BRUNSWICK
Mollie Fry
Provincial Director

In New Brunswick CAYC has created and is circulating an exhibition of photos contributed by teachers. They demonstrate children learning through play in the school setting. The exhibition was engendered by concern over revision to the kindergarten curricular - "to bring it into line with other school curricular material" - and which it was feared could erode the Early Childhood focus of the document. Currently the photos can be seen at the York Regional library in Fredericton, and will move to other sites in the province including schools. Librarians say it has attracted public attention, and a notebook for comment has indicated interest in the CAYC which is encouraging.

We have initiated a story-telling/reading session in a Community Center on the north side of Fredericton. It has crawled through summer - undoubtedly and rightly, children are swimming and playing outdoors - but it will continue through fall. Its aim is to interest children in stories, and offer them help with reading through informal work and phonic interaction during the session.

The Early Childhood Center, in partnership with Literacy N.B. Inc., N. B. Health and Community Services, the Dept. of Education, and the Fredericton Family Resource Center, has run a training program for Family Resource and Early Intervention staff at U. N. B. As Provincial Director for CAYC - and as a kid-lover - I attended part of it as a volunteer assistant and enjoyed and applauded the program. It involved parents with their children, and a valuable component was the development of training materials for Early Intervention and Family Resource centers. A summation of the experience and development of training materials is being produced, and is expected in March 1999.

MANITOBA
Margaret Smith
Provincial Director

The period of time since our Conference has been filled with attempting to tie up loose ends, contact new members who joined through the conference "window", and turning to plans for our Fall Program.

Several ideas came out of the conference evaluations that gave some direction for the Fall, we think. One idea was that a great number of Early Childhood Educators, whether they be in the school system or in the child care centre field, are having to deal with children who have behavioural difficulties. Those who work with them are tired and really searching for answers in working with them. Three of our workshops this Fall will be attempting to address this need. We also will be addressing requests for workshops in Art, Math manipulatives and problem solving and Integrated programming and Assessment. In order for teachers and early childhood educators to take advantage of more than one of these workshops, we will be offering each workshop on two separate occasions. It is hoped that participants will find this format beneficial.

We also plan to continue the Bookbags for Moms program at the request of several places where we offered the program last year.

Several members from Manitoba have expressed interest in the NAEYC Conference in Toronto, in November. Besides those of us who will attend it, Anne Grewar and Debbie Campbell Briscoe, who presented at the February CAYC National Conference will be presenting at NAEYC Conference as well. We wish them success.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Regular Membership $40
Association Membership $75
Student Membership $25

CAYC is a non profit organization
A receipt will be issued with membership card

Please print your name and address and mail to
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Phone/FAX 604 984 2361
Please make cheques and money orders payable to CAYC

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CONTRIBUTORS Cont

Anne Gillain Maufette has been teaching at the Université du Québec à Hull for the last ten years.She has been involved for the last three years in a National Study of the Safety of Child Care Centres in Canada, with a Focus on Play Spaces. Before that, she taught at the college level in early childhood education for 5 years (Collège de l'Outaouais). In between these two, she did some programming for the Children's Museum in Hull and research for an exhibit on children in the world for the Museum of Civilization in Quebec. Her first experiences with child care (in the 70's!) was as coordinator and teacher (for ten years) at a centre in Port Cartier on the North Shore. She studied (in the 60's!) at the Université de Montréal at the faculty of Physical Education and worked in a children's hospital and then in elementary schools for several years before specializing in preschool children: her own and those of others. She did a Master's degree with the late and sorely missed Dr. Steen B. Esbensen at the UQAH. In short: a life with children, for children.

: **Anne Gillain Mauffette** enseigne depuis dix ans à l'Université du Québec à Hull . Elle est impliquée depuis les trois dernières années dans une « Étude nationale sur la sécurité dans les centres de la petite enfance au Canada: regards sur les espaces de jeu ». Auparavant elle a enseigné pendant 5 ans au niveau collégial (Collège de l'Outaouais) en Techniques d'éducation en services de garde et fait sa maîtrise à l'UQAH avec le regretté Steen B. Esbensen. Entre ces deux expériences, elle a travaillé à l'élaboration de programmes pour le Musée des enfants à Hull ainsi qu'à la recherche pour l'exposition Trois pays dans une Valise du Musée de la Civilisation à Québec. Elle vécut ses premières expériences au préscolaire comme coordonnatrice (pendant 10 ans) d'un service de garde à Port Cartier sur la côte nord (dans les années 70 !). Elle avait étudié à l'université de Montréal (dans les années 60 !) au département des sciences de l'éducation physique et a oeuvré en milieu hospitalier puis dans des écoles élémentaires avant de se spécialiser dans l' éducation des enfants d'âge préscolaire : les siens et ceux des autres. En résumé : une vie avec et pour les enfants.

June Meyer (M.Ed.UBC) retired from the University College of the Fraser Valley in 1997. She recently conducted an early childhood education course for the Lower Post First Nation in Northern B.C.

Dr Gretchen Reynolds is full time faculty in the ECE Program at Algonquin College in Ottawa, Ontario, and teaches online courses in the distance learning program at Pacific Oaks College in Pasadena, CA. Gretchen is a co-author, with Elizabeth Jones, of two books published by Teachers College Press, *The Play's the Thing: Teachers Roles in Children's Play* (1992), and *Master Players: Learning from Children at Play* (1997). Gretchen has a Ph.D. in education from Claremont Graduate University in Claremont, CA., and a Master of Science in Education from Bank Street College in New York City.

Dr. Ji-Sook Yeom obtained her Ph.D. in Early Childhood Education from the University of Alberta. Upon completion of her program, she returned to Korea where she now resides. She is currently a sessional lecturer at Chung-Ang University.

Unseen Partners: Parents' and Caregivers' Perceptions of Children's Transitions From Kindergarten To Grade One

Karyn Cooper and Ji- Sook Yeom

(Parent's reflection on her child's first day in Grade One)

Even though months have passed, I remember my son's first day of Grade One as if it were only yesterday. It was a golden autumn day and, as I walked Matthew to school, I remember thinking about all the preparations that had gone into trying to ensure that my son would have a successful experience in Grade One.

Since Matthew had mixed feelings about leaving his old Kindergarten teacher behind and starting a new school career as a Grade Oner, both my husband and I had tried to answer positively all of his questions regarding what this new experience would be like. Many of Matthew's questions, perhaps not surprisingly, focused on who his new teacher would be: Would she be nice? Would she let him play with his friends and share his snack with them the way his old Kindergarten teacher had? Would she give hugs sometimes and not be mean all the time? (Apparently he had already heard stories about mean teachers.) Would she help him if the work was hard to do? Now, as I walked my son to school that first day of Grade One, my mind turned back to what lay at the heart of his questions. I wondered, would this new teacher care about him both emotionally and academically? Would this be a good start to his official academic career? Would he begin to hate school the way my husband had because he had a mean Grade One teacher?

Not five minutes later, as many children and their parents collected around that Grade One classroom, I saw similar questions reflected on the faces of many of these parents. It would be a long day for many of us.

Introduction

Making the transition from Kindergarten to Grade One is not easy for many young children (Kelly & Kelly, 1985; Mangione, 1992; Yeom, 1996) and their parents. It often involves many new experiences. These new experiences may include adjusting to a new and unfamiliar environment, as well as meeting new teachers, making new friends, and learning new routines (Jiwa & Brophy, 1996). In addition, children are expected to gain new academic skills and to adapt to the expectations of teachers, parents, and new school rules. When children experience a lack of continuity between programs, the positive effects of the previous program may be diminished (Mangione, 1992; Velazquez, 1992). A successful transition program needs to provide continuity and ensure the involvement of family (Jang & Mangione, 1994).

Several researchers (Velazquez, 1992; Kakvoulis, 1994; Mangione, 1992; Yeom, 1996) concerned with understanding children's transition experiences from one year to another indicate that parent, caregiver and family support at home and at school help children make a positive adjustment. According to documents developed by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services (1990) for early childhood teachers and administrators, one of the main recommendations for easing children's transition between preprimary and primary programs is the involvement of parents in the transition period. Although researchers (Rockwell, Andre & Hawley, 1996; Shimoni and Baxter, 1996) point to the need for early childhood programs to communicate with parents, caregivers, and families, very little is yet documented about how parents and caregivers perceive and shape their roles in the transition process. In fact, in the majority of literature on children's transitions from Kindergarten to Grade One, the parents' perspectives are conspicuously absent.

Research Purposes

The purpose of this study, then, was to shed light on parents' and caregivers' perspectives of their children's experiences as they make the transition from Kindergarten to Grade One.

The study responded to one main research question:

* How do parents and caregivers perceive their children's transitions from Kindergarten to Grade One?

The main research question was guided by four subsidiary questions:

* What are parents' and caregivers' expectations of school, of their children, and of themselves during the transition?

* How do parents and caregivers perceive their roles during their children's transition?

* How do parents and caregivers perceive their roles during their children's transition?

* How transparent is the culture of the school to parents and caregivers of new students?

* What strategies do parents and caregivers of new students use to involve themselves in their children's education?

Research Methodology

The research was conducted over a 14 month period (November, 1996 to March, 1998) and involved two researchers working collaboratively across two research phases. Researchers conducted interviews using narrative inquiry methods (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995). Narrative inquiry is a particular form of qualitative research within education which portrays human experience. The emphasis in narrative inquiry is on understanding human experience through examining and interpreting the details of everyday lives. In this study, the focus is on parents' and caregivers' experiences of their children's transitions from Kindergarten to Grade One.

Pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Even though the sample for both phases of the study was small, participants were selected with a view to include a variety of experiences. Thus race, sexual orientation and marital status were all taken into consideration during the selection process. For this reason, participants are referred to as "parents and caregivers", acknowledging the range of social structures which support children. Narratives describing parents' and caregivers' perceptions of their children's transitions formed the basis for the research findings. Narratives were examined for common underlying themes as well as for the diversity of perspectives expressed across the participant group.

In Phase 1, Yeom met with 4 families (1 single parent mother, 2 heterosexual couples and 1 same-sexed couple) whose oldest children were making a transition from Kindergarten to Grade One. Conversations and open-ended interviews were conducted in participants' homes. Participating parents and caregivers were asked to give their perceptions concerning: their expectations of school, their children, and themselves; their perceptions of their roles as parents and caregivers; their ways of helping their children; and their perceptions of their children's readiness and adjustment during the transition.

In Phase 2, Cooper met with 6 families (3 single parent mothers, 2 heterosexual couples and 1 same-sexed couple) whose children were also making a transition from Kindergarten to Grade One. Participants were asked to talk about the transition experience, focusing on the degree of match or mismatch between the family's lived experience and the exigencies of school culture. Parents and caregivers were asked to provide specific examples of situations which were helpful or comfortable and of situations which created conflict for them. The researcher, in turn, looked for ways to provide participants with insights regarding the nature of school culture and how to impact it. It was an explicit goal of Phase 2 to explore, in conversation with participants, the nature of parent/school encounters.

The two researchers met to develop a holistic understanding of the complete findings, seeking to discover threads connecting expectations reported by parents and caregivers, and consequent patterns of actions and understandings. Individual reports were mapped out to facilitate the identification of themes and commonalities, as well as to enable researchers to locate points requiring clarification. Follow-up with participants was conducted to extend understanding of the space which connects/ separates parents and caregivers and schools.

Interpreting the Findings:

Recognizing Unseen Partners: Perhaps, as the parent reflection which began this paper implies, sending one's child off to school is not an easy adjustment for parents and caregivers to make. According to the participants in this study, it is an experience fraught with mixed feelings and no small amount of fear. There is anxiety about change and the inevitability of surrendering one's child to a system which suddenly becomes much more impersonal and bureaucratic than it has ever seemed before. Hence the feeling expressed in the parent reflection that "it will be a long day for many of us", as parents wait anxiously, hoping that their child will be welcomed into a nurturing school environment, an environment which will promote the development of a whole and healthy person.

Betty, another parent in the study, sheds further light on the transition experience. She also expresses concern about putting her child into a system that, as she puts it, "is not always to be trusted," She said:

"It was hard enough to let go of my baby in Kindergarten but then safe Kindergarten turned out to be a

zone. The Kindergarten teacher seemed to be in tune with my child with less focus on the demands of the curriculum and school policies. The Grade One experience looked daunting as I peeked through the Grade One classroom window. The desks were all in straight rows, faces forward, desks forward ... The teacher seemed so big and the children seemed so small and I felt anxious just knowing my child would be in school for full days."

Perhaps this vignette gets to the heart of the matter. While parents and caregivers all hoped that both Kindergarten and Grade One would provide a nurturing environment, they were anxious about how to prepare and protect their children in a system which so many of them saw as curriculum driven.

In fact, we found that most participants expressed a feeling that things changed during their children's transition period. While they used to enjoy having fun with their children, they now felt pressure to develop more structured routines for ensuring that children completed curricular requirements. There is an important subtext to parents' and caregivers' experiences of the transition from Kindergarten to Grade One which runs throughout this study. The curriculum orientation of the Grade One program introduces the rudiments of a more content-based education. Some parents and caregivers, who expected their child's education to be child-centered and less curriculum-driven, experienced difficulties adjusting to this shift. Other parents and caregivers, more inclined to defer to the school's authority to maximize their child's chances for success, expressed more confidence in their communication with educators.

Beginning a School Career on the Right Foot:

Perhaps because Grade One symbolizes the beginning of the child's official school career, the change from Kindergarten to Grade One is a difficult time for parents. Will spoke about this change and its meaning.

"Even though our child did well both academically and socially in Kindergarten, we were worried about the more formal curriculum of Grade One. There is this feeling that we have to get it all together... and it was true, Grade One didn't have the same play element to it, not this open concept to it, like in Kindergarten, and I thought 'Oh my God, what is going on in there and why can't we just go in?"

Will's apprehension about the change perceived in his role was shared by other parents and caregivers. Bianca echoed his feelings, stating that Kindergarten started out to be a really positive experience because she felt a part of her child's education. She had the sense that she was working together with the Kindergarten teacher. She felt things changed in Grade One as she expressed in the following quotation:

"Kindergarten was a time when the teacher took over the role I was doing as a parent. Because I felt part of my child's education, it was less difficult for me to let go. Grade One is hard because your role is lessened as a parent. It is a feeling that from now on the school owns them [children] and school runs education and at the same time they say you are welcome but welcome seems to mean you do errands but not be part of your child's education."

For many parents and caregivers, the perceived shift from participant in their child's education to that of program assistant contributes to a growing sense of distance from education. This shift comes at a time when parents are being asked, more than ever before, for active involvement in their children's education. Thus, there is a tension between the expectations of the school for parental involvement and the parental experience of increasing distance from meaningful involvement. The parents and caregivers in this study speak to this very notion. Bianca talked about her role in this way:

"My role is just to be there, to support her and encourage her. To give unconditional acceptance, for example, when she's all of a sudden in an environment where she may have to redo something or she may not understand something right away, I can support her. I know my child. When she's at home, she's in a warm and loving environment. I guess I see that as my main role, just to be there for my child."

While Bianca understands her role as a parent as that of supporter of her child, Betty sees her role as that of advocate:

"It's not just up to the school system to be able to help him get through his whole education. I think it's very vital for parents to participate as much as they can, even to the point of being co-decision makers in such areas as school policy."

Monica, like Bianca, sees her role as a passive one in comparison with Betty's expectations. She describes her role this way:

"I think my role as a parent is to build his confidence and his self esteem so that he can learn and, at the same time, really enjoy things. I

like to be invited to open house night at school and to school concerts and seasonal events."

Tammy, on the other hand, sees her role as more direct. She said:

"I feel more responsible for making sure the teacher sends homework home, that it's done."

Bianca agrees with Tammy and observes:

"Now my role is more structured in that I have things I have to remember to work with her on like organizing her things. I'm getting her work done."

Regarding the need for parent involvement, Judy, another parent, said:

"Opportunities such as visits to the school may be particularly helpful for those parents who feel anxious about their role. It made all the difference in the world to be able to visit the school and talk about what may be expected for both my child and I."

While parents perceive their roles in a variety of ways, parents in this study generally expressed that it would have been helpful for them if they were given some information about the school's expectations for them, so they would be able to support and help the teacher in a consistent and appropriate manner during the transition period.

Parents as Partners in Education

While there may be individual differences in the ways the parents perceived their roles during their children's transition from Kindergarten to Grade One, all parents in the study stressed the importance of being supportive and actively involved with their children during that time. Yet what does support for education mean to parents and caregivers and what forms does it take? Lisa observed:

"It seems to me that support is a two-sided issue. I think that both parents and teachers need to support one another in the education of children, but in many ways past interactions between teachers and parents need to be understood. For example, in my time, parents and teachers only met during a crisis situation. For many of us [parents] we remember only hearing from teachers when we were in trouble as students. Teachers and principals held the power. Now times are changing, perhaps partially because parents are key players in community support for school funding ... parents are called upon to be "partners" in their child's education, (to be involved) but what does that mean?"

Lisa's comments offer a view that partnerships between parents, caregivers, and school professionals need to be understood both holistically and locally, that is, with greater attention to both the parents' experiences of being involved in the school and the school's ways of involving parents.

Research conversations showed that potential for conflict may arise if parents/caregivers and teachers have differing understandings of each other's roles. Such conflict may have a negative impact on children, especially in the early years. Judy, for example, thought that the teacher perceived her role to be only that of clerical helper. The only assistance she was asked for was to prepare classroom materials. She was never asked how she could help in the classroom. She made the observation that:

While the school calls on parents to be actively involved in their children's education, the truth seems to be that the role of the parent is often prescribed by the school.

For Judy, attempts to become involved in her child's education led to disappointment. The energy and imagination she hoped to bring to the partnership was, for the most part, unacknowledged by the school.

Judy would have been more comfortable if she were given room to negotiate her role as an education partner. Making room for parents and their views is not always easy for teachers, given the variety of different expectations. Yet, according to many of the participants, it would have been helpful to the transition process if they had been given the opportunity to discuss and plan with teachers how they could best help in the program.

If partnerships are to be forged in education, attention needs to be given to how to engage with parents and caregivers. Current tools to encourage partnership, such as needs surveys in multiple choice formats, appear to do little to capture parents' and caregivers' concerns. According to several participants in this study, typical checklist-type needs assessments are perceived as superficial and their outcomes are seldom, if ever, reported back to the community by the school. Research conversations with parents and caregivers revealed that many parents felt unwelcome in their child's school and that their involvement was token.

The Culture of the School

While all parents and caregivers in this study expressed mixed feelings about their children entering Grade One, many seemed more concerned with understanding the school culture and establishing a working relationship with their child's teacher than with feelings about their own roles. This group of parents and caregivers expressed an expectation and hope that school would provide a nurturing environment for their children. They had fewer problems accepting changes within the school program, possibly because their children had participated in school-like structures such as daycare prior to Kindergarten and Grade One. These families were used to routines common at school: work schedules, clean-up routines, time management. Many of these same parents and caregivers, however, also felt overburdened by issues in their daily lives: many of them were single parents or parents struggling to learn English. Yet, awareness of how to include this growing population within the group of parents and caregivers is critically important if schools are to respond to the needs of students, their parents and caregivers during the early school transition years.

How does parental experience affect school performance? Monica and her partner Bev, two same-sexed parents, felt it was particularly important to establish a good relationship with their child's teacher. They also felt, however, that they were discriminated against by their son's Kindergarten teacher because they were lesbians. As a result, Kindergarten had been difficult because they often felt rejected by the teacher. They also felt that their child had been made to feel unwelcome at school because of his family situation. Monica said:

"We now know how a teacher's judgment or bias can affect the future of your child. Our son often did not want to go to Kindergarten because he sensed that his teacher did not approve of his family. Naturally we were relieved that his Grade One teacher did not discriminate against us for being lesbians."

Monica's and Bev's experience suggests that teachers need to be aware of their own beliefs and how they might affect relationships with children, parents and caregivers, especially during critical periods such as the transition from Kindergarten to Grade One. Such stories also underscore the importance of teachers' awareness and acceptance of the diversity of experience within the school community.

Escaping from Stereotypes of the Family

Many parents and caregivers expressed frustration regarding the school's expectations of them. Research conversations produced unforeseen outcomes when some of the parents and caregivers began to articulate their increased awareness of school structures and to question the lack of responsiveness to their information needs and lifestyles. For example, Julian, a single mother, noted that her child's neighborhood school was still "operating under the assumption that families consist of a mother (stay at home) and father who works." She noted that there are few nuclear families in her neighborhood. The problem for Julian and many of the families in her neighborhood is that the staff at her child's school does not seem to engage with the reality of the families of their students. The result is that not only is there a mismatch between school expectations and structure and the lived reality of the families in the community, but parents and caregivers often feel guilty about not being able to meet the expectations placed upon them. Julian said:

"I only just began to realise that I can no longer feel guilty for not being able to volunteer in my child's classroom. Many of the moms I know are in the same boat. We cannot ask for time off from work to volunteer or be at school activities during the day. I guess we should say something. Most days I am just trying to survive."

Others, who came to the research with a more complete understanding of how school worked, also expressed frustration about the mismatch between those structures and the lived realities of families in the community. Will said:

"I actually feel kind of sad for those parents who are not able to co-educate their children. You have to be so aware of how schools work, and of course, it is different from school to school but teachers are also often stuck in a system which often has little regard for individual families and their needs. Look at the new evaluation policy and all this talk about excellence. It seems to me that it is easy to pat ourselves on the back and say 'look at how well our school is doing in our neighborhood.' But what about those kids who are functioning significantly below grade level and a teacher/parent who works hard to help those kids. It is easy to teach somebody who is at grade level but harder to teach children who struggle. Still I think my wife and I try to use good communication skills for working with the school. Maybe that's key."

Perhaps Will is right. Good communication between home and

school may be key in not only ensuring that children are successful in the transition between Kindergarten and Grade One but that parents and educators work as partners in all school endeavors. Certainly many parents and caregivers in this study were interested in talking about strategies for more effective involvement in their children's education.

Strategies for Effective Parent - School Involvement

As noted earlier, the participants in this study were apprehensive about sending their children to Grade One. Some participants reacted to this apprehension by trying to establish effective strategies for involving themselves in their child's education in a positive manner while other participants were more passive in their involvement, often waiting for the school to direct them. Regardless of their level of involvement in education, parents and caregivers in this study offered a variety of strategies for increasing that involvement and their feeling of participation in their children's education. Four strategies were offered by the parents.

1. Establishing effective home and school communication. It was of particular importance, for participants in this study, to learn what their child's teacher was like. Although this expectation was not always strongly expressed, it seemed one which parents and caregivers felt was critical to a smooth transition. When this expectation was not recognized by teachers and schools, the result was that many parents depended on information from more assertive friends. They did do so because they worried about the treatment of their child on the part of the teacher, a stranger. For example, Jan said:

"We actually had heard a lot about her [the grade one teacher] from Catherine. We asked a lot about the teacher. What she was and that sort of thing but we didn't have the chance to meet her. That would have been extremely helpful. The main thing is she sounded like a fair and caring teacher. We feel a little better."

Tammy observed that:

"We have friends who have been through the Grade One experience and I think informally we got a lot of information in terms of learning about the days getting longer, and children becoming more tired, and Grade One being more serious, but we did not really hear any of that from the school."

Parents in the study expressed the view that it would have been helpful to meet the Grade One teacher prior to the commencement of the school year rather than relying on second hand information about the teacher from other parents. Furthermore, when school routines and procedures were not fully understood by parents, they often expressed feelings of anxiety and frustration because they did not know precisely what was going to happen in Grade One.

2. Creating a place for parents and caregivers within the school. While Julian felt that her child's school needed to communicate routines, policies and descriptions of curriculum to parents of children in Kindergarten and Grade One, she felt it was even more critical that parents first felt welcome in the school:

"The biggest thing that the school could do is provide an environment where the parents feel welcome. If they feel welcome they will also find ways of talking to the principal and Grade One teacher maybe even saying things like, I am really worried about my child's transition. What do you think I should do about it? How can I handle this? I would want to feel that I was welcome to come in and talk to the teacher. So if there are some kind of posters, or bulletin boards saying - Do you have questions about Grade One? Come and speak to a teacher - it would have been really helpful."

Perhaps communication begins with understanding the variety of parents' and children's perspectives. This is no small task given the diversity and complexity of feelings that parents may have about schools and teachers. Yet this study illustrates that the experience of letting one's children go to school, particularly in the early years, is full of mixed emotions including apprehension and fear. Educators may be able to make the transition period between Kindergarten and Grade 1 easier by recognising parents' feelings and acting in ways that make them feel welcome. Perhaps, as Julian suggests, when parents feel welcomed in, and familiar with, their children's school, anxiety may be minimized.

However, even when parents in this study did not feel welcome or comfortable with their child's school, many of them found strategies for coping with feelings of anxiety. For example, Julian was disappointed when her child's school did not organize a parent orientation night for parents of Grade One children. She arranged to meet with both the Kindergarten and Grade One teachers on her own and to visit the

Grade One classroom. In addition, she met with the school principal to express her concern that there was no information night for parents of Grade One children. The outcome was positive. The school now has a parent orientation evening for parents of Kindergarten and Grade One children. Julian felt she had taken a risk in talking to the teachers and principal about her concerns but the outcome was positive. She suggested that risk-taking is an important part of the communication process. Julian felt most comfortable taking risks in communicating her concerns, opinions, and expectations to school personnel.

3. Encouraging risk taking. Other parents considered risk-taking to be an important strategy for openly and clearly expressing their concerns. Cara, another single parent, began to notice that the children's literature in her child's Grade One classroom did not reflect the lived reality of her single parent family life. She decided to risk speaking to the Grade One teacher about her feelings.

"It took me awhile to decide how to approach the situation. I had read my son many great books from the public library which included stories about single moms and dads and their family situations. I thought that I would ask the teacher to read one of these books to the kids in my son's class. Not only would our life style be honored in the classroom but so would the lives of many other single parent families."

Fortunately for Cara, the Grade One teacher was not only enthusiastic about reading the book Cara recommended, she was also apologetic because Cara made her realise the importance of including children's literature which reflects the experience of all individuals in her classroom.

For both Julian and Cara taking risks resulted in a positive outcome. However, not all educators are comfortable with listening to parent concerns or suggestions. Furthermore, not all parent requests will be reasonable to educators. Yet, many parents in this study expressed the view that assertiveness and personal initiative, often in the form of risk-taking, were necessary for effecting change in the school.

4. Acknowledging and voicing support. Jana, another parent, felt that supportive communication is a strategy which is important to consider when speaking to teachers. Jana said that she believes that everyone wants to feel supported. She appreciates the way her daughter's Grade One teacher seems to have positive things to say about her child. Jana said she could easily support this teacher because she felt the teacher really cares and makes her want to trust and talk openly. Tara, Jana's daughter, was having nightmares about not being able to spell color words in Grade One. Jana described being able to talk with her teacher:

"It was a great relief to feel like I could speak openly with my child's Grade One teacher. Recently, I talked to the teacher and told her that my daughter, Tara, was having nightmares about learning to spell color words. I said, "I think she feels that she has to learn how to spell them." So Traci [the teacher] said, "Oh Tara, don't worry. All we're learning is what the colors are. You already know this. Don't worry about this." Traci also talked to her, and asked her: "Are you feeling worried about something?" "Are you feeling upset?" "Is there anything I can do?" I think that the big change now is that Traci tells Tara and the other children what they are learning about and exactly what her learning expectations are for them. It has really reduced the tension for Tara and maybe for some of the other children too. I would not have been able to speak to Traci if I didn't feel comfortable with her. Support is a two-way communication tool."

Perhaps Jana, more than other parents in this study, considered the importance of using words of encouragement when communicating with teachers. Her story also shows the importance of the reciprocal process of supportive communication and its potential benefit to parents, teachers and children.

Reflecting on the Possibilities of Partnerships

The many concrete strategies offered by the participants in this study suggest that parents, no matter what their background, have much to offer to schools as partners in their children's education. The experiences of parents reflect differing awarenesses of how schools operate. These differing awarenesses need to be addressed and understood as they impact on the child's education. To this end, educators need to be aware of their own listening skills in communicating with parents and caregivers. What kind of questions are parents asking? What are they not asking? Do teachers listen to what parents are trying to tell them?

Parents and caregivers bring a range of life experience to their school careers. It is up to schools to find ways for parents to share their skills and express themselves within the curriculum. Recognizing the spectrum of experience among

parents also means finding ways to reach out to include parents from a variety of cultural sub-groups. It is important for schools to engage with who their parents are and what they have to say about their aspirations for their children. This may translate into such concrete change as creating a physical place within the school for parents to meet and feel welcome. If schools are to ask for parents to be partners in education, schools must provide a place for them.

Summary

The findings of this study supported Mayfield's (1983) research that parents of children undergoing the transition from Kindergarten to Grade One wanted to know more about what was expected of their children, what the children would be doing during the year and how the parents could help their children. The current study added insights into parents' perceptions of their expectations, fears and concerns.

The difficulties of learning to work together were highlighted as it became apparent that the role expectations of parents and caregivers may be quite divergent, and teachers, as extensions of the parents, are expected to deal with the whole spectrum. This can, at times, be a problem for teachers and school professionals, particularly in trying to understand parents' behaviours and motivations. Parents and caregivers who appear to be abusive or unresponsive may, in fact, be uncomfortable with the school culture or they may feel unqualified to speak about educational matters. Teachers, likewise, may be reluctant to deal with issues such as family violence or differing cultural experiences. Perhaps achieving some understanding of this dilemma means that negative stereotypes need to be overcome by both educators and parents. If parents and caregivers are to develop their roles in ways that are meaningful to them, it is up to schools to engage parents and caregivers as partners in education, acknowledging individual experience, expectations and abilities.

The participants in this study highlighted strategies that they felt were effective in establishing partnerships with schools. Clear communication between parents and teachers seems to be the most useful strategy for enhancing connections between home and school experience, to clarify potential difficulties before they arise, and to establish partnerships.

The transition from Kindergarten to Grade One is a critical time in a child's school career. Clearly, in addition to the anxiety experienced by students and their teachers, the anxiety experienced by parents and caregivers must be taken into consideration. By initiating strategies which engage and involve parents as meaningful partners at the early stages of their children's education, they can become involved as active participants in the educational process. Such involvement can only enhance and improve the school experience of all children, regardless of their family's background or composition.

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Exploring Gendered Reading in Beginning Readers: One Teacher's Queries

Ann Bishop and Marlene Asselin

Abstract

Somewhere between acknowledgment of gender differences in reading abilities and attempts for gender equity in our curriculum lies gendered reading. In what ways are reading attitudes and behaviors of boys and girls the same or different? How might these patterns form, and how do these patterns effect success in school reading programs? This article is based on a report of an extensive field study in gendered literacy undertaken by Ann Bishop as part of her diploma in early literacy. Marlene and Ann revised the report to highlight the background, inquiry process and educational implications of Ann's findings.

Over the past four years, I have become increasingly interested in issues concerning the development of literacy in early primary children. Most recently, I have found myself considering the role of gender in reading development, partly as a result of my course work in family literacy. I had started teaching Kindergarten eight years ago with the idealistic concept of non-sexist education, just as I had raised my own children. The phrase "Boys will be boys, " referring to either social behaviors or intellectual abilities, was unacceptable in my philosophical outlook. However, I learned to adjust my expectations as I began to accept that many contributing factors were beyond my control. This article describes some of the ways I explored the influence of gender on beginning readers in my own grade one classroom. I offer the story of my own learning process to other teachers of young readers to consider as they support their students' literacy development.

Background to my Inquiry

What did my teaching experience suggest?

Part of my first teaching assignment was in learning assistance and gifted education. Here, I observed that the primary-age students in learning assistance for reading were mostly boys while the students in the gifted program were fairly evenly divided between boys and girls. Over the past four years, I had noticed similar trends in my kindergarten/grade one classroom. Assessments of my current class's instructional reading level during the fall and winter seemed to reinforce this pattern. Of the ten children in the lowest reading levels in the fall, seven were boys. Five of those boys remained at the lowest levels in the winter. Other teachers shared similar observations but were unclear as to why this should be so. I was hopeful that investigating this situation would enable me to help boys be less disadvantaged as early readers.

What trends does the literature document?

A review of the research identified many aspects of reading in which boys and girls differ. Barrs (1994) points to three main differences between boys and girls as readers: girls read more than boys; girls and boys choose different reading materials; and girls are better readers than boys. Golombok and Fivush (1994) summarize research findings on gender and reading in terms of female advantage: females read earlier than do males, have fewer reading problems, and respond more easily to reading. Such differences seem to persist as the children get older:

From the earliest stages of education, girls seem to find books and reading more interesting than boys. Girls tend to learn to read more quickly with more ease and with greater success than boys. Boys read less from choice, form the majority of children with literacy problems and, later in their school career, perform less well in language-related subjects (Browne, 1996).

Girls tend to do better than boys on reading tasks, although the difference is not always statistically significant (Swann, 1992). Swann (1992) also presents two conclusions about reading behaviors of boys and girls: (1) Girls tend to enjoy reading more than boys do, although more boys than girls enjoy reading non-fiction, and (2) Girls are inclined to choose reading as an activity more often than boys.

What explanations have been offered?

As with other areas of development, both biological and social theories explain gendered differences in reading. While social and cultural theories are newly prevalent, maturational differences need to be considered.

Inherited factors of language development, the slower maturation of boys, and biologically inherent brain differences, may result in boys having more reading problems than girls. Berninger (1994) states that while boys have a much higher incidence of reading disorders than girls, researchers have not assumed that the gene responsible for dyslexia occurs on a sex chromosome. Berninger finds that a more likely explanation is that of "major gene transmission in a

dominant or additive fashion with sex-dependent penetrance"(p.31).

Gender stereotyping may be at the bottom of cultural explanations of reading differences. For example, reading in our culture is often viewed as being an activity more suited to girls than boys because it is a quiet, introspective pursuit rather than an energetic, physical activity (Browne, 1996, p. 172). In other cultures, such as the kibbutz system of Israel, where both boys and girls consider reading to be sex-appropriate, no gender differences in reading ability are found (Gross, cited in Kelly, 1986). Brophy (1985) also points to the effects of teacher expectation in comparative reading achievement of grade one boys and girls.

It has been well documented that boys receive more attention from parents and teachers than girls, especially in elementary school (Berninger, 1994; Golombok & Fivush, 1994; Millard, 1997). Often they tend to receive more attention simply by being noisier and more active than girls in the classroom. As a result, boys' needs (social as well as reading) tend to be attended to while girls' needs tend to be overlooked. The fact that many more boys than girls are identified as learning-disabled may also reflect boys' success in gaining the teacher's attention (Boyles & Contadino, 1997).

In a large-scale study of kindergartners, no mean differences were found between boys and girls in reading achievement, but nearly twice as many boys as girls fell into the bottom ten percent of the reading achievement distribution (Vellutino et al., cited in Berninger, 1994). Gender differences in reading ability may therefore not be apparent when the mean of the distribution is examined but is revealed at the lower end of reading achievement where boys have much more trouble than girls.

Grade level appears to be a factor of children's view of reading as a gendered activity. Kelly (1986) found that kindergarten children tend to designate all reading materials as being appropriate for both boys and girls. By second grade, reading begins to be viewed as a feminine activity, although some reading genres were viewed as being more appropriate for boys than for girls (mystery books, newspapers, comics, science books). Poetry and dictionary reading were consistently viewed as being only appropriate for girls.

The dominance of storybooks within school reading material reinforces reading as a feminine activity (Swann, 1992). Weinberger (1996) found that 7-year old boys' favourite reading books at home were unlikely to be found in the classroom library. Although boys enjoy stories, they see their fathers and other role models reading information books rather than stories and their mothers reading novels. This well may have some effect on their attitude towards a school reading program that is heavily dependent on fiction. Weinberger (1996) also notes that 7-year old children are very aware of men and women having different reading preferences with mothers reading "books with roses on and dad(s) read(ing) monster books and computer books" (p.90). Browne (1996) claims that a story-based reading program may in fact not be the best for girls either. Young girls need to read, and be comfortable reading, non-fiction in order to prepare for reading for information in their later school years.

Many studies have shown that boys and girls choose different types of books to read. Langerman (1990), for example, cites Kropp and Halverson's study which found that girls preferred stories with a female character and a "feminine" activity and least preferred stories with a male character and a "masculine" activity, while the reverse was true for boys. Other studies show that boys choose more non-fiction than do girls. Childress (cited in Langerman, 1990) found that kindergarten and grade one boys showed greater flexibility in their reading choices than girls did. Thus it appears that both concept of reading and genre preference as gendered activities are less formed in early primary and therefore that this is a critical period for efforts supporting healthy development in reading.

My Classroom Inquiries into Gendered Reading

My students and our discussions

My grade one class consisted of twenty students, twelve girls and eight boys. The class was "young" with seven late autumn birthdays. Six children received extra support in reading through Learning Assistance, two children had difficulties in language processing and concept development, and one child was classified as ESL. All but two children were from two-parent, mainly middle class families. At the beginning of the year, four of the five girls I had in kindergarten the previous year were well into reading and two of the other children were also on their way. As mentioned above, students' instructional levels of reading in the fall and winter showed the prevalence of boys at the lower levels.

Two books which greatly influenced my inquiries into my reading program were *Reading the Difference* (Barrs & Pidgeon, 1994) and *Differently Literate* (Millard, 1997). I planned a series of class discussions about reading which I audiotaped and transcribed. I explained to the children that I thought the discussions would be

useful for all of us - for the children because it would help them to think about reading and for me, because I was learning what children thought about reading. The following sections highlight and summarize the children's responses to eight of our discussions about reading.

Pidgeon (1994) states that six-year olds are already building their concepts of reading and gender from what they observe at home. I structured the first class discussions around what the children's parents read at home, who reads most at home, and who reads with the child at home.

Inquiry 1: *What do your parents like to read at home*?

Boy 6: My dad reads space books and airplane books because those are his favourite things and my mom sometimes reads dictionaries.

Boy 1: My mom and dad like to read, like, magazines and chapter books and comic books. My dad looks at fishing books and my mom reads Avon books.

Boy 5: My mom likes to read chapter books.

Girl 10: My dad reads his workbooks and my mom reads the newspaper.

Girl 11: My mom and dad read newspapers.

Girl 6: My mom reads the magazines and my dad reads the newspaper.

Boy 4: My dad and mom, they read these kind of books which are cool, the fun books.

Teacher: How many people's mothers read the newspapers? (Hands up: 12 out of 18)

Teacher: How many fathers or step-fathers read the newspaper? (16 out of 18).

Teacher: Do you think that the newspaper is more for men to read than for women? Who thinks that? (5)

Teacher: Who thinks women prefer to read books rather than newspapers? (6)

The children were well aware of their parents reading at home. The parents of these children seem to read a mixture of newspapers and "chapter books". The children seemed to see nothing unusual about their fathers and mothers having different reading interests due to their gender. They found it quite normal for one mother or father to read chapter books while another mother or father read the newspaper.

Inquiry 2: *Who reads most at home and what do they read*?

Girl 8: My father. He reads newspapers and chapter books.

Girl 6: My mother. She reads newspapers and magazines.

Girl 3: My stepdad. He reads magazines, experiments, science magazines, newspapers.

Boy 4: My mom. She reads a lot of good books. Newspapers.

Girl 2: My mom. She reads mystery books.

Boy 6: My big sister. She reads textbooks, math books, her binders.

Here there seemed to be more of a pattern emerging. The children did not hesitate with their answers. It seemed clear to them who read most at home. Of the 19 children, nine selected their mothers as reading the most, six selected their fathers, three selected siblings, and one selected an aunt. Millard (1997) finds that "it is the female members of the family who are most often mentioned by both boys and girls" (p.83).

Inquiry 3: *When you are reading at home, who reads with you?*,

Overall, responses to this question showed that 15 out of the 19 children read with mothers, 12 out of the 19 read with their fathers and one read only with his brother. The large number of children who read with their fathers surprised me. Most of the research shows mothers being much more involved in their children's reading than the fathers. Most of the mothers in our class worked outside the home, so perhaps the fathers are more involved with their children than in homes where the mother is at home most of the time. Upon reflecting, I realized that at least 12 of the fathers had attended Family Reading Time, four of them regularly. Pidgeon (1994) says that "many children will go through their entire infant school [roughly equivalent to the North American primary school] experience without ever seeing an adult male reader" (p.32). The experience of the children in our classroom was obviously very different.

Inquiry 4: *What kind of books do you like reading?*

I structured two discussions to find out about children's reading preferences. First I posed the question directly and another day, I asked children to bring one of the books they had been reading during Family Reading Time to our circle. Children's responses to the direct question represented a range of fiction titles from *Frog and Toad* to *Goosebumps* and challenged the assumption of boys' preference for nonfiction. For the second discussion, I guided children to give their reasons for their selections. Children's responses to this discussion suggest three reasons for reading selection: familiarity, genre (especially humour), and challenge.

Teacher: [Girl 3], which book did you choose to read?

Girl 3: *The Biggest House*.

Teacher: Why did you choose it?

Girl 3: Because it's kind of a hard one and I already know how

to read the whole book and I like the pictures.
Teacher: Who did you start reading that book with?
Girl 3: My mom. (In Family Reading Time)
Teacher: So you've read it quite a lot of times with your mom and you really enjoy it. I noticed that when you were reading it to me today.
Girl 3: Yes, I can read it all by myself.
Teacher: [Girl 7], what are you reading?
Girl 7: *Arthur's Pet Business.*
Teacher: Why did you choose that book?
Girl 7: Because it has some hard words that I don't know.
Teacher: Can you see the hard words on the cover or did you look inside?
Girl 7: I looked inside.
Teacher: Boy 6, what are you reading?
Boy 6: *Arthur's Birthday.*
Teacher: Why are you reading that?
Boy 6: Because I've read some other Arthur books and they're really good and some of them are very funny and this one is very funny.

Inquiry 5: *Reading Survey. I conducted a reading about perceptions and attitudes towards reading. Two items addressed reading preferences. Children answered the following two questions: (1) Find your favourite book in the classroom and write its title and the author. Why do you like this book? (2) Find a book you don't like and write its title and its author. Why don't you like this book?*

Every child except two was able to find a different book which was his or her favourite book. Common strands for the girls' choices were animal themes, humour and exploring dictionaries - this last interest had recently emerged among some of the more fluent readers. Of the eleven girls, seven chose fiction and four chose non-fiction. Three of the eight boys chose books about aliens, monsters, and pirates. Five boys chose fiction and three chose non-fiction - about the same ratio as the girls. Some reasons the children identified for not liking a book could be seen as gender-typed, such as "It is boyish", "It has trucks", and "I don't like space" from girls and "It has kissing" from a boy. If the book looked too easy to read, that seemed to be a concern for both boys and girls.

Inquiry 6: *Do you think boys and girls like reading the same kind of things?*

This discussion was intended to extend the issue of reading preferences beyond the personal level. Although young children may imitate others' responses, I stress the value of individual thinking from the beginning of the year in all our school experiences.
Girl 7: I think boys and girls like to read animal books.
Boy 5: I think boys like to read soldier books, books about soldiers.
Girl 8: Boys and girls both like reading just about all kinds of books and they can both like the same books.
Boy 1: Boys don't read Barbie books. At my friend's house, he got a book from the library here and it's a scary book. He read it to me and I like it.
Girl 4: I don't think all boys like to read the same things girls do 'cos I like Barbie books and fairy books and boys don't.
Girl 6: I think boys and girls both like I Spy books.
Children: Yeah!
Boy 7: I don't think girls like reading boy books because girls don't like reading chapter books, like it has blood and history in it.
Girl 7: I think girls and boys like to read books that you can make stuff after reading them.

In this discussion, a definite difference in perception emerged between boys and girls. The girls made 13 comments stating that boys and girls liked the same books and the boys only made 3 statements indicating this. The boys made 5 statements that boys and girls would not like reading the same books and there was only 1 statement from the girls indicating this. I am not sure what this suggests. Perhaps girls enjoy reading most books and assume that boys do the same, while boys are aware there are books they would not choose to read (e.g., Barbie books). Also perhaps the boys are claiming various types of books as theirs - as being suitable for boys and not girls - like soldiers' books and "scary" books.

Inquiry 7: *Looking at the cover of the book, do you think boys and girls would want to read this book, or just boys, or just girls?*

Over the previous investigations, I had become interested in how children selected books which were new to them. Many of the children were still non-fluent readers and often could not read the title of a book. I wondered about the impact of the front cover of a book. What was it about the book cover that led children to choose a book if they had not read the book before? From my books at home, I selected some books which were not in the classroom. Since I was trying to find gender preferences, I focused on that area.
(T. shows the cover of *King of the Playground..*)
Girl 4: Oooh! That's a boys' book. It's got boys and it says: *King of the Playground* and that

seems so bossy. (Girl 4 is a fluent reader.)
Girl 7: I think boys would like it because it has boys and boys like to read books with boys on.
Boy 4: It's a boys' book - because it has two boys.
Girl 6: I think it's a girls' and boys' book because there might be a mom in it.
(T. shows the cover of *The Fire Station* by Robert Munsch. Some children know this book.)
Boy 5: It's a girls' and boys' book because it has a girl and a boy.
Girl 4: I think boys and girls would like that one because the girl is driving the truck and the boy is just going to get in.
Girl 1: No, I wouldn't choose it because it's a boys' book - it has a fire engine.
(T. shows the cover of *When the Wild Pirates go Sailing.)*
Teacher: Who thinks this is a book for boys and girls? (4 boys and 6 girls)
Who thinks this is a book just for girls? (Nobody)
Who thinks this is a book just for boys? (4 boys and 3 girls)
Teacher: Boy 4, why do you think this is a book just for boys?
Boy 4: Because it has boys on it - it has a cover with pirates on.
Boy 5: I think it's only a boys' book because it has pirates on it and a pirate thing (skull and crossbones) and a shark.
Boy 7: I voted for both girls and boys because I know some girls in this class would like it and I also like it too.
Boy 3: I voted for boys and girls because some girls like sharks and boys like sharks.

Research has shown that boys and girls choose different books due to their content. I have not come across any research on the influence of book covers on children's reading preferences. In a classroom, children will select books that they know or that they have seen other children reading but what happens when they come across a new book? My investigations suggest that the cover of a new book speaks to the worthiness of the reading experience. Children seem to perceive the presence of a boy or girl on the cover as indicative of gender interest. Animals seem to signal acceptance to both boys and girls. Later discussions with an illustrator confirmed that decisions regarding book covers are market-based aimed to appeal to purchasers (i.e., parents and grandparents in the case of young children's books). Inquiry into the relationship between children's and adults' perceptions of suitable children's books could be revealing.

Implications for Instruction

Just when we thought we had successfully addressed gender inequity, it appears the scale has tipped the other way. . . . Although it might seem shocking to some people stuck in outdated gender trenches, it could be time for affirmative action education programs for boys similar to those that encouraged girls in the maths and sciences (Todd, 1998).

I would be surprised if anyone seriously considers gender inequity to have been successfully addressed. There is much greater awareness and a corresponding attention to some areas - such as making sure there are positive, non-stereotyped images of girls and women in books and other reading materials (British Columbia Teachers' Federation, 1994; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1996). Inequities, nevertheless, still exist for both boys and girls.

With regard to reading in the early primary years, research shows that boys seem to have more against them than girls overall. Reading ability research demonstrates that fewer girls have difficulties in learning to read than do boys. The reasons for this seem to be multifarious and some factors will apply to some young children and not to others, depending on family and cultural practices as well biological factors. Teachers of early primary students should therefore examine their reading programs to ensure optimum conditions for learning to read in their classrooms - optimum conditions for both boys and girls.

I now had a wealth of new information about my class related to the issue of gendered reading. To translate those insights into practice, I turned to Browne's (1996) list of strategies to foster a gender-fair reading curriculum and selectively constructed my own applications. While some of my ideas may be relevant to other early primary teachers, I urge all teachers to learn more about their students' beliefs and behaviors related to gender and reading and revise their curriculum accordingly.

1. Ensure that the reading program and the classroom library contain a good balance of both fiction and non-fiction or information books and other reading materials.

Research has shown that while young boys are interested in reading suitable stories, they are also interested in reading information books which may or may not be available in the classroom. Reading materials about science, sports and hobbies, for example, should be available for reading, both in individual choice time and in shared and guided reading.

We are fortunate to have many books in our classroom. I was aware, however, that these books might reflect my interests rather than the children's. At the beginning of

the school year, I sent a Book Interest Inventory home with each student to be completed with a parent. Every child returned their Inventory and I used the information when purchasing new books. I learned, for example, that all the girls enjoyed reading about whales while the boys were not as interested. All the boys, on the other hand, were keen to read about spiders but only half the girls. Reviewing the inventory upon completion of my gendered reading study revealed remaining gaps in our classroom library such as sports, hobbies, magic and jokes/riddles in which nearly half of both and girls professed interest. I found a series of *Eyewitness* (Stoddart) books called *The Young Enthusiast* Series about sports and hobbies. The books look wonderful but are for older children (8 and up) and include titles on swimming, martial arts, baseball, dancing, and basketball. I have now found a smaller series published by Kids Can Press which are suitable for 4 to 8 year olds. There are only three books - on baseball, hockey, and soccer - but it is a start. I may buy one or two of the *Eyewitness* books because parents will be able to read them with the children at Family Reading Time.

2. Ensure that children read in a variety of contexts including word processing and computer programs.

The term "other reading materials" seems to refer to comics and magazines, although, computer programs should be included as well. Our classroom computer contains several reading programs which seem to appeal to the boys while the girls are more involved in the writing programs. With regard to comics and magazines, it is difficult to know what to choose. Very few children read our copies of *Chikadee* magazine unless there was something I drew their attention to - such as a photograph of penguins if we were studying penguins. Although I am wary about using materials such as comics and some magazines in the classroom, I intend to ask the children, especially the boys, for their preferences in these genres at home. I can then look at samples and see if they would be helpful in encouraging children to read.

3. Keep a record of books children read and regularly review their selections with them so as to provide a balance in their reading choices.

I already keep a record of each child's reading choices which I use to examine comparative reading choices by gender and to monitor individual choices. Informal reviews of the children's choices have been limited to suggesting a new or more challenging book. I realize now I need to also guide children towards broadening their range of genres.

4. Involve fathers, male teachers, and older boys in reading activities in the classroom.

Fathers and grandfathers are already regularly involved in our Family Reading Time which is held every day. We only have a small staff at our school, but the principal and two of the teachers are male. I will invite them into our classroom - perhaps to read or tell a story, to recommend a book, or to share something they have learned from reading. Buddy reading with boys from the higher grades would also be effective

5. Create centres that have a literary focus where reading and writing are used by both male and female workers, for example, a post office or library.

Other teachers must have more success with this than I do. I set up a centre with a particular focus, only for the children to take it over and develop it into what they would like. I decided to follow the children and introduce extending activities (such as reading and writing) into their centres, their ideas. Our writing centre was reborn as the "creative centre." Papers of all colours and weights, with lines, without lines, one-hole punches, three-hole punches, staplers, scissors, string, rubber stamps toilet rolls, paper cups, yarn, cardboard pieces, scraps of material, tissue paper, are some of stocked items. What do the children do with these materials? They make wonderful kites, incredible three-dimensional animals, boats, and airplanes. They also make cards for their families and friends, menus, report cards, party invitations, write stories for the classroom library, make surveys of class choices for pizza and what time children go to bed.

I have found extending my role as teacher as researcher enjoyable and worthwhile. I have learned much more about the interests and attitudes of my present class than those of any previous class. I have also learned a great deal about gendered behaviour which will help me not only in my reading program but in other academic and behavioural areas. I look forward to implementing my own applications of Browne's strategies for a gender-fair curriculum. I also look forward to discussions about reading with each new class to strengthen my reading program and to support students' metacognitive dimensions of reading.

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Further Reflections upon the Applications of the Reggio View in a Kindergarten Classroom

Barbara Gerst

Background Information About My Previous Reggio Inspired Work

My only son's birth in 1988 marked a significant shift in my teaching career. For the ten years prior to his birth, I had taught high school and enjoyed in-depth exploration of literary genres with my students. Their work clearly revealed that many had deepened their appreciation and knowledge of English during a given semester. I felt very satisfied as a teacher. However, I began to become interested in teaching younger children shortly after my son's birth. I started to attend local kindergarten meetings and visit various Kindergarten classrooms in the Calgary area. In 1990, I began to teach Kindergarten, eager to make a difference in young children's lives. I carefully planned ten themes a year as I had observed other teachers doing. I moved at a hurried pace in the classroom which experienced Kindergarten teachers told me was to be expected. By 1994, I had become very dissatisfied with my work in the Kindergarten classroom. I was aware that I rarely explored any topic in depth with my students; instead, I merely touched the surface of many.

In the spring of 1995, I attended a session on the preschools of Reggio Emilia and found it a wonderful inspiration. I learned that Reggio teachers explore subjects in depth with their children over a lengthy period of time. They challenge the children to explore their environments and express themselves through all their natural languages. I knew the Reggio perspective would offer me a wonderful opportunity to improve my work with young children. In the fall of 1996, I began to reflect upon my view of myself as a kindergarten teacher and my role in the classroom. I started to work with children as a collaborator. I knew that I had to let go of my previously held view of myself as a director in my environment. I became interested in helping the children deepen their understanding of whales and dolphins, our chosen area of study that fall. My new role as a collaborator allowed me to take on a variety of roles in my classroom that I had not valued before. Sometimes I was a nurturer supporting the children's growth. Other times, I became their partner in learning as we discovered a new fact about dolphins. I became a provocateur, challenging and probing the children to expand their abilities to think critically. Additionally, I began to revise my view of my students and their role in the classroom. Reggio teachers consider their students as rich, powerful and filled with potential. I realized with guilt that I had often viewed mine in terms of their deficits and needs. I began to challenge the children to use a multitude of languages to express their ideas about whales and dolphins. The children started to bring in a multitude of materials to support our study. During the four month study, I became very appreciative of young children's marvelous potential. For example, many children created detailed sketches of whales. Several fashioned whales and dolphins from clay. Some related wonderfully descriptive tales centering upon these massive mammals. My first Reggio inspired project caused me to reevaluate the role parents play in my classroom. Parents in a Reggio environment are very much a part of their children's learning; they are instrumental in helping children utilize their potential. Prior to applying the Reggio view, I had often directed parents in their work with children and filtered out possibilities for children's growth in doing so. I began to view my parent volunteers as collaborators in the whale and dolphin project. The children and I wrote a letter to parents encouraging them to share their knowledge of whales and dolphins with us. Many brought books, videos, and other materials to class and shared them with the children. Others related tales of whale and dolphin sightings. Several parents expressed their gratitude in being given a vital role in my classroom; they felt it was rewarding and exciting to help young children deepen their understanding of whales and dolphins.

Fullan reminds us that "anxiety, difficulties, and uncertainty are intrinsic to all successful change. Change involves learning, and all learning involves coming to understand and to be good at something new" (Rechild, 1997, p.4). I pondered these words as I embarked upon my third Reggio inspired project with Kindergarten children during the winter of 1998. As I reflected upon my Reggio influenced work in the classroom, I recalled my considerable struggles with implementing a view so complex. I had often debated about what direction to take the children's

ideas and what my role in the classroom should be. Time was an issue that often concerned me. Often, I was aware that my program was simply reduced to a busy sequence of events. Within two and a half hours on certain days, my class traveled to the library, the computer, and the gym. Frequently, I felt isolated as I had no colleagues who were familiar with the Reggio approach. Lella Gandini reminds us that teachers who want to begin to change their approaches must "call everything into question, a situation which to say the least, can be unsettling". (Rechild, 1997, p.6). During this third project, I wanted to continue to hold up for scrutiny all that I do when interacting with children and parents. I was very aware that this process would be disturbing. However, I knew that despite my uncertainties when applying the Reggio Approach, my work with children was becoming so much better, so much more fulfilling than it had been prior to my introduction to Reggio views.

One day in November while discussing our beautiful humpback whale watercolour painting with a few parents and their children, Thomas's geologist mother told us her favourite animals are whales and dolphins. Alison's strong interest in these mammals had obviously stimulated her son Thomas to become more knowledgeable about them. I reflected that for many weeks since the beginning of Kindergarten, Thomas had arrived at school with a whale fact to share and often a large picture book focusing upon whales and dolphins. Frequently, his enthusiasm and loud voice attracted several children who gathered about him to explore his books. When speaking to Alison one day after class, I learned that Thomas often accompanied his mother when she visited classrooms in our school division and shared her knowledge about these sea animals with elementary students.

In early December, I asked the children if they wanted to discuss whales and dolphins with Alison. The interest was certainly strong. Some children even cheered! We decided to invite her to class in early January. Many children had questions about these massive mammals and observations they wanted to share with Alison. We concluded that we should begin a study of these mammals right then, in early December.

Just before Christmas, we sent a letter to parents, as I had done last year when first I studied whales and dolphins with Kindergarten children. We asked for books, videos, pamphlets and any other materials about whales and dolphins to be loaned to our classroom during our study. My previous experience with this subject had informed me that parents in our community travel a lot and are keen to share their experiences with children. We decided to invite parents, grandparents and anyone else connected to the children to share their encounters with whales and dolphins. We said that slides and pictures would be great additions to their sharing sessions with the children.

Our letter generated a lot of interest among family members of my students. Parents and older siblings stopped by the classroom with wonderful posters and books about these sea creatures. Some parents told me they would come to class and share their knowledge of whales and dolphins in the new year. As had been the case last winter when I explored this topic with my students, many children arrived daily with toy whales and dolphins, sharks, mermaids, and a plethora of books related to our study.

During this whale and dolphin project, I decided to reflect upon and improve the ways in which I interact with children during large and small group conversations. I decided to be candid with parent volunteers, more so than I had in the past. I did not want a formal relationship with parents of my students. Rather, I wanted to view them as partners in teaching. This winter, I asked them to help me change the ways in which conversations take place in my class.

"Paley (1995) states that one essential lesson learned after teaching 37 years is 'to take very seriously the things that children say and take equally seriously the things you say to children' (p. 14)" (Hendrick, 1997, p. 160). Within the last two years, Paley's words have caused me to reflect on how I interact with young children in my room. Like Paley, Reggio Emilia preschools place a high value on conversations with children. The teacher's role is to ask open ended questions that provoke thinking and discussion among children. The teachers "...facilitate, orchestrate, and gently guide so that the conversation does not stray too far from the subject, so that every child has a chance to participate, and so that children consider the matter at hand with all their attention and interest" (Hendrick, 1997, p. 62). Thinking about Paley's words and the Reggio way of talking with children, caused me during this whale and dolphin project to reflect further upon my interactions with children during large group conversations.

One day in December, I decided to begin refining the ways in which I am involved in large group conversations in my room. Reflecting upon my previous two Reggio–inspired projects, I was aware of the many obstacles that had confronted me in this setting. I began to consider each one and try to work

around it with my aid's and parents' help.

The Reggio teachers find time during the day to carefully review conversations and plan for the next ones they will have with children. They seem to reflect a great deal about their interactions with children. I knew my hectic days with two groups of thirty children did not allow for much quiet time to reflect upon conversations. I decided to ask my aid to help me reflect each day. We began to use our twenty five minute noon hours, when possible, to discuss large class conversations and try to "read" them. I studied Cadwell's intriguing conversation with children about changing seasons and leaves found in her book, *Bringing Reggio Home* as I began to "read" my students' conversations and share ideas with my aid. I wanted to have conversations in my classroom cause children to "draw upon their experience, to hypothesize, to wonder, and to venture forth into new territory together" (Cadwell, 1997, p.65).

One day, I played a tape with humpback whale songs on it. Our parent volunteer turned off the lights and the children lay down quietly on our classroom rug. After a few minutes, I asked the children why they believed these large mammals were singing to each other. The children began to share their ideas.

Colleen: Humpback whales sing because when they are separated in a group, they get lost. They can communicate with sounds to talk to each other.

Pamela: They would actually say to each other, "Where are you?"
Pamela: He would answer, "I am in a group!"
Colleen: "I love my baby!"
Tanner: "Come here because I want to show you something!"
Colleen: "See my new calf!"
Caitlin: "Come here, I don't want to lose you!"
Pamela: "Hurry up! A boat is coming!"
Scott: "Let's stay together in a pod!"

That night, when reviewing this conversation, I thought it insignificant. However, the next day, the children asked to hear this section of the tape. The whole class listened quietly. I asked them why they wanted to hear this one again. Pamela said it was because it made the whales seem real. At noon that day when my aid and I talked about this conversation and Pamela's words, I realized that this conversation gives us an appreciation of the empathy the children feel for humpback whales. I realized that these children had given the whales human qualities; they made them act and speak as people do. "If we accept this way in which children see the world as their own special intelligence instead of thinking it is cute and/or incorrect, we have much to learn from the children we listen to". (Cadwell, 1997, p.66).

This conversation caused me to understand the need and interest my students have in giving whales human qualities. I began to support their interests by asking parents to tape their many imaginative tales. We provided a blank tape for children to do so at the listening center and in the hallway area as well.

One day as I inserted another blank tape in our tape recorder, so as to be ready to record children's stories, I realized with guilt that I had not provided as much support for children's imaginative tales last year during our whales and dolphin study. I knew I had been much more focused upon encouraging debate among my students. This winter, I was pleased to note how much richer and detailed children's large group discussions about whales and dolphins were becoming. I reflected that it may well have been my support of Pamela's small group's brief conversation about humpback whales that functioned as inspiration for many others, who began to create detailed conversations, about sperm, beluga and killer whales.

This year, I wanted to see if I could extend large group discussions beyond the few minutes I had observed were generally allocated to them at the Kindergarten level. Since beginning to teach Kindergarten, I had often heard it said that young children's short attention spans were an obstacle to a teacher who wanted a lengthy discussion to take place in her classroom. Last year I begun to move away from dull calendar discussions into richer deeper conversations about issues concerning whales and dolphins. This year, I decided to involve parents and my aid more actively in this setting. I invited them to participate during our discussions. I let parents, my aid, and the children know that I wasn't an expert about whales and dolphins. We needed to work together to investigate this area and extend our knowledge. Children often began our discussions with news articles they had brought to share, Internet information, or a picture they had drawn with a dictated story accompanying it. Parents often offered their knowledge or functioned with me as co-provocateurs in order to provoke the children to think more deeply about a particular issue. Over the winter, we spent a lot of time talking about news articles about beached whales. We wondered why whales would beach themselves and we developed many theories. Some children drew pictures of beached whales and asked parents to write down their thoughts about them. Others told tales into our tape

recorder which revealed their thoughtful views about this issue.

In January and February, parent volunteers and my aid often commented upon how long children seemed to remain interested in being part of a large group conversation. My principal, Ms. Barrington, spent some time with us during this setting and commented afterwards that she has never heard so many how and why questions surface in a Kindergarten classroom.

One serious concern I have about large group conversations is that I know not all children are equally interested or connected to what takes place during them. I was very aware that our often spirited and enthusiastic discussions did not engage all the children. How would I deal with this issue? Students like Sandra concerned me. She is a quiet child who often appeared to be distracted or just uninterested during large group storytelling or debate sessions. One day Sandra, placed a book she had made on my chair. I decided to begin our class discussion with Sandra's book. I was surprised to learn as I read it that she had created a tale about a humpback whale who was trapped by an oil slick. We had spent most of the previous day's discussion focusing upon a book that discussed this tragedy. Sandra had obviously been touched by this issue, significantly enough, said her mother, to spend all afternoon creating this book. This student made me realize that a teacher cannot always tell if all children are engaged in a discussion. It is very hard to gauge someone's involvement in a discussion. Additionally, I have come to conclude that I cannot insure that all children do connect with a given conversation. No teacher can. All I can do is try to insure that as many children as possible find such discussions stimulating venues for their questions and observations.

Another obstacle I considered as I interacted with children during large group conversations is the formality often associated with sharing ideas in North American classrooms. Hands are politely raised. Some are acknowledged. Others are not. Comments often follow each other in the order dictated by the answered hands. Therefore, class conversations are often sterile. They frequently consist of disjointed ideas rather than spontaneous linked ideas. Lynn White, a teacher from Illinois, spoke about this problem during a guided discussion in Anaheim, California, in November of 1997. She shared her observations about how the Reggio teachers interact with their students. Lynn said they teach their young Italian students to be respectful of others' ideas and extend others' thoughts in discussions by simply speaking, without first raising hands. Lynn stated that the rich detailed conversations she had heard in Reggio schools had motivated her to begin to interact with her students as the Reggio teachers do in order to deepen her students' understanding and appreciation of subjects being discussed. She mentioned it was taking her a lot of effort to encourage her students to offer ideas, listen to each other, and then reflect and comment upon what another child had said. Lynn had been trying this way of interacting with children for about a year by the time she shared her thoughts last November. She said that despite the hard work and frequent frustrations inherent in changing her way of having classroom conversations, her students' more complex thinking patterns and insightful observations were inspiring her to continue this Reggio approach.

After hearing Lynn speak, I reflected on the formality and often shallow nature of many conversations that had taken place in my classroom. Although I had begun to change my way of interacting with children in large group settings, I knew I had not encouraged children to express themselves spontaneously. I resolved to have conversations become more natural and less formal. Initially, this was a very frustrating experience. When I explained this new way of sharing ideas to the children, many decided that they could simply talk all the time and never listen to each other. The volume in the class became unreasonably loud as a result. It took a lot of time and patience to explain again and again that the children needed to listen carefully to each other and think about whether their ideas were linked to the previous ones before speaking. Many a day, I felt my attempts at having more natural conversations that led to greater contemplation of ideas had failed.

However, I did find some conversations were becoming more rich in late February, three months after I began to modify class conversations. One day, Thomas began to talk about his lion fish which his family had recently found dead in their aquarium. He explained that his mother, Alison, had frozen it to keep it intact until she could bring it to school. He told us about his poisonous fish and showed some pictures of it. Many children's interest in this creature seemed very strong. A lively conversation about this lion fish extended for twenty five minutes. After class, I asked Alison if she could bring it in soon. She was concerned that this lion fish was not linked with our whale and dolphin study and therefore may not be appropriate to bring to school; however, I assured her that the children's strong curiosity about this creature justified bringing it to class.

The next day, the lion fish arrived, safely encased in a large clear plastic container. Several children crowded around Alison and Thomas as they shared information about their particular fish and lion fish in general. This large group conversation threatened to extend into our library period. I asked the children if they wanted to continue discussing lion fish. They were very vocal in confirming they would. We simply changed the library visit to another day and this interchange of ideas and information continued for another twenty minutes or so.

Jan, a parent of another student, popped into the class during our noisy conversation about lion fish. She asked if she could stay in the background and simply observe the children. She did not want to interfere. I encouraged her instead to join our group and contribute to the conversation. Within a few minutes she was sharing details of her recent trip to the Caribbean. She had snorkeled and while doing so had seen lion fish, moray eels, and dolphins. Her stories certainly enriched our discussion and caused the children to ask many more questions about various sea animals. Jan offered to help the children set up a center wherein small groups of children could inspect Thomas' lion fish and share their books about sea life. After class, I spoke with her about the multiple roles teachers and parents have in Reggio schools. Jan was intrigued. She said she would like to try be a provocateur and encourage the children to share and extend their thoughts and questions about sea life during that morning.

Jan's enthusiasm and the strong interest the children had demonstrated during our lengthy large group discussions about lion fish and other sea creatures resulted in a lion fish center being set up. I began to experiment with the Reggio way of viewing conversations with young children. Cadwell states that Reggio teachers "use the conversation again with the same group or a different group."(Cadwell, 1997, p.71). I decided to begin to revisit previous conversations held about lion fish with the same large group and, again, at the lion fish center. I tried to extend our knowledge of lion fish by encouraging the children reflect upon what we had said about them and consider what more we could glean through new information and ideas brought up by various children. Although two children became very engaged in this process and created lion fish books, most children seemed more interested in simply looking at the lion fish or chatting to each other about it. I discovered it was very hard to encourage my students to be reflective. I believe an obstacle to this reflective process may well be that I have never before encouraged this kind of thinking among my students. I know I will have to continue to work hard to nurture this process in my students if I want them to become more analytical and reflective about their learning experiences in my classroom.

During our whale and dolphin study, I discovered that it was very difficult for me to remember to stay in the background during large group discussions. I knew I had to learn to do so for the children had to learn to debate with each other and refine their thinking skills. Cadwell states that when teachers learn to take on this role during class discussions, changes happen within the children's interactions. The conversation "begins to belong to them, they become more invested in it and they begin to learn to discuss among themselves without intervention" (Cadwell, 1997, p.70). I decided to begin to deal with this concern by removing myself from the chair in which I usually sit. I became part of the group by simply sitting on the floor with the children. I encouraged parent volunteers to do so as well and shared with them my reasons for doing so. It was a strain to refrain from intervening when children began arguing or talking loudly. I found myself speaking up more than I hoped I would. This is an area wherein I need to work a lot with my students.

Despite all the frustrations and concerns inherent in trying to implement the Reggio perspective when interacting with young children in a large group conversation, I found myself very pleased when a conversation became lengthy and detailed and seemed to engage most of the children. It was gratifying when a parent volunteer would comment upon insights she heard children revealing during these interchanges. It was wonderfully supportive to hear my principal comment positively about the engagement and enthusiasm she felt the children demonstrated during large group discussions. Most importantly, I discovered that I felt good about the increasing depth and meaningfulness that was beginning to characterize my interactions with young children.

The richness and depth of many conversations that took place during this Reggio-inspired project will inspire me to consider several ideas when having conversations with young children next year. Most importantly, I will continue to place a high value upon children's thoughts and convey interest in their words through my enthusiasm. I have become aware that meaningful conversations take place in quiet environments away from distractions. Additionally, I have discovered that placing an emphasis upon good listening skills and respect for others' ideas is crucial. I believe that reflections with parents and teachers

about types of questions that may stimulate discussion is valuable. Involving a parent as the children's memory during a conversation is important. A quick summary of the main points in a conversation helps children stay focused and interested in a topic. I have learned that tape recording conversations allows children's ideas to become alive in a classroom. This year, many children listened to taped class conversations over and over again. Some of these children brought ideas from those conversations to other discussions and deepened our involvement in whales and dolphins by doing so.

In future Reggio-inspired projects, I will continue to work upon developing more natural conversations with young children. This is very difficult to achieve, I have discovered. However, the richness of many conversations this year will continue to motivate me to move away from the formality and sterility that often define conversation in early childhood environments.

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Photograhh by Susan Evavs - Douglas College Daycare

The Power Of Voice

Vera Goodman

Voices heard by young children are the foundations on which lives are constructed.

In the first few months of life infants build a perception of the world, and their place in it, based on the voices they hear and the treatment they receive. As speech develops, children's individual voices enable them to shape their own destiny in increasingly complex ways. They impact others through speech and make sense of their world in self-talk, which is sometimes spoken aloud to an imaginary audience. This dialogue constantly reflects on both conscious and subconscious experiences: Conversations overheard; attitudes and beliefs encountered; emotions aroused; behaviours accepted or rejected; stories told and stories heard; all develop individual 'pools of knowledge' as unique as fingerprints.

The images and impressions that result from this constant flow of input are not necessarily true nor related to how things really are. Unfortunately, the brain doesn't sort for accuracy but, instead, records these perceptions and uses them as the basis for future decision-making.

The quality of the dialogue engaged in by young children and the experiences they encounter are important to learning to read. Childcare workers and teachers replace parents for a significant part of the day and have a responsibility to structure conversations and activities that broaden and deepen young children's knowledge of the world.

Reading is defined by Webster as "making sense of". Concepts, represented by words, are its building blocks. The more blocks a child accumulates before school the more quickly and easily a strong reading structure can be built. Parents, childcare workers, and pre-school teachers make their greatest contributions to literacy by providing a broad background of experience in as many areas as possible and by making a conscious effort to structure opportunities for expanding vocabulary.

Attributes needed to become an effective, mature reader have more to do with experiences stored in the learner's 'pool of knowledge' than with memorizing word lists and phonic rules. The ability to read effectively at all ages is dependent on the background of understanding the reader brings to the text. We are all illiterate in subject matter for which we have no prior knowledge, no frame of reference.

Tradition dictates that children will learn to read independently in Grade One. If they fail to do so, they are at risk of being labelled as defective or disabled and, in some cases, are forced to repeat their year.

Children, who range in age from 5 to 7 years and vary widely in many ways, are told by friends and family that they are going to learn to read in Grade One. When this does not happen quickly or they are not as good as the best of their peers, self-talk can quickly turn confidence into fear. About January of Grade One we hear some children say, "I'm dumb. I hate reading" and maybe even, "I hate school". Do they really hate reading and school? Are they dumb? No. They feel inferior because they are not reading as well as others. These self-imposed labels are based on self-talk that lacks the maturity to account for the uneven nature of human development.

Some children need more time than others to learn the language of school and to build the background experiences needed for successful performance. Who can presume to have the wisdom to set time frames for children learning to read? Do we put as much pressure on children learning to speak?

We can take a lesson from the relaxed attitude we have toward beginning speakers. What do we do? We surround them with an unrestricted variety of models; celebrate mistakes with humour; correct errors without judgement; refrain from setting time limits and never entertain a doubt that they will become talkers. Maintaining these behaviours for beginning readers is equally important.

Young children need TIME, without judgement and fear of failure, to find ways of making sense of who they are and how they fit into the world of formal eduction. What purpose is served by introducing the notion of failure to children who, like Alice, are just beginning their journey through Wonderland and are having trouble just keeping the same size for ten minutes together?

In his allegorical novel, *Haroun and The Sea of Stories,* Salman Rushdie illustrates the critical importance of story, laughter

and song to maintaining healthy self-talk. Rashid, the storyteller, lived with his wife Soraya and their son Haroun in the saddest of cities. However, they were coping well until, "The day Soraya stopped singing, in the middle of a line ... Haroun guessed there was trouble brewing. But he never suspected how much". Rashid lost his ability to tell stories and Haroun's life became a roller-coaster ride until, "his mother had begun to sing" again. Be alert for signs that children are losing their songs. Find what is causing them to be discouraged and deal with it quickly.

Voices young children hear can energize them and become 'wind beneath their wings', enabling them to soar. Or they can engender feelings of inadequacy and failure making it difficult to maintain the natural joy and ability to learn that every child is endowed with at birth. Challenge yourself. Turn the tape recorder on when interacting with children. Listen to it critically to determine what kind of energy your voice imparts.

I was born in southern Saskatchewan in the middle of the Great Depression. There was no money for books and no library. My mother tells me that (to help make ends meet) she took in a boarder. Mr. Smoke was the new high school teacher and principal of the three-room school. He had BOOKS - lots of books and TIME - lots of time. He spent many hours reading to me and teaching me to recite poetry.

The energy of his voice was not wasted on that little two-year-old. Although I have no memory of him, I like to think he was an angel who sparked my lifelong passion for reading and deep desire to learn and understand. What I absorbed from an early age has grown to an understanding of relationships that I have only recently come to fully appreciate.

Beginnings are intimately related to endings. The energy of Mr. Smoke's voice is still fuelling my practice. And there are countless others, who through both spoken and written words have comforted me in times of distress, praised me when I did something well, and taught me what I needed to take the next step. They have all been 'wind beneath my wings'.

In whatever years of service I have left, I want to share the insights and knowledge that have been given to me in the hope that I can COMFORT, PRAISE, and TEACH others so the energy can keep flowing. We strengthen each other by intermingling our voices, and with our voices we will serve the children of Canada.

Reference:

Rushdie, S. (1990). *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. Middlesex: Penguin

Lolly and the Hat Illustrated by Lorlie L. Vuori

BOOKS IN REVIEW

Lolly and the Hat

by Laural Chvojka Illustrated by Lorlie L. Vuori
Reviewed by Sally Krueger

Lolly and the Hat is a true story by Laural Chvojka who still lives on the dairy farm in Delburne Alberta where the story took place. Red Deer artist, Lorlie L Vuori, went out to the farm and painted the beautiful and realistic illustrations with enough detail that the children who live in the area can actually recognise the farm buildings.

The main character of the story is Lolly, a calf, who arrives on the farm by truck. First, she is fed milk from a pail. Then she learns to eat with the other cows, until finally she is given her own stall in the barn where she will be milked everyday. Lolly was given her name by Rocky, a toddler, who helps his dad look after the cows. One day, as Rocky walks through the barn with his straw hat on, Lolly, thinking it is something good to eat, takes a bite out of it.

Children who hear this story laugh with delight as the author humourously describes the action from Lolly's point of view. This is reinforced by the illustrations which show the hat and the little boy as Lolly would see them from her stall. The rest of the story shifts to Rocky's point of view as he is horrified by his wrecked hat. His mother takes him to a country store to choose a new one. Again the humour of the author and the illustrator work together and the children who read it are left laughing as the last page shows that the hat Rocky has picked is a hard hat. Lolly won't be able to eat this one!

Laural Chovjka has a gift for telling a funny story which also includes interesting information about milk cows. Both city and country children find the story informative. And they all love the humour. Unlike many stories where the humour is there for the adults who read to the children, this is humour which children themselves enjoy.

When the story was read to ECS or Grades 1 and 2 students the only difficulty they had was in identifying all the characters which are introduced along with Lolly on the first page of the story. Because the characters are real, perhaps Mrs. Chvojka felt she needed to mention all their names. The children found the names and the picture of the family a little confusing. It would have perhaps been a little easier to have introduced the relevant people as they appeared in the story. But after the first page, the story moves along easily and the children who hear it quickly get hooked on the character of the little calf.

The illustrations are very realistic. The human characters have their own recognizable traits, and Lolly, the calf is clearly the same cow as her brown and white markings remain exactly the same as she grows up. The beautiful countryside around Delburne, just east of Red Deer, is shown in all seasons as the cows feed in the corral near the barn in the winter and are moved out to the pasture in the summer. Lorlie Vuori lovingly depicts the old barn on the farm and the old fashioned country store with all the shelves of goods behind the counter. It is a good way for children to learn somethings about what life was like before supermarkets.

Mrs. Chvojka published the book herself. The name of Echo Hill Publishers is the name of her farm. Skytone Printing and Graphics did an excellent job of reproducing the illustrations on heavy paper with a laminated colour cover. The printing is large and easy to read. I would highly recommend this book for anyone who is reading to children. The children really enjoy the story and the book is a pleasure to read over and over again. Lolly and the Hat is available in major bookstores and from Echo Hill Publishers, P.O. Box 68, Delburne, Ab. TUM OVO.

The Party

Written and Illustrated by Barbara Reid
North Winds Press - 1997
Reviewed by June Meyer

The 1998 winner of the Amelia Frances Howard-Gibbon Illustrator's Award was - *The Party* by Barbara Reid, who also won in 1995 with her picture-story book *Gifts*. In 1987 she was runnerup with *Have You Seen Birds?* This Canadian award was established in 1971 to honour "outstanding illustrations by a Canadian...whether picture book, fiction or non fiction , in the hope that Canadian authors and illustrators would be stimulated." Certainly Barbara Reid is well-known and duly recognised for her contributions to Canadian literature so what is it about *The Party* that makes it so unique?

The authenticity of both story and illustration are fused together through a subject that is familiar to us all - the celebration of a party with all the trimmings and trivia. The delightful rhythmic text, which flows freely, is accompanied by exquisitely detailed and colourful plasticine pictures which capture the essence of what happens before, during and after the party. There are many characters in the story which is narrated through the eyes of the author as a young child. The story and illustrations recall the nostalgia of such party events.

The story begins with the preparation of getting all dressed up and groomed to go to the party, taking along the garden chairs, a cooler and a "bowl full of dip and a tin full of squares." Reid's illustrations cover a full two pages throughout the majority of the format, and the three-dimensional effect of the moulded and imprinted plasticine conveys the emotion and the acute sense of each moment in time. There is the welcoming by the adult relatives, one being Aunt Joan, whose kiss with pursed, full blown lips and accompanying embrace is impossible to avoid, "The very worst of the party." The next illustration reveals a group of children, staring, with hands on their hips at the two girls donned in spotted pink and yellow party dresses. The power of this illustration is that the perspective is from the grass level and shows the scurrying of the arriving adults' legs with the children in the background. Adults and children are from now on separated into two groups until the culmination of the celebration. At this point we have no idea why and for whom there is the party.

The action begins with Danny's idea for a game of "sharks." The children are shown leaping, running, chasing and scrambling in every direction, as lawn chairs become lifeboats, the grass is the sea and the table cloth becomes a tidal wave. Suddenly, there is a moment of dramatic change and pace when two children hide in a hedge. We now see the adults from the children's perspective in the hideout. An unsuspecting uncle becomes a sleeping dragon as the two children steal a "treasure chest" of chips!

The children are too busy to heed the call to "Come eat" and begin "spinning in circles." We experience the height of their dizziness through superimposed movements brilliantly created by time photographic exposures. When the twirling tornado subsides, we are led to the laden table covered with a smorgasbord from "devilled eggs" to "little cheese things," all realistically sculpted in plasticine and still we have no idea who is the deserving celebrant! Turn the page, and here is the answer - the party is in honour of Gran who has ninety glowing candles to extinguish. Everyone gorges an cake and in the end even the mongrel dog, who appears on every page, is flaked out...

From a neighbour's rooftop (or so it seems from the perspective in the illustration), we watch the groups of both young and old reforming into families and saying their farewells. We leave too, reflecting back on
"what a wonderful time
such a very late time
at the party."

The intimacy of the script and accompanying illustrations successfully meld the party experience together for both young children and adults. Although today's parties may vary according to culture and custom, the essence of shared delight and surprise at a party, as experienced in this children's book, is universal.

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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 know someone you would like to nominate for this award, please use the procedure and criteria below.

PROCEDURE

The submission for nomination(s) must come through a member of the board and seconded by a member of the board. Board members can receive recommendations for nominations from other persons or groups.

The nominator will be responsible to obtain approval from the nominee before submitting the name of the nominee with relative background or biographical information

The nomination(s) will come forward at a board or executive meeting from the board member assigned responsibility for the award.

This board member or an executive member will present the nomination and speak to it.

The nomination will be passed by the board and/or executive 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.

Number of awards per year may vary.

This may be:-

CRITERIA

An individual or group, regardless of age.

Has a history of commitment to the CAYC mission statement and/or aims.

Has shown an outstanding scholarly, advocate innovative and/or practical contribution to the well-being of young children.

CAYC membership not mandatory but encouraged.

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