Real-life Literacy Instruction, K-3: Handbook for Teachers

The Cultural Practices of Literacy Study
University of British Columbia

The creation of this Handbook was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada
Real-life Literacy Instruction, K-3:
A Handbook for Teachers

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Chapter One

Creating Authentic Literacy Activities for Young Readers and Writers

This Handbook offers teachers of kindergarten through grade 3 a rich resource for creating authentic literary activities for their classrooms. Authentic literacy activities are significantly related to increased reading and writing achievement, according to research. This Handbook pulls together for the first time for K-3 teachers a succinct definition of authenticity, together with concrete strategies, suggestions, and examples for how to design their own authentic literacy activities. What make this resource even more valuable are the real-life accounts of teachers who describe for others their first attempts at incorporating authentic literacy into their existing literacy instruction. These descriptions offer concrete models for those who are motivated to begin to include more authentic literacy activities in their classrooms.

Authentic Literacy Instruction

Authentic literacy is the reading and writing of real-life texts for real-life purposes in the literacy learning classroom. When children are involved in authentic literacy activity in school, they are reading or writing texts that people outside of school read and write such as recipes, greeting cards, stories, and poems. Furthermore, they are reading recipes for the purpose of preparing a food dish, writing greeting cards to send to friends or family, or reading stories to enjoy and discuss with friends. They are reading and writing real-life texts for real-life purposes in the literacy learning classroom.

The term authentic literacy must always be paired with the term instruction. This is because the definition of authentic literacy only applies to the type of reading and writing that occurs within classrooms and within instruction that is ultimately focused on helping young
children learn to read and write. Literacy practice that occurs outside of the learning/teaching to read and write context is always authentic – that is *real*, and, thus, it does not make sense to refer to it as *authentic*.

This means that there is no such thing as *inauthentic literacy* or instruction. We call the kinds of reading and writing that children do in school that is not authentic, by our definition, *school-only*. When children are involved in school-only literacy activities, they are reading and writing texts that are specifically designed to help children *learn* to read and write. These are texts like leveled readers, flashcards, phonics charts, spelling lists, and comprehension questions and answers. Further, they are reading leveled readers to learn and practice skills like decoding, comprehension, vocabulary, and fluency. Or, they are writing spelling words to learn how to spell new words. They are reading and writing literacy instructional texts for purposes of learning to read and write and to develop more advanced reading and writing abilities. These are school-only literacy activities, engaged in for the purpose of literacy learning.

**How is Authentic Literacy Different from Whole Language?**

The type of authentic literacy activity that is described in this Handbook differs from most descriptions of Whole Language instruction in that it includes the explicit and systematic teaching of skills and strategies for beginning reading and writing. While some versions of whole language include embedded skill teaching, others rely on students inferring the regularities and structures of written language through wide and meaningful reading and writing. I believe that this approach can delay, and in some cases divert, children's development as independent and effective readers and writers. Thus, in this handbook, teachers are encouraged to incorporate authentic reading and writing into skill instruction, and do this in whichever way they are
comfortable and that works within their mandated curricula. This may involve embedded skill instruction, side-by-side skill instruction, or any combination of these.

**How Does This Differ from Balanced Literacy Instruction?**

The definition of *authentic literacy* in existing descriptions of balanced literacy instruction is somewhat different from the one used in this handbook. Authentic reading in many classrooms is almost exclusively related to reading children's literature. And authentic writing is most often enacted in different types of Writer's Workshop. Children's literature does involve real-life texts but they are not the *only* real-life texts that exist in people's lives. This handbook expands the range of real-life texts beyond, but including, children's literature and personal writing. In addition, the authentic literacy activity that is promoted in this handbook carefully specifies the inclusion of real-life purposes for reading and writing these real-life texts. This is important because the type of authenticity that has proven to be significantly related to learners' growth in literacy abilities includes the connections between real-life texts and real-life purposes for reading and writing.

**Authentic Literacy is Research-Based**

When learners are engaged in reading and writing real-life texts for real-life reasons, they are always highly motivated and engaged. They 'come alive,' in the words of many teachers. This, alone, can be considered reason enough to include authentic literacy activity in the classroom. However, when kids write thank you notes to school visitors, or read information books to explore their interests in bugs or storms, they are not only 'having fun.' Several large research studies have documented a real relationship between the frequency between engagement in authentic reading and writing and achievement in reading and writing. Scores
increase on standardized reading and writing assessment.

Adult learners report increased frequency of reading and writing in their everyday lives and report that they read and write more advanced types of texts.

The TEXT study, directed by Nell K. Duke and me, involved 26 second and third grade teachers and their students. As part of this study, all of the teachers worked with us to make authentic reading and writing an integral part of their science instruction. They used the definition I use here: Reading and writing real-life texts for real-life purposes in the classroom. In the case of the TEXT study, which focused on second and third grade science learning, this translated into reading and writing real-life science information texts like books on snakes, the weather, or force and motion. Real-life science texts also included brochures that one could find at a science museum or center, procedures for science experiments, and bookmarks that included 'science facts.'

The students were assessed three times a year for two years on reading comprehension of these types of science texts and on their ability to write/compose these types of science texts. At the end of the two years of the study, the children who had read and written more real-life texts for real-life purposes scored higher on these assessments that those who had not. For each increase in the frequency of authentic literacy in these classrooms, there was a corresponding increase in literacy achievement.

This is pretty impressive evidence that, in addition to the motivating element of authentic literacy, children appear to improve their reading and writing abilities more when they engage
with authentic reading and writing in school. Teachers can begin to conclude that adding authentic literacy to their literacy instruction is both fun and instructional for their children.\textsuperscript{1}

**Elements of an Authentic Literacy Lesson**

There are four things to consider, or keep in mind, when planning and carrying out an authentic literacy activity, or lesson, in the classroom: (1) Learning the literacy practices in the lives of your students; (2) Creating the necessary authentic contexts for literacy activity in your classroom; (3) Selecting both real-life texts for your students to read and write as well as real-life purposes for the reading and writing of these texts; and (4) the explicit teaching of skills and strategies as well as formative assessment of how your students are learning them.

Each one of these is explained in depth in Chapters 2 – 5 of this handbook. Further, you will find concrete suggestions and ideas for each of the elements in the following chapters. These are meant both to exemplify the concept under discussion as well as to get you started in thinking about how each of the elements could take shape in your own classroom with your students.

**A Note about the Co-Authors**

Interspersed throughout this handbook are accounts from practicing teachers of authentic literacy activities that they have brought into their classrooms. These stories will help you to picture what authentic reading and writing looks like in a variety of instructional contexts. They will also spur your own ideas about the real-life texts and purposes that you can build literacy lessons around in your own classrooms. These teacher stories are meant to serve as models of how teachers can begin to think about the design of authentic literacy activities. They are not meant to be taken as recipes or lesson plans.
One outstanding quality of the model lessons is that they were designed and tried out in classrooms of incredible diversity. Each community and school represented in the lessons include families who speak many different languages and come from countries around the world. English is the second, third, or fourth language for the majority of the students taught by the teacher authors in this handbook. Authentic literacy lessons proved just as engaging and valuable for young English-language learners as they did for native-language learners in the research, described above. The literacy practices in the homes and communities reflected this diversity. In the process of designing the lessons the teachers all gained a deeper respect and knowledge of the lives of their students who were often from different cultures and backgrounds from their own.


Chapter Two

Learning the Literacy Worlds of Your Students

Children always learn better if they are working with familiar ideas and concepts. When children come to school for the first time, they bring with them their knowledge of literacy that comes from experiencing the ways that the people in their own lives – parents, relatives, sibling, and neighbors – use literacy.

Authentic literacy activity in the classroom means that children will be reading and writing real-life texts for real-life purposes. Real-life here means the real lives of the children. And this means that teachers will need to know about the literacy practices that are common in the families and in the public spaces of the communities of their students. They need to know this in order to identify which texts, and purposes for reading and writing them, to choose for authentic literacy activities for their students.

This chapter focuses on ways to go about learning about the literacy practices of your students. Alison Jambor’s lesson, below, provides a wonderful example of how a teacher can go about getting this information as well as how the resulting knowledge about student's familiar texts and the purposes for reading and writing those texts can be incorporated into an authentic literacy activity in the early literacy classroom.

The “To-Do” List

By Allison Jambor
### Introduction

We’ve all had lists of things to do. In my survey to find out what kinds of literacy activities the children of my class were experiencing, the ‘To do’ list was part of their literacy worlds. Indeed, as I began my authentic literacy lesson and requested a show of hands to see how many of my kindergarten class had seen their parents write out a list like the one above, almost every hand went up. Even one of my quietest students piped up in her broken English, “I go bank,” showing that she was making connections to the activity, and engaging her existing schema.

My all day kindergarten class is located in a predominantly Punjabi neighborhood, although there are students from several different backgrounds in my class. I have three First Nations students, all of whom speak English as their first language. My other students speak one or more languages at home including Urdu, Punjabi, Spanish, Kanjobal (a Mayan language), Tagalog, and Vietnamese. The range of language skills is as varied as the backgrounds of the students. I have some students who have only spoken their native language at home. Others come to school fairly conversant in English, although with a limited vocabulary and some grammatical issues. Some are fluent English speakers. Needless to say, the range of skills in the class is quite large. Our school is a small school with 97 students in five classes, grades K to 5.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To Do</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Bank</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Clean bathroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Pay phone bill</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Stamps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Call about cable, sister, Ted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Pharmacy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Real-Life Texts

To get a better understanding of what the children of my class experience as literacy practice, I began spending time along the main shopping corridor nearest to the school, looking for environmental print. Here, I met students and their parents shopping. I also noted many shops with prominent signage. Stores such as Blockbuster Video, Starbucks, Dollar stores, Convenience stores, Doctors office, Immigration services, restaurants, and banks and credit unions provided colorful examples of print. Most of the signage in the area was in English, although some businesses had Punjabi signs, Chinese, Vietnamese, and Filipino (Tagalog).

As a kindergarten teacher, I had found a wealth of information for adapting my centers. A restaurant and a grocery store, with associated print use, would figure in my future center-time activities.

I also observed several people reading and writing during my visit to the community:

- A man in a medical clinic was reading a Punjabi newspaper.
- A man was flipping through a magazine.
- Various people were reading menus.
- Shoppers were looking at signs.
- At Starbucks, a woman was reading a book while another was writing a letter.
At a travel agency, the agent was writing down ticket information while customers read brochures.

A man was filling in a form for film processing.

A man was reading a bank slip as he exited the bank.

I also visited the local library which was filled with people of all ages reading and writing, e.g. newspapers in different languages, computer text, gardening books, books on Feng Shui, and picture books.

As you can see, the neighborhood alone provides the children with extensive opportunities to see print of many different types, including print in other languages. I took pictures of the print on the various stores and businesses. As well, I sent cameras home with families that volunteered to take pictures of themselves engaged in reading and writing. I used the pictures to make a poster with a sign saying, “Reading and writing are all around us.” This poster generated quite a bit of interest and discussion.

In order to facilitate a bridging between school and home literacy, and to learn more about the print environment in my students’ homes, I sent home a letter with a calendar indicating what our “Letter of the Week” would be each week through to the end of December. I asked that parents send children to school with a sample of text in which their children had found the letter of the week somewhere outside of school. See Appendix F for a sample of this letter.

To kick off the weekly sharing-time activity, I arranged to have a “Print Party” and sent a letter home requesting that parents send in a sample of some kind of print. See Appendix H for a sample of this letter.
While some students brought in items for the “Print Party,” several did not. I helped the students who did not bring in any item from home to find some print on their clothes, backpacks or food packaging from their lunches. We found print from the following sources:

- A Dora, the Explorer advertisement
- An ad for Halloween costumes
- A Punjabi newspaper, written in Punjabi.
- Hot wheels brand running shoes.
- Barbie shoes.
- A school notice about picture day
- Print on food packaging
- Containers with food prepared at home
- An ad for Pizza Hut. The other students had various clothing items with printing on them, primarily advertisements for other kinds of products.

Those students whose parents did not understand the letter because of language barriers came to understand that the requirement was simple—spot the letter of the week embedded in some type of print text. The students were proud of being able to find the letter of the week and often pointed it out during other times if they saw it on their clothes or on their lunch or snack packaging. This class was much more aware than my previous classes of the ubiquitous nature of print in our lives.

Next I sent home a letter explaining that I wanted to plan some reading and writing activities for the class based on the kinds of things that the children see people reading and writing in their homes and communities. The letter asked the parents to fill out a simple chart that documented who was reading or writing, what the person was reading or writing and why
the person was engaged in this activity. I sent the letter and form with the examples so that the families would have an idea of how to record the literacy events.

I also showed the students some samples of things I might read in my home, and that maybe they had seen their parents reading. I showed newspapers, flyers, a phone bill, a post card, a recipe book, and a driver’s manual. The phone bill and the post card got the biggest responses, with most students getting quite excited by the post card. As might be expected with a class with many ESL learners, most of the students have relatives in other countries. In spite of the great distance, a number of the Punjabi speaking students travel with their families to India or Pakistan, or have relatives who travel back and forth.

Parents reported a number of texts that are read and written in their homes in addition to my examples like reading the newspaper, writing letters, and reading bills/writing cheques:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flyers</th>
<th>Bills</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bus tickets</td>
<td>Dictionary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspapers</td>
<td>Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prescriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maps</td>
<td>TV Guide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>Puzzle Books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work reports</td>
<td>Homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To-do lists</td>
<td>Grocery lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cards and letters</td>
<td>Calendars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone lists</td>
<td>Spiritual books</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Authentic Literacy Activity**
I chose the ‘To do’ List as a real-life text around which to base authentic reading and writing with my students. Some families reported using specific ‘To do’ lists, while others reported using other kinds of lists, such as grocery lists and phone lists. I felt that using the general list genre at this time of the year was appropriate since it was a common text used in the homes, and it would fit in nicely with an authentic reason to use them this early in the school year. While more families cited recipes as a common activity that involved reading or writing in their households, I felt that for kindergarten students in their first term, and with many English language learners, that the genre would be too challenging. I earmarked recipes for a spring unit. In the fall many of my students were still learning the names of some letters, and others had only the beginning stages of sound-letter correspondence knowledge. Thus, I felt that the `to do’ list would be a simple enough genre for them to master.

Since the grocery list was also common in the homes of my students, and it is similar in function (helps us to remember what to get), I expected that most children would know how a list works; we write things down to help us remember what to do, and cross the items off the list as they are completed. As a final check on the familiarity of the ‘To Do’ list, I asked each child’s caregivers if they ever used ‘To do’ lists. Most families responded that they did, indeed, use them.

Using the whole-part-whole lesson design for teaching skills, I decided that a natural fit with the ‘To do’ list was to focus on teaching the students to instantly recognize the sight words ‘to’ and ‘do.’ We had studied the letter ‘t’ and the letter ‘d’ but not the letter ‘o,’ so I felt quite comfortable with using the words ‘to’ and ‘do’ as the focus for sight word work. These two words are among the 24 most common words cited as necessary for students to learn (Tompkins, 2006; Pinnell & Fountas, 1988):
In order to assess the effectiveness of the sight word work, I used 10 of these sight words for a pre-test and a post test: a, at, and, do, I, in, is, it, and, the. I embedded to and do in the sight word test to evaluate overall levels of reading fluency as well as for the specific target words for the authentic literacy lesson.

To assess the children’s knowledge of sight words, I assessed each child individually in class. One at a time, I sat with each child and displayed one sight word flashcard at a time. To receive credit, the student needed to identify the word correctly within 3 seconds. I then marked down on a checklist which words each child was able to correctly identify. See Appendix I for sight word flashcards that can be used for this assessment.

The list at the side is the one with which I opened my lesson when I introduced the `To do’ list to my students. Although I used chart paper when I wrote the list in front of the class, I made sure to act thoughtfully, talking to myself as I generated the list, modeling the thinking I usually use when I make my own `To do’ lists. I asked myself what I needed to do and who I needed to call.
I asked for a show of hands to see how many of my students were aware of their families' using print in this way. Most hands went up. I talked to students about the purpose of making a list like this—that it helps us to remember what we need to do.

**Bridging School Activities and Integrating Sight Word Lessons**

I drew the students’ attention to our `Shape of the Day’ where we had a list of the activities we would be doing that day. Many of the students could recognize the activity words such as reading, math, science and centers. I suggested to the students that our `Shape of the Day’ was really another kind of `To do’ list and that we should change the title to `To Do.’

I had the students provide the letters ‘t’ and ‘d,’ when I made the initial sound, writing out `To Do’ on a piece of sentence strip paper. I replaced the `Shape of the day’ sign with the `To Do’ sign. I noted that often people cross out the words on a `To Do’ list, but that we would simply remove the finished activity from the pocket chart.

**Making 'To Do' Lists**

The upcoming student-led conferences, in which the families of the students visit the school to learn what their children have been doing, provided a perfect opportunity for the children to write their own 'To Do' lists. I told the students that we do so many things in school that they might forget to show their parents and guardians some of the things, so having a list of what they were going to do would help. We brainstormed all the different things we do in school. Then I modeled writing out a `To Do’ list on chart paper using the activities we just brainstormed, so they could see how to put the words `To Do’ at the top of their own papers. I included the words that were posted at each of the centers to help them spell the words they needed. I also gave them their math notebooks and journals so that they could use their books as models and to encourage them to show their families all their hard work. Each child generated
his or her own `To Do’ list to refer to it when their families visited. Because the students were in kindergarten and had never led a conference before, their grade 3 big buddies came in to help them practice using the list so they would feel successful on conference night.

As the students used their `To do’ lists on the night of the conference, the communicative nature of written language was reinforced even though some of them needed help figuring out what they had written! The parents, though, were impressed. They could easily read what the children had written. Giving the students clues, reminding them to look at the letters and say the sounds, and getting them to compare their lists with the signs around the room changed the conference from a simple reporting opportunity to a learning situation, where the parents were able to see their child’s learning in action. Both students and parents were learning from the situation. The parents learned ways to guide their children, rather than simply providing the word when the children were attempting to read. Several parents commented on how surprised they were that their children understood how to use the list. The children were proud to impress their families. Some parents also mentioned that the students had been coming home and talking about having a `To Do’ list at school.

Problem Solving

In addition to using a `To Do’ list for the conference, I used the concept again to help solve a problem that came up frequently in the class. Daily Center's time required that the students choose a new activity center each day. By Wednesday or Thursday, many had difficulty remembering which centers they had already done that week, making the choosing time drawn out, and the play time reduced. I discussed the problem with the children and suggested that one way to solve the problem was for them to choose all of their center activities for the week on Monday and write down their centers `To Do’ list.
The students seem quite happy with this new system. They cross a center off the list each day and complete the `to do' list with a sense of accomplishment. This was a terrific idea! They improve their reading, having a vested interest in using the words on the list to help them find their center activity for the day. The list has an authentic purpose and function. It is an important choice that they make so they are enthusiastic about using the lists. They get practice with reading and writing and reinforce the target sight words when they put `To Do’ at the top of the page.

Skills: Sight Words

In addition to introducing and using the sight words for the list, I have used `to’ as a “Word of the Week,” and plan to teach `do’ in a similar fashion. The word of the week is part of daily calendar activities. The students focus on the word for a quick minute or two. After I demonstrate how to use it in example sentences, the students make up their own. We read the word and use it daily. At the end of the week, I transfer the word to the word wall for high frequency words and we review it regularly. Students are reminded to use all of the words in their writing activities. The word of the week is also the focus for two-minute break activities like read-around-the-room or find-it-in-a-book. The students have begun spontaneously to bring the word of the week to letter sharing time, and to point it out any time they see it written somewhere.

Skill Post Assessments

The pretest showed that most students did not recognize either of the target words before the lesson. The posttest showed that most students recognized `to,’ although `do’ was not yet part of their sight vocabularies. Some of the other test words were previously `word of the week’ and few of them were recognized as readily as `to.’ The use of (a) introduction in an authentic
Creating Authentic Literacy Activities K-3
Chapter Two

context, (b) direct teaching of the word, and (c) repeated use in context appeared to be a winning combination. Indeed, after having ‘do’ as word of the week, and using the word at the top of their weekly centers ‘to do’ lists, the students were retested. All students recognized both of the target sight words, including students who were struggling readers and writers.

From Here

My students will continue to use their ‘To Do’ lists for centers and other occasions such as up-coming field trips. I am also hoping that I will have future problems that may be solved by using the ‘to do’ list. Ideally the students themselves will be able to suggest the use of the list to help solve the problem. Perhaps our upcoming trip to science world where there is “so much to see and so little time” will provide just such a scenario.

Reflections

With future classes I think I would spread out the use and introduction of several ‘To Do’ lists over a longer period of time. There were a few students who were confused by which list they were supposed to refer to. I might have them call the lists more than just a ‘to do’ list. For example, I think I will add ‘today’ to the ‘To do’ list that replaced the ‘shape of the day,’ so it will read, “To do today.” I might add “Centers” to the centers ‘To do’ list. Introducing the centers list first, and following later with the conference list would give the students more authentic practice with the list and its format before having them write and read the list to use with their parents.
Although the things that are on the `to do’ list for these activities are school activities, they are activities that the children enjoy spending time doing. The function of the list was true to form, helping the students to plan, organize and remember what they felt was important for them to do with their parents. The centers list was a solution to a real problem, not being able to remember what they had done, and benefited them directly by providing more time at centers, and helping them to plan what to do for the week. The students were writing with themselves as the audience, and were engaged in reading with a definite purpose. The activities increased their self-confidence, helping them to see themselves as readers and writers, and urged them on with their understanding of the purpose and usefulness of written language.

References


Learning what is 'Real-Life' for Your Students

Again, one of the reasons why we think including authentic literacy in early literacy instruction is beneficial is because children always learn better if they are working with familiar ideas and concepts. When we set about to discover which textual practices are already familiar to young literacy learners, we will have begun to act upon this principle of good instruction and effective learning.

Ideas for Learning about the Texts in the Student's Environments
So, how do teachers go about learning about the literacy practices in their students’ lives? There are several ways that teachers can learn about the literacy worlds of their students. Those that have already proven useful for teachers are listed here. However, I encourage each of you to come up with your own ways of 'detecting' to learn about the ways that people use reading and writing in the lives of your students.

The key pieces of information to gather from these procedures, or any others you can think of to learn about the literacy practices in your students’ lives, are

- Which texts are read and written?
- What languages and scripts are they read/written in?
- Who reads and writes which texts?
- Why do they read and write them?

The answers to these questions will help you decide what kind of literacy is 'real-life' for your students. You will be able to decide which types of texts to use in your classroom as well as which purposes, or reasons, you will want your students to be reading or writing these texts.

Get to Know the Public Texts in the Community

Allison (The 'To-Do' List) began learning about the texts that were visible in the community of her school by hanging out in the main shopping area of the community in which she taught. She walked around the streets, shopped in the stores, had coffee in the local coffee shop, ate in a local restaurant, visited the local library. She dropped into medical clinics, banks, immigration services, and other locales that the families of her students were likely to visit. She participated in the community served by her school. She tried to see the environmental print and the examples of people reading and writing from her students' points of view.
How did she document the examples of print and print use in the community? She took photos of many of the store signs, street signs, and other types of signs. She collected examples of text types that were visible and available to the people in the community like flyers, newspapers, menus, and so on. She also made notes of people reading and writing, where they were, and what they were reading or writing. Here is a list of things you can do to learn about the public texts in the community in which your students live:

**Walk around the area served by the school.** Take pictures of all the store signs, street signs, highway signs, etc. Examples:

- **No Left Turn sign**
- **Safeway store sign**
- **For Sale sign**
- **McDonalds sign**
- **Exit sign for freeway**
- **Stop sign**
- **School Bus sign on side of bus**
- **Bus stop signs**
- **House for Sale signs**
- **Dry Cleaner signs**
- **Advertisement posters on store windows**
- **Street signs**
- **Name of the school on the building**
- **Yield to pedestrians signs**
- **Shopping Mall sign**
- **Shoe Repair sign**

**Ride the buses or the subway.** Note all of the printed advertisements, directions, maps, etc. Examples:

- **Subway map**
- **Bus route pamphlets**
- **Stay behind Yellow Line sign**
- **No Eating sign**
- **No Smoking sign**
- **Exit from Read Door signs**
- **Exact Fare Required signs**
- **Yield to the Handicapped & Elderly signs**
- **Subway station signs**
- **Print on bus/subway tickets**
Enroll in Language School signs   Instructions on ticket machines

Dunkin' Donuts 'bus wrap' sign   Name of the bus company on the bus

Look around the buses or subway cars. Note who is reading or writing and what they are reading and writing. Make some informed guesses as to why they are reading and writing these texts. Examples:

Woman reading a magazine (to pass the time?)

Man reading a book (to enjoy the story?)

Young woman reading a photocopy of an article and highlighting sections (to do school work?)

Man reading a newspaper (to learn the today's news or weather?)

A group of adolescents reading the back of a CD (to see which songs are on it?)

People 'texting' on cell phones (to share jokes or make appointments with friends?)

A young man doing a crossword puzzle (to entertain oneself/pass the time?)

A woman reading the print on her Ipod (to choose a list of songs to listen to?)

An older woman reading what looks like a personal letter (to connect to her daughter? To hear news of the family?)

Shop in the stores. Note what you, as a shopper, are reading and writing. Note what others are reading and writing. Note what print is available and what functions it serves for shoppers and for shop workers. Examples:

The store directory with the names of the different departments and which floors they are on
Aisle markers such as 'Canned Fruit and Vegetables'; 'Produce'; or 'Soft Drinks and Snacks'

Receipts

50% Off signs

Package text like Cheerios, Non-Fat Milk, Canned in Water, Nutrition Information, Recipes

Restroom signs

Exit signs

Clothing labels

Store department signs: Women's Sport; Men's Casual; Children, etc.

Customer Service sign

Cashier sign

Go to special events like fairs and festivals. What public signs and texts are around for people to read? Examples:

Restroom signs for 'Men' and 'Women'

Cotton Candy

Fresh Lemonade

Carnival Rides

Fairground maps

Programs of live entertainment and events

Signs marking individual items in displays like 'Blackberry Pie', 'Photos by Joan Evans'
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Live Animal Exhibition signs (Sheep, Cows, Pigs, Horses, etc.)
Fried Dough
Hotdogs
Parking

Do your laundry in a Laundromat in the community. Note all of the texts that are around, and what functions they serve the people who read and write them. Examples:

Instructions for using the change machine
Instructions on inside of lid for using the washing machine
Bathroom signs
Flyers on bulletin boards, e.g. Services; For Sale, and so on
Newspapers
Magazines
Children's books
Soap package text like Tide and directions for use
Hours of operation
Instruction for the coin operated bathroom doors

Eat in a restaurant. Make note of all the things you need to read and write in order to eat in the restaurant. Examples:

Menus
Money-due checks
Credit card forms
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Filling in how much tip to leave on a credit card form

Signature on a credit card form

Make note of other texts in the restaurant that people read and write. Examples:

Newspapers

Notices on bulletin boards

'Freebies' like real estate brochures

Advertisements on paper place mats

Print on the walls

Restroom signs

- Take pictures of public signs when it is appropriate and collect samples of public texts when available. Note that many store owners wish to be asked permission before allowing anyone to photograph their store/store signs.

- Take your students on a Literacy Walk. This will allow you to see the literacy worlds of the children through their eyes. Give them cameras or pads of paper to take notes. Ask them to point out the print that they see. Ask them to find things they can read. Ask them to talk about what familiar signs and print mean.

Get to Know the Family Literacy Practices for your Students

Allison (The 'To-Do' List) used several different methods of learning about the literacy practices in the homes and families of her students. She sent letters home to the parents asking them to send children to school with an example of the texts within which their children had found the letter of the week. She also tied her sharing-time activity to the home by requesting that parents send a sample of a printed text in their home for the child to share as part of the "Print Party" activity. She asked children to find print on their clothes, backpacks, and food
packages in their lunches. She sent a letter asking parents to report on the events in which children see people reading and writing. She provided a simple chart for parents to note who was reading or writing, which text(s) were read or written, and why they were read and written. She showed students samples of things that she reads and writes at home and asked them if they had seen their parents engaged in each type of activity.

Here is a list of things you can do to learn about the family literacy practices of your students. Again, these are suggestions and each teacher is encouraged to come up with additional ones that will allow them to learn about the literacy worlds of their children:

- **Ask your students what people read and write in their homes.** It will amaze you how much the children can tell you about what their parents and others in their homes read and write. They may even know why they read and write those texts.

  * **For the Classroom**
    
    * Start a large 'Things We Read and Write at Home' Wall (building on the Word Wall idea), recording each text (and purpose(s) for reading and writing each text) that children report. Let this build over the year.
    
    * Create a mural and have each child draw a picture of his/her house and list the texts they have noted underneath the house drawing. Let this build over the year.
    
    * Begin a discussion of what people read and write outside of school and, together with the class, begin a chart with a column for "Texts" and one for "Why" (purpose for reading and writing that text). Post this and add to it over the course of the year.
Send home disposable cameras. Ask the children to fill out the roll of film with pictures of things in their homes that people read and write and/or people actually reading and writing.

*Classroom Ideas

* Print the photos and add them to your mural (see above)
* Start a class book about 'Reading and Writing at Home' and give each child a page. Use one or more of the photos for the pages, around which the children can write (or dictate) a description of what people read and write in their families.
* Make picture books for the kindergartners (or a preschool), using the photos. This might be an alphabet book where each text photo begins with a letter of the alphabet. Or it might be a label book with each text written in large black letters below a photo, e.g. BOOK, CEREAL BOX, GROCERY LIST, and so on. The book could begin with the question, "What do people read?"

Ask the parents. Parents are usually intrigued by the question, "What do you and others read and write at home?" Most are willing to help out and provide this information. It is important to note, though, that almost all people, when questioned about their literacy at home, think you only want to know about things like books or newspapers. They often will respond with something like, "Oh, I don't have time to read!" Or "I used to read books but not anymore."

So, when you approach your parents with questions about what they read and write, be sure to give them some 'ordinary' examples like print on food packages, directions for using cleaning products, or maps to use when driving.
Solicit Information from Parents By

- Engaging informal chats at opportune moments, e.g.
  - *When a mom picks up her child after school*
  - *When a parent comes in to help out in the classroom*
  - *When travelling together on a field trip*
  - *When running into a parent in the community*
- Conducting group interviews
- During Back-to-School Night
- During Parent/Teacher Association meetings
- Sending questionnaires home

> Open-ended questionnaires that ask questions like "What kinds of things do you read at home?" "What kinds of things do you write at home?" "What kinds of things do others in your family read and write?" Why do people read and write these things?" Be sure to give examples.

> Charts with columns for 'Text', 'Read/Write', and 'Purpose'. Fill in the first two rows as examples.

Bridging Home and School by Learning about Family Literacy Practice

All of the suggestions above for teachers to learn about the literacy worlds of their students constitute a targeted type of teacher research. This type of teacher research makes the print lives of the students visible in ways that they never were before. It helps to bridge the gap between the community and the school. It helps teachers see and understand in deeper ways what their students understand as 'literacy.'
This type of teacher research also provides the basis upon which teachers can begin to design authentic literacy activities for their classrooms. Teachers can look to their growing list of text types that are public in the community and that are read or written in the homes of their students for ideas about which text types could be presented to their students for reading and writing. By consulting their list of purposes that go along with each text type, i.e. Grocery Lists (Text type) to remember what to buy (Purpose), teachers can be sure to engage their students in reading and writing familiar texts for real-life purposes in the classroom. That's what authentic literacy activity is all about!

Read Sarah Loat's account of designing an authentic literacy activity for the children in her resource room. Note how she incorporated many of the ideas above for learning about the real-life texts in the lives of her students and used what she found as the basis of her authentic literacy lesson.

Cooking Up Some Authenticity

By Sarah Loat

Knowing the Community’s Diverse Ingredients

My elementary school enrolls 461 students whose diverse socio-economic and cultural profile reflects that of the community. Although the majority of our students live in the urban center, some live on agricultural cranberry farms to the south and are bused to the school. Approximately 68 percent of our students have a home language other than English. Of the 21 different languages spoken in the homes of our students, the most prominent languages are English, Cantonese, Punjabi, Tagalog, Mandarin, and Arabic. Two hundred and twenty-two of
our students are designated English as a Second Language (ESL) students. I have taught at this 
school for the past four years, and I am currently working in the position of resource teacher 
providing support to four primary classes.

**Searching for Literacy Ingredients**

I took a walk around the shopping plaza that serves the community near my school to 
gain insight into the types of texts the students in my school were exposed to daily. Most of the 
published text in the area serves the purpose of giving information and soliciting customers. There 
were a number of restaurants, serving a variety of cuisine from Dairy Queen to Dim Sum. Many 
of the signs were translated into Chinese and/or Punjabi, which are the two most prevalent 
languages in this area, aside from English.

The local drugstore sold newspapers in three languages: English, Chinese, and Punjabi. 
Video stores, two banks, and a medical clinic completed my tour of the shopping plaza. The 
windows of the video stores were plastered with posters, written in Punjabi that advertised the 
most recent releases.

**Literacy Flavors within the Children’s Homes**

To gather data on the types of texts that the students in my school were encountering at 
home, I sent home a questionnaire (see the complete questionnaire at the end of this description) 
to the families of a grade two/three class in my school. The class was made up of 21 children, 13 
grade three students and 8 grade two students. The languages spoken at home by the children 
were English, Cantonese, Punjabi, Tagalog, Mandarin, Vietnamese, Spanish, and Arabic.

I had a full range of learners in this class, and an educational assistant supported three 
special needs students, of whom one Grade 2 girl was a high-functioning, autistic student and 
two grade 3 students with mild developmental delays in all academic areas.
Engaging the Children in Exploring Their Home Literacies

Before I sent the questionnaire home, I familiarized the students with the notion of text types and the fact that they have many of them in their homes. I brought a variety of materials that were both non-fiction and fiction into the classroom. For the purpose of the lesson, I asked the children to sort the materials into fiction and non-fiction and decide where we might find these types of materials, at home or at school.

After they had been shown a number of examples, they volunteered examples of their own, such as a prayer book. It was clear that they understood the different types of texts they would see in their homes, and I felt confident they could fill out the questionnaire properly.

At this point, I went over the questionnaire with the children. I explained to them that in order for Ms. Davis and me to improve their success in reading and writing at school we wanted to find out what types of reading and writing activities their families did at home and who in their families participated in these activities. I also gave disposable cameras to six of the children and asked them to take photographs of family members reading and writing and of examples of print in their homes (e.g. on the refrigerator). The “photographers” were each from a different ethnic background: Vietnamese, Indo-Canadian, Chinese, Hispanic, Saudi-Arabian/Chinese, and Caucasian.

Combining our Shared Literacy Ingredients

Using the information gained from the questionnaire, I found that all the children saw their mothers and fathers, siblings, and grandparents both reading and writing in their homes.
However, a few children mentioned that their fathers did not write as often as their mothers. Perhaps this was because the children saw their mothers as the adult most involved in daily-living texts, such as completing grocery lists and writing notes to teachers. Mothers were also identified as the adult who helped the children complete their homework most frequently. I learned that the types of reading that went on in the homes of my questionnaire group centered on daily routines, entertainment, and school/work related activities. Interestingly, some children reported that their fathers read the newspaper while their mothers read books. The reading of magazines, recipes, instructions, using the computer, completing homework assignments, and reading work-related material was also recorded (in order of frequency) as types of reading the children saw their families doing. One boy wrote that his father was reading a car repair book because their car had broken down and he was trying to find out how to fix it! Most of the families also reported that they went to the public library once a week. In answer to my question of what type of materials they borrowed, they reported books, movies, CD’s, tape stories, cookbooks, self-help books, comic books, and math books (in order of frequency).

In terms of writing activities in the home, again the families reported that they completed written tasks mostly for daily living purposes. For example, lists, cheques, bills, notes, and homework were the most prevalent types of texts written in their homes. Other types of writing mentioned were mainly for the purpose of correspondence, such as writing letters and greeting cards, filling out forms, and sending e-mails.

**Mixing the Flavors of Home and School Literacies**

I found that most families use reading and writing for daily routines as well as to help their children with schoolwork and/or to complete some work-related activity. The photographs that the six students took further supported the information gathered in the questionnaires. From
the photographs it was evident that many of the families used a second language at home, and that English reading materials were sparse. If school is the only place where many of our students are speaking, reading and writing English, this may be the reason why they are struggling in the areas of reading and writing. There are such large Indo-Canadian and Asian communities in our city that it is possible for a family to function with little or no English ever being spoken in the home.

The questionnaire demonstrated that there were many examples of texts, especially nonfiction material, in the homes of these students, but the connection between home and school literacies can be improved upon. In order to access the knowledge that these children had, I wanted to integrate authentic literacy events into my activities.

A Menu for Authenticity in the Resource Room

First Course: Linking to a Shared Text

Soon after the home literacy information was returned, the children in my resource group were reading a story in a basal reader called *Cookie Day*. The story, by Susan Green, is about a father who decides to bake chocolate chip cookies with his two children. After we read the story together, the children noticed that the story *Cookie Day* included the ingredients for making chocolate chip cookies and a description of the baking tools needed as well; however, there were no amounts included for the ingredients.

One of the girls volunteered to bring a chocolate chip cookie recipe from home. She said we could make some cookies in school from her recipe because it had the right amount of each ingredient. I had previously noted that many of the students had listed reading recipes and taking cookbooks out of the library as regular literacy events in their homes. Two of the students in my resource group specifically mentioned cooking and reading cookbooks as a favorite
pastime at home. It seemed to me that the recipe genre would be an excellent way to connect the students’ home literacy experiences with our classroom literacies. I began to see how using the recipe genre that was familiar to the children would help me to teach a vocabulary lesson on verbs (such as mix, combine, remove, stir, chill, etc.) that are necessary for the completion of a recipe. I suggested that Ruby bring in her recipe so we could bake cookies for all their classmates and give them their own recipe cards as well. The students enthusiastically agreed.

Second Course: Assessing the Children’s Existing Understanding of Recipes

The following day, I asked the four children in my group to write out a recipe for me to assess their knowledge of a recipe in general. The recipe could be any type of cookie that they liked. All the children had their ingredients written down in some way. Ruby, who volunteered to bring the recipe the day before, had the ingredients written in a list with actual amounts next to each item. For example, she had “2 cup (sic) of flowr”. Another girl, who said she liked to read cookbooks, had written her recipe in sentences each beginning with, “You need….” For example, she wrote, “You need sugar”. The other two children had a few ingredients listed and then the instructions written afterwards. For example, one student wrote, “2 eggs. Crack the eggs. Put them in a bowl and add baking soda. Mix them up”. I noted that this student was using verbs in her sentences; however none of the others had.

Third Course: Examining the Parts of a Recipe to Learn Procedural Texts/Embedded Skills Lesson
My third lesson focused on having the children look at recipes in various cookbooks and notice what verbs, or action words, were common to all of them. When the children came into the resource room, I had a number of cookbooks on the table. We began by discussing that recipes were a special type of text, which I called a “procedural text” or “how-to” text. I explained that a procedural text tells someone how to do something.

The children chose a cookbook and looked through it. I asked them to find as many verbs as they could and to highlight them with highlighter tape that I gave them. When the children each found five verbs, they shared their vocabulary words with the group and I recorded them on chart paper.

Before I ended this lesson, I asked them to look at the recipe that Ruby had brought from home. We then starred any of the verbs that were on her recipe and added any new verbs to our list. Our list of verbs included: mix, add, drop, bake, combine, stir, cream, chill, sift, cool, pour, and beat.

**Fourth Course: Linking to Texts from the Children’s Homes**

The following day, two girls reported that they had looked through their mothers’ cookbooks at home. They had noticed that many of the cookbooks at their houses were written in a different language. We discussed that cookbooks are written in many languages.

I explained that now our task was to write out Ruby’s chocolate chip recipe so that we could make cookies for their classmates using the verbs we would learn as we cooked. We then copied the recipe together. I wrote a line of the recipe on chart paper, and they copied it onto a recipe card, which I provided for them. I reminded them that their classmates were going to get a copy of their recipe card so it should be written out neatly and carefully. The students were
extremely careful as they wrote out their recipe, acutely aware of its purpose. I underlined the verbs on my chart-paper recipe, but the children did not underline on their cards.

After writing out the recipe cards, we made a shopping list for the cookie ingredients (another authentic text and purpose for writing and reading it).

Fifth Course: Making Cookies

The children were very excited as they entered the resource room on the fourth day of our lessons! It was baking day! We carried all the ingredients and equipment into the school kitchen and made sure we had everything we needed. We did this by reading from their recipe cards and checking our list of ingredients. As I set out the ingredients, I made sure each child was familiar with what each one was. The children did not seem to know what vanilla was, so we passed it around, smelling it and discussing that its purpose was to add flavor to the cookies. I referred the children to my chart-paper recipe with the underlined verbs as we completed each step of the instructions.

The students were in charge of reading each step aloud. As they read the action words, or verbs, we discussed their meanings and the students took turns demonstrating the meaning, such as
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as *creaming* the margarine and sugar together or *combining* dry and wet ingredients. It soon became clear to the children how crucial the understanding of verbs is in following a recipe. The children especially liked the verb *beat* and we discussed its multiple meanings.  

**Sixth Course: Considering What Was Learned**  

After the cookies were in the oven, and we had washed the dishes, we sat down to reflect on our baking experience and what we had learned. I made a list on chart paper of their findings.  

| What We Learned About Recipes  
(Procedural Text) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• There are numbers to tell you how much you need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• There is a list of items you need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The ingredients need to be added in a certain order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The instructions need to be followed in a certain order</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After our reflections, it was time to take the cookies out of the oven. As the cookies cooled, we took our recipe cards to the photocopier and photocopied each recipe several times on special card stock so that each student in the classroom could have his or her own recipe to take home along with a chocolate chip cookie. Once the cookies had cooled, the “cooks” tested the fruit of their labor and exclaimed how delicious their cookies were.  

At this point, I redirected them to the verbs on our chart. I asked one of the children to choose a verb from the list to act out in front of the group. They pantomimed stirring, mixing, pouring, etc. while the other children guessed what they were doing.  

Before we took the cookies into the classroom to share, the children reread the story *Cookie Day*. They read more fluently, especially the verbs in the story. They laughed at the illustration of the mixer splashing dough on one of the children in the book because it had
actually happened to them. They talked about how good the batter tasted when they read how the children in the story asked if they could eat some and the father said, “Wait for the finished cookies.” I could only conclude that learning the meaning of verbs involved in baking had enhanced the reading experience for them.

Then the children took their cookies into the classroom on a platter and handed them out to their classmates, along with their individual recipe cards. The other children were excited about receiving a cookie and having a recipe to take home.

**Seventh Course: Writing Their Own Recipe**

The next day I asked the students in my resource room to write out a cookie recipe of their choice because I was curious to see what features of a procedural text had remained with them. I then compared this second recipe to their initial recipe sample. I was pleased to see there was definite improvement in their understanding of the recipe genre. In their second recipe attempt, the children included the following features:

- a title
- a list of ingredients
- specific units of measure listed next to the ingredients
- numbered steps
- verbs from our list

It was clear that their recipe vocabulary, not only the verbs, had grown through this authentic literacy event.
The next day, the children gave me a card. It said, “Thank you for letting (sic) us bake cookies.” I was surprised that the experience had meant so much to them. In addition, one boy from the larger class ran up to me as I entered the classroom. He exclaimed that he had made the recipe at home with his mother. He said the cookies were delicious.

**Chewing on Authenticity: Planning Literacy Experiences in the Resource Room**

**Reflections**

Reflecting upon this authentic literacy event, I was impressed with how much the children enjoyed making the cookies and how proud they were of their accomplishment. The children were familiar with recipes as a text and understood their function in the real world; however, actually following a recipe themselves would have been difficult without an understanding of the various verbs used in the recipe genre. Instead of merely teaching the children what these verbs meant through discussion, the act of cooking brought each verb to life. The children found it easy to understand that the term *verb* meant an “action” after carrying out those actions themselves while following the recipe.

In addition to learning a procedural vocabulary for cooking, the children’s reading comprehension was also enhanced by their baking experience. The teacher’s guidebook for the story *Cookie Day* suggested the writing of a recipe as a follow-up to the story. Ruby seemed to anticipate this activity when she offered to bring in a recipe from her home. These children are in the resource room because they struggle to make meaning from written text. Without the actual writing of the recipe, the children would not have understood the procedural text; however, without understanding the verbs in the recipe, they would not have understood what they needed to do to produce cookies.
My group’s success with the text of a recipe led me to envision continuing their authentic literacy experience with additional procedural texts from their home environment. Since it was near Christmas time, I planned to bake Christmas cookies and make a holiday greeting card. A second baking event would reinforce the vocabulary already encountered in our first recipe writing. The card making would add verbs, such as *fold,* *cut,* *stamp,* *trace,* *paste,* *print,* *sprinkle* (glitter), *decorate,* and *address* to their speaking, reading, and writing vocabulary. Many children receive board games for Christmas, and the playing of these requires knowledge of a specific vocabulary, such as *roll,* *pass,* *count,* *move,* *forward,* *backward,* *draw,* *skip,* etc. After learning the vocabulary of gamesmanship, the children could make their own game boards and share them with grade one classes for rainy days. The opportunities to introduce successive procedural texts and create additional authentic literacy events in my resource room seemed endless. So did the opportunities for connecting home and school literacies.
Chapter Three

Authentic Contexts: Requirement for Authentic Literacy

Authentic reading and writing events are authentic because they serve real-life social functions for readers and writers. That is, authentic literacy activities occur within social contexts, and there are aspects of those contexts that require reading and writing. To take a bus, for example, one needs to read the *route sign* on the bus, if not on the bus stop. One may need to read a *bus schedule* if unfamiliar with the system. To run a bus company requires the writing of *bus signs* and *schedules*. If one drives a bus, one must fill in *time schedules* that detail time of arrival at different stops, time that one started to work, and time that one finished the day, among other things. A bus driver also needs to be familiar with the mechanics of the bus and pass a test on all of different parts of the bus, using information gained from a large and detailed *technical manual*. While a bus system, itself, is not a literacy practice, it is a context for many different literacy events.

When planning for authentic literacy activities for the classroom, one first needs to capitalize on, or plan for, contexts that will call for reading and writing. Without social activity there is no real practice of literacy. Marianne McTavish designed and executed a complex and engaging authentic literacy activity centered around the social custom of giving gifts to new mothers. Read her account for the skillful way in which she responded to a teachable moment and created contexts for authentic textual involving ordering from a familiar catalogue and delivering a gift.
The Sears Catalogue Comes to School

By Marianne McTavish

“Oh! Oh! Oh! Mrs. McTavish!” exclaims six-year-old Jonathan, wildly waving his highlighter pen in the air. With his other hand he emphatically points to the picture of the small wooden train located at the bottom of the page of the Sears catalogue. “Here! This is perfect for baby Brendan! And look, read this…it is only ‘9.99!’”

Jonathan’s exuberance during this lesson was reflective of the attitudes of all of the students in my first grade class. And what was the reason for their exuberance? The students were engaged in a literacy event using an “authentic” or real life text for an authentic purpose. The Sears catalogue, an important text in the lives of my students outside of school, had made its way into the world of our classroom.

Introduction

Last fall my inner-city, first grade class was working on a project that required pictures in order to make a collage. As my old magazine collection had dwindled, I asked my students to bring in items (e.g., magazines, flyers, newspapers, etc.) from their homes that contained pictures that we could cut out and use. As the collections started coming in, I was surprised to find that almost every child in the class brought in the same local department store catalogue. It appeared that almost all of the families in my community chose and bought goods from this catalogue and then had them delivered to their homes. I began to think about the unique nature of my students’ backgrounds and I saved the catalogues after our project was complete. Reading these catalogues was an important part of the literacy practices of my students and their families and this was something I knew I should not ignore. By happenstance, the
Sears catalogue became an important authentic material that I would use with my students over and over again. The discovery of the Sears catalogue encouraged me to look further for possible texts in my students’ outside worlds, ultimately serving as my pathway to more authentic literacy instruction.

**Community of Walton**

I teach in the community of Walton, a north end community of the larger city of Greenwood (all names used are pseudonyms), in a western province in Canada. Created to relieve the burgeoning need for house in this historically farming community, Walton is home to just under 50,000 people. Visible minorities account for 34% of the population; over 45% are of South Asian descent, twice as high as the distribution average in the province. The immigrant population is at 32%, with the highest percentages coming from India, the Philippines and Fiji. After English-only (84%), the most common home and spoken languages are Punjabi and Hindi.

The community of Walton spans an 11 square-mile radius. My school, Northwood Elementary, is located in the centre of the Walton community. A shopping centre, located within a mile distant, contains a grocery store, bakery, bank, liquor store, video store, pub and many ethnic and fast food businesses. Major shopping malls including larger department stores and bulk food grocery stores are located within a five mile radius and are accessible by car and bus. The community centre and library are housed in the same complex, again within a five mile radius. Churches and temples of various denominations are frequent in this community (e.g. Seventh Day Adventist, Jehovah Witness, Korean, and Sikh) and most operate child-care or preschool programs on their premises.
Walton's fast growth has given way to the development of many strip-type malls, and the signage to advertise the stores within them is abundant.

These signs are usually in English or Punjabi. Due to the high incidence of crime, a great deal of the environmental print in and around the stores is regulatory or warning in nature (e.g., "You are on hidden camera"; "We are not responsible for lost or stolen articles"; "Do not leave valuables unattended"; "Do not wash dirty or greasy overalls in machines"). In addition, there is a great deal of graffiti and advertisements; both in a variety of languages. Community texts consist of ethnic calendars and papers, local and provincial newspapers, magazines, international phone card posters, and lottery ticket advertising. As well as English, the community library contains a number of books for adults and children in Punjabi. The community offers a number of resources and programs through provincial organizations. In addition, Walton is focusing on initiatives to make it safe and clean for its residents and is currently upgrading their leisure/community centre and local library.

My Class

Northwood Elementary School is located in the community of Walton. Northwood has approximately 350 students with 10% of its population of Aboriginal descent and 25% of its population designated as ESL students requiring support. Many of our students are socially and
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economically disadvantaged. Languages spoken at my school include English, Punjabi, Vietnamese, Chinese, Cantonese, Tagalog, Philippino, and Spanish. Northwood Elementary also has "inner-city" school status which includes, according to school district criteria, a high percentage of families who are on income assistance or who have an annual income of less than $30,000 CAD.

Gathering Literacy Practice Data

Having observed the Sears catalogue’s prominence in my students’ lives, my interest was piqued. I wanted to see what other texts were important in my students’ worlds. I asked myself these questions: What are the literacy practices in my students’ community? What are people in the community reading and writing? What are some common texts? What languages are these texts written in?

To answer my questions, I began my personal research by setting out on a Saturday with my video camera, my still camera, and my notebook. I began at my school and drove through the community looking for the ways that people were engaging with text.

As Saturdays are busy shopping days for members of this community, my first stop was at the local strip mall. Here I found a grocery store, a liquor store, several fast food places, an ethnic bakery, a video store, two restaurants, a laundromat, and several smaller stores selling dollar goods and other household items. As I walked along the mall, I walked into several businesses and took notes on what I saw.

In the Laundromat, people were reading newspapers in Punjabi and in English while waiting for their laundry to finish drying. One couple was laughing over their daily horoscopes in the local newspaper, and two men were watching and reading the rolling print at the bottom of
the closed-captioned TV screen. I stopped and read the text with them for a brief moment. It was the national news station that was doing an update on one of the prominent news stories of the day.

I stepped out of the Laundromat and made my way past several of the stores. As I passed a small alleyway that led to the back of the mall, I noticed two small children pointing to and talking about some graffiti which had been spray painted on the wall. They asked their father what it said. Unfortunately, the writing was not discernable, but it certainly piqued these children’s curiosity.

After spending some time at the mall recording the types of texts that people were reading, I drove my car a short distance to the community centre complex which houses the library and the recreation centre. At the library, I was able to see a number of different texts being read as people engaged in various literacy events. For example, I observed many people using the public computers to access text from the internet in both English and Punjabi. Some were reading text on different websites and some were using email programs to read and compose emails.

As I continued to wander around the library, I noticed that young children were reading easy reader books to each other, and young adults were quietly reading novels. I observed an adult involved in finding a specific book by reading the catalogue information on the spines of shelved books. In another area of the library I observed a man reading the back of a video box in order to gain more information on the content of the movie contained inside.

I left the library and decided to walk the short distance to the recreation centre. Once inside, I saw a number of parents and caregivers sitting in a lounge area waiting for their children
to finish their skating and swimming lessons. Here I observed a number of different types of texts being read. The first observation I made was of a man reading some sort of soft-cover book that looked like something one might read for school. I politely interrupted him to ask what he was reading. He told me that he was reading a flight manual in preparation for an exam that he needed to take in the next few weeks. A few chairs away from him a mother was reading aloud to her young adult daughter from a religious prayer book.

I continued my observations as I walked to other areas of the recreation centre. More adults were waiting for their children as the children participated in their activities. One woman was reading the recreation leisure guide in order to find some lessons for which to register her son. Another man was checking the TV listings portion of an abandoned newspaper. Further down by the ice arena, a man was checking his lottery tickets against the printed publication of a lottery results flyer.

Making my way out of the recreation centre, I walked a little further to a small news stand and coffee shop. I decided to order a cup of coffee to sit and observe the texts that people were reading. As I sat drinking my coffee, I saw people reading varied text types ranging from the labels on food packages and dispensers, to advertisements on car bumper stickers. One woman was writing in her journal and rereading entries she had made on previous days. Interestingly, she was writing in German. This shop also housed a lottery outlet and I observed many adults reading and writing out lottery tickets for purchase.

Having finished my coffee, I moved on to my final destination of the afternoon – the rapid transit station. As I watched people getting on and off the trains, I observed with fascination the huge array of texts that people were reading. For example, frantic travelers were reading text
messages on their cell phones, others were reading the arrival and departure schedules, two men were reading the warning signage regarding taking bicycles on the trains, and another man was consulting house rental advertisements taped to a pole. People were reading the texts in a quick and hurried fashion. As I recorded these observations in my notebook, I couldn’t help but wonder if the people in the community were aware of the great variety of texts they were reading, and the amount of reading they were doing. I hurried home to tally my results.

There were many, many different types of texts read in my students’ community. However, the greatest numbers of texts that I observed were read for entertainment or information purposes (e.g., reading horoscopes, novels, and internet sites). The next greatest number of texts was read for the purpose of assisting in daily living (e.g., reading food labels, flyers or bus schedules). What became clear to me was that the texts I observed being read in my students’ community were reflective of their cultural values and practices. This working class community read texts in their lives to support their daily life routines. In light of this information, I reflected once again on the abundance of Sears catalogues that had made it into our classroom. The Sears catalogue serves information, entertainment and shopping purposes for my students and their families. And it could also serve as a pathway to authentic literacy instruction.

**Skills Pre-Assessments**

In September, the reading abilities of my class were varied, according to the Developmental Reading Assessment (DRA) (Beaver, 2001). Most children were at the emergent stage, having little knowledge of the concepts of print, and only two were at the early stage (able to read and retell very limited text). But what is most alarming is the fact that a large number of
my students have difficulty connecting with school texts. This disconnection with school texts is evidenced by yearly results on the provincial standardized tests: Our schools’ results on the Foundation Skills Assessment (FSA) for reading are well below the school district and provincial averages. Our school staff was very concerned with these results and was taking steps to raise these scores. I was particularly concerned and I wanted to find ways for my students to engage with reading so they could begin building their reading skills and abilities.

Creating the Context for Authentic Literacy

Since September, my first grade class had been participating in a "buddy" program with a fifth grade class in the school. The original purpose of the buddy program was based on a two-fold need: first, to give the fifth grade students an opportunity to practice their oral reading skills and second, to give the first grade students an opportunity to be read to. My class soon became quite attached to their buddies and to their buddies' teacher--they were like our “family.”

It soon became apparent that the teacher of the buddy class was expecting a baby. After the winter break, my class received the news via email and pictures, that baby Kevin had been born. After much discussion, the class decided that we needed to buy a small gift for the baby with the money we had collected recycling juice boxes. Suddenly, I remembered the Sears catalogues! Perhaps we could buy the baby a gift from the catalogue?

My mind started racing. My students were highly familiar with this text and they are also familiar with the practice of choosing gifts (e.g., birthday, Christmas, baby, etc.) from it. One of the most important Sears catalogues to my students is the Christmas catalogue due to its large section on toys. This catalogue is usually pored over by my students at home, usually for making a "wish list." Even children who don't celebrate Christmas delight in looking through
this catalogue to discuss the latest inventions and additions. Could I use this authentic activity opportunity to also teach some critical early literacy skills? I decided to give it a try.

**Embedded Skills Lesson**

This lesson, while flexible enough to accommodate all learners at all levels of literacy development, was specifically designed to teach the critical early literacy skill of concepts about print. The lesson was targeted at those children who were having difficulty in connecting with school texts. For varying reasons, these children do not perceive these texts as important and therefore were not learning the skills necessary to become readers. The purpose of this lesson was to build on home literacy practices and to use texts that were found in the home that were important to the students.

**Concepts to be Learned**

By using this highly authentic, interesting and familiar text, I intended to teach to the needs of my students. For my students at the emergent level, I wanted to teach concepts of print. This included the various conventions for reading and writing such as: front of the book; print, not pictures, tell the story; first letters in a word; big and little letters; directionality; concepts of letter and word; and identification and functions of punctuation marks (Clay, 2002).

For a group of my students who already have the concepts of print, I tried to meet their needs by having them develop a bank of sight words from the catalogue. For one student in particular, I taught him the skill of using a table of contents and an index. But for the purposes of this chapter, I outline below the specific lesson on concepts of print.

I had a small group of students for whom print is not familiar or functional. I wanted to show these children that there was print embedded in a text that was familiar to them. These
Creating Authentic Literacy Activities K-3
Chapter Three

children needed to know that while pictures are important, it is the print which communicates information about the picture, and that there are letters and words which enable us to do this.

Choosing a Gift for Baby Kevin

Based on the skills that I was teaching, I chose to work with small groups. Gathering a group of students at the back table, we reviewed the purpose of the activity which was to choose a gift for baby Kevin. With the catalogues (stacked "every-which-way") in a pile in the centre of the table, I led a discussion about what the catalogue was and what their families used them for.

*Front of the book concept.* I asked the students to take a catalogue. I observed how they handled them, and then introduced the concept of the front of the book and the back of the book. Each child was guided to point to the front of the catalogue and the back of the catalogue. At this time I compared the cover with a regular book from the classroom library.

*Print, not pictures, tell the story.* I opened my catalogue and discussed with the children that although the pictures in the beginning were exciting and that's where I wanted to look first, it was the print that I needed to look at to tell me what to do. (For example, the first section tells me that it contains gifts for under $10, a perfect amount for our baby gift). I had them turn to page 4 of the catalogue. While our purpose was to look for a gift for a baby, the print would help us learn more about the gift, rather than just the picture.

*Directionality.* On page 4, I instructed the children to look at the first picture.
I taught the children that when we read a book or a catalogue, we need to start on the left hand side of the book, and at the very top left hand corner. That way we wouldn't miss any information. I instructed them to look at the picture of the slippers first. Then I told them that we would look at the catalogue in the same direction that we would read a book, starting at the top, going along left to right, sweeping back to the left until we reached the bottom of the page, and over to the top of the next page. This concept would be reinforced throughout the lesson as we moved our way through finding a gift.

*Concepts of letter and word.* I instructed the children to focus on the picture of the women's slippers. When asked what they were, they replied, shoes. In order to find out if they were indeed shoes, I showed them how to look at the print to see. I pointed to the words and read “women's slippers.” They followed with their fingers. I read each word and talked about the concept of word, and how there were two words here: *women's* and *slippers.* I asked them to use a highlighter pen and highlight each word in a different colour. We went through the next
section of print and highlighted each word. I also stated that these words were made up of individual letters.

*First letters in a word.* Using the same picture, I pointed to the first letter in the word "Women's" and taught first letter concept. I asked the children to then take a pencil and circle the first letter in the word "Slippers." We did this for the next section of print.

*Big and little letters.* Still in this same box, I pointed out to the children that the words *WOMEN'S SLIPPERS* were all in big, or capital letters, and that the words underneath (e.g. *padded*) were in little or lower-case letters. We went through this section pointing out with our pencils the big and little letters that we knew.

*Identification and functions of punctuation marks.* As we moved through the catalogue in looking for a gift, I directed the children's attention to the punctuation marks that were present. Since this genre does not use punctuation in the conventional ways, I tried to find those marks which would illustrate this concept. We were able to find commas, and periods, and an exclamation point. With the punctuation, I had the children use their highlighter pens to accentuate the mark.
After the instructional part of the lesson, we went through the under $10 gift section to look for a baby gift. We carefully went through each item as we would if reading a book and we would stop at a particular item and read more about it to judge it suitable for our gift. Each time, I reinforced the concepts of print that I had taught above. Interestingly, the children soon became careful consumers in choosing our gift because of their attention to the print. For example, they originally thought a stuffed animal pictured in the catalogue would be a good gift, until we read that it was not a stuffed animal, but a backpack; not very suitable for a baby. After much debate and deliberation we finally decided to order the wooden construction train (see photo).

To make this a truly authentic event, I phoned the catalogue's toll-free order line from my cell phone and ordered the gift with the children present. I made arrangements to have the gift delivered to a post office station that was located in our neighbourhood. About a week later we received notice that our package had arrived and we took a short walking field trip to pick it up. We arranged for payment when we picked up the gift, so we brought our juice box money with us. As a class we purchased the gift and went back to the school to wrap it. The following
Friday we were visited by our buddy teacher and her new baby. We ceremoniously presented her with our gift much to the delight of the entire class. She loved it!

**Skill Post- Assessments**

It now became necessary for me to find out if the students did learn the concepts of print as I intended. Therefore, I intended to collect my evidence in two ways. First, as an informal measure, I used the catalogue once again as the text, and asked them questions based on the concepts they had been taught in the lesson (e.g., show me the front of the catalogue, show me where the print is, where to begin, directionality, show me a big letter, show me a little letter, etc.) A day later, to see if the skills were transferred, I used a regular small classroom library book as the text and asked them the same questions. A week later, I used Clay's (2002) specific Concept of Print assessment using the *Follow Me Moon* book. The results from my assessments showed that the children gained the concepts of print while using the catalogue as the text. As we moved into the school texts, the children continued to succeed.

**Reflections**

The discovery of the *Sears* catalogue as an important community text not only changed the way I taught literacy to my students, it connected me to their world. Although I am an experienced teacher, I never really examined the texts that had a “lived” importance in the homes and community of my students. The *Sears* catalogue certainly went beyond what I would ever envision as a literacy resource in my classroom.

While the authentic circumstances for using the authentic text of the catalogue came purely by chance, the experience certainly shifted my thinking to extend beyond the basal reader. What
I thought would be a fun activity for the students turned into an effective literacy lesson. But what was most surprising to me was how engaged and excited my students were.

Creating the Contexts for Authentic Literacy

Without real-life contexts that call for reading and writing, there can be no authentic literacy in the classroom. Marianne (The Sears Catalogue Comes to School) contextualized her authentic literacy activity of ordering from a catalogue with the fact that a favorite teacher had just had a baby. This event created the need, or desire, to buy a baby gift for the newborn – something that is socially common in the North American context. Allison (The 'To Do' List, Chapter 1) capitalized on the need to organize center time to engage her students in writing To Do Lists. Sarah (Cooking Up Some Authenticity, Chapter 1) used the desire of her students to cook chocolate chip cookies and share them, and the procedures for making them, with their friends, to call up the need for reading and writing recipes. In real-life, people read recipes to help them cook and write them to help others cook.

Classrooms, however, are not organized or set up for the types of social activities that call for authentic literacy. They are first and foremost organized for the teaching and learning of reading, writing, arithmetic, science, social studies, and other content areas. This is the life of classrooms. So the
challenge to the teacher who wants to include authentic literacy in her literacy instruction is to create the contexts that will call for it. Following are some typical types of real-life contexts that can be brought into the classroom that would call for the reading and writing of specific types of texts by your students.

**Daily Routines of Classrooms.**

Across all kinds of families, daily living routines call for reading and writing texts (Purcell-Gates, 1996). Classrooms have routines – tasks that are required to make the day-to-day life of the classroom, and the school, run smoothly. Teachers need to take roll everyday. Many need to take a 'hot lunch' count. Supplies need to be ordered. Parent permission slips need to be sent and received. Announcements about school events need to be sent to parents.

Teachers do a lot of reading and writing as part of performing these tasks each day. However, These routines offer a perfect, and genuine, context for your students to engage in authentic reading and writing. Remember: Authentic literacy is the reading and writing of real-life texts for real-life reasons.

Do you need to take roll? Then devise a way for the students to take turns taking roll, reading from the list of names and marking A or P for absent or present – each day.

Do you need to make a list of materials to buy for an activity? Enlist students to do this for you. Do you need to send a note home to parents announcing the coming holiday program, together with date, time, title, place, and so on?

Have each child prepare that announcement for his/her family.
IDEAS FOR AUTHENTIC LITERACY CONTEXTS IN CLASSROOM ROUTINES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Routine</th>
<th>Students Read and Write</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking Attendance</td>
<td>Read list of names and mark 'P' or 'A' (take to office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buying or collecting materials for an art project</td>
<td>Write list of materials to get or buy (give to teacher or aide)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtaining parent permission for a class trip</td>
<td>Read and copy official request (take to parents and obtain signature)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sending home announcement of holiday program</td>
<td>Write personal announcement with relevant information (take home to inform parents)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing and storing classroom materials</td>
<td>Write labels for locations and read them to assist in putting materials away</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting up individual schedules for center activities</td>
<td>Write out their weekly schedules (or lists of centers) and use them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking lunch count</td>
<td>Read aloud the menu for the day and write down how many will be buying lunch (take it to the office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posting a list of behavior rules</td>
<td>Write out the rules and post them. Refer to (read) them throughout the year when needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing teams for games</td>
<td>Write out the team names and the team members. Refer to (read) this when needed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Present Needs as Genuine

All of these ideas work best, and generate the most authentic reading and writing, if you present them as *genuine* needs and not just ways to keep the children occupied or as fun lessons.

For example, you, as the teacher, can spend your time better if someone else takes roll. You are too busy to make the list of materials but want to shop immediately after school today. The school is saving on photocopying so the students will need to write their own program.
announcements. And so on. It is the genuine need for reading and writing in social contexts that drives the development of readers and writers.

**Contexts for Literacy Outside of Classroom**

Functions for reading and writing can also be found in contexts outside of the classroom – in other rooms, the school as a whole, or in the community. Look around for opportunities to engage your students in authentic reading and writing. Following is a list of possibilities. See if you can add to it as your thinking is sparked.

### IDEAS FOR AUTHENTIC LITERACY

**CONTEXTS OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authentic Literacy Context</th>
<th>Students Read and Write</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The kindergartners need help with organizing their materials and their teacher is busy.</td>
<td>The second graders visit the classroom and help them make signs to put on cubbies and shelves to indicate where items belong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The librarian doesn’t seem to have enough books about snakes.</td>
<td>Students (or some students, anyway!) may wish to create books about snakes to put in the library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school would like a system for alerting all of the classrooms about the likelihood of the children being allowed to go out for recess, given inclement weather.</td>
<td>The children could put together a weather report or a ‘recess report’ and read it over the intercom system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The community is building a recreation center and would like to know how many children would use it after school.</td>
<td>The children conduct a poll, writing up the questions, tallying the results, and preparing a report to be delivered to the Recreation Center Committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The school needs a pamphlet to advertise and explain a candy sale.</td>
<td>The students read about how the proceeds will be used and design (write) the pamphlet which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The kindergartners need 'book buddies' to read to them.</td>
<td>is produced for children to use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The kindergartners want to read to their younger siblings.</td>
<td>The students select books and read to the kindergartners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The second graders want to invite a favorite author to speak to them.</td>
<td>The students make alphabet books to take home to read to their brothers and sisters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The local newspaper has written a story critical of the students and their school.</td>
<td>The students select books and read to the kindergartners.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The city council has announced a plan to poison the pigeons that gather under a bridge on main street, creating a health hazard.</td>
<td>The students make alphabet books to take home to read to their brothers and sisters.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Creating a Need: The ‘Set Up.’

The kinds of ideas above require a different type of work for the teacher. Rather than just trying to think of fun and interesting things to do in the name of literacy instruction, she must first think of types of contexts that would call for the use of reading and writing – real-life needs and functions and real-life texts. Because this takes place within an institution, however, it is the case that we often need to create our own real functional contexts for literacy. This occurs in the case of real needs like those listed above where the teacher recognizes those contexts as ones within which her students could become involved as readers and writers. Furthermore, this could entail ‘setting up’ a context for authentic literacy.

The teacher of authentic literacy will increase the frequency and quality of the authentic literacy in her classroom if she is creative in thinking of ways to create situations that call for it. There are many ways to do this. It just requires explicitly thinking about how real-life situations call for reading and writing. Then, thinking about how one could go about creating those situations, always remembering that the needs for literacy need to be perceived as genuine by the
students. Below are some ways that teachers have found to create, or set-up, situations that call for authentic reading and writing.

### IDEAS FOR 'SET UPS' THAT CALL FOR AUTHENTIC LITERACY ACTIVITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SET UP</th>
<th>AUTHENTIC LITERACY ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher arranges with the other third grade teacher to request multiple copies of a book of short stories for her students to read since she doesn’t have any and doesn’t have the money to buy them.</td>
<td>Students each create a short story and put them together into a book. Either the teachers or the school makes enough copies of the book(let) for each student in the third grade class to have one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher arranges with the principal to request the formation of a school garden that contains labels for the different vegetables, as well as instructions on caring for them. This garden would be for the use of the entire school.</td>
<td>Students read about garden layouts and write a map with labels. They read about which vegetables grow in their climate, how to plant them, how to take care of them, and so on. They write out instructions for caretakers (other children in the school and parents who will come in during vacations). They create schedules for watering and weeding. They label the rows with the vegetables planted there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher sets up an exchange with a class in another country around the topic of weather to go along with her science unit.</td>
<td>The students in her class write to inform the other class about the weather in their part of North America and wait to read about the weather (as the year goes on) in Central America. Students read and write emails, letters, weather maps, and more.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The teacher arranges with the Director of a nature pond center (recently visited by the class) to write to her students to request a brochure for visitors to the center, answering some of the common questions that people have about the pond and the</em></td>
<td>Students brainstorm questions that they had when they visited the center. They read science information books to find the answers. In groups, they create the different parts of the brochure. They send it to the director who makes it available to visitors.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
pond life. He wants to place them at the front desk for people to take and keep.

*The teacher arranges with another teacher to request a collection of science experiments for her students to work from since there are none to use for kids at this age.

The students read and learn about specific science concepts (friction) and design (write) a series of experiments that the other kids could do that relate to this topic. They publish these after they have been thoroughly tried and tested and present them to the other class. The kids in the other class send thank you notes.

*The teacher arranges with the custodian to put a file cabinet into the middle of the classroom during the evening. The children and teacher confront this the next morning and wonder aloud what to do. The teacher calls the custodian to remove the cabinet but the custodian says it will be a few days before she has time. The teacher encourages the students to think of a way they could move it, using what they have been learning about force and motion.

The students read about how they can use a lever to move the cabinet. They then construct a 'simple machine' to do the job. They write out their process and put it into a book about uses of levers.

*You can read more about these activities in *The Reading Teacher* article, "Authentic literacy activities for developing comprehension and writing" by Nell K. Duke, Victoria Purcell-Gates, Leigh A. Hall, and Cathy Tower, December 2006/January 2007, pgs. 344-355.

**Keep it Real**

If teachers focus on creating realistic (to the children) contexts and needs, or functions, for reading and writing and then carry the process through to a real conclusion – like mailing letters to real people who will read them for real reasons, placing student-authored books in places where real readers will read the for real reasons, and so on – authentic literacy activity by the children will result. However, if teachers get side-tracked with some of the ideas that are presented to teachers as 'authentic', and these ideas involve fantastic, unrealistic, contexts, then the reading and writing that ensue will not truly be authentic. Such unrealistic activities include ones like asking the children to pretend that a Martian has landed in their backyard and asked
how to find the drugstore and their task is to write directions. Or to pretend they are a pencil and to write a story about ‘Jim the Pencil.’ While these might be seen as 'fun' and 'motivating' activities for children in school, they do not reflect the type of authenticity that research has shown to be highly related to children's literacy achievement.

**Identify teachable moments**

Most of us are familiar with the concept of ‘teachable moments.’ These are the special times in our classrooms when events converge to render a moment as especially ripe for the teaching and/or modeling of particular strategies or skills involved in reading and writing. These are unplanned moments. They usually occur when the students are involved in an activity and suddenly need a piece of information. Or they occur in the midst of lessons when suddenly the teacher becomes aware that what she is teaching is also relevant to other learning that her students have done. The teaching and learning that occur during teachable moments can be powerful. This is because we seem to absorb new information (or newly learned information) faster if we receive it *at the time that it is needed and immediately applied.*

The key to the success of responding to teachable moments lies, first, in the teacher’s ability to recognize when one occurs and, second, to respond appropriately. To respond appropriately involves knowing what the moment calls for and providing just what is needed at that time. To do this, teachers must be aware at all times of which skills and abilities the students are currently learning and which they need to acquire in the future.

Teachable moments can be very productive for authentic literacy instruction. As always, the key lies in the identification of the moment. Because authentic literacy revolves around real-life activities and needs, many of these moments relate to the lives of the students outside of
class. So teachers can be alert to children’s cues regarding their lives in order to look for openings for authentic literacy activity in the classroom. Following are some examples of how teachers responded to teachable moments with authentic literacy activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEACHABLE MOMENT</th>
<th>AUTHENTIC LITERACY ACTIVITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One kindergarten teacher, for example, was able to respond when one of her young charges shared that she and her family were going to celebrate the Chinese New Year with a large family dinner.</td>
<td>The teacher picked up on this and organized a lesson around writing invitations to a party for Chinese New Year. These invitations were sent to children in the first grade, who received them and responded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Another teacher, this time of third grade, recognized a teachable moment when a group of boys returned from recess with an injured baby squirrel that they had found on the playground.</td>
<td>The teacher responded by problem solving with the students as to the best course of action. She divided them into groups to find information about who to call to arrange for medical help for wild animals, to read and share information about the care of baby squirrels until they could be delivered to the appropriate agency, and to draw up a schedule for the care of the baby squirrel until help could arrive.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A second-grade student arrived at school one day with a broken arm.</td>
<td>The teacher focused discussion on this during group time and in the process pulls out a book on 'Bones,' finds a picture of a skeleton, and shows the children which bone was broken. This book becomes a favorite of the children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A group of third-grade girls showed the teacher a snake skin that they had found over the weekend.</td>
<td>The teacher wondered aloud if they would like to make a book about finding the snakeskin and place it in a center with the skin and other books about snakes that the children can read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The children read a book about making cookies.</td>
<td>The teacher suggested making their own cookies, reading and writing their own recipes to share with their friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One of the children was absent and the first-grade class learned that it is because he is</td>
<td>The teacher suggested that they write 'Get Well' cards and send them to their classmate.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
having surgery.

| A storm blew up outside the window, with bright flashes of lightening and loud rolls of thunder. | The teacher responded to the excitement (and fear for some children) with a discussion of the relationship between thunder and lightening. She solicited ideas and then turned to science books about weather to have groups read and report what they found in answer to the question, "Why does thunder and lightening always come together in a storm? Does thunder cause lightening? Does lightening cause thunder?"

| A boy arrived at school with a strange looking rock that he had found while camping over the weekend. | The teacher encouraged the boy and a group of friends to investigate books about rocks to discover what kind it is, specifically is it from a volcano (the boy's suggestion)?

| A new song had just been released and many of the second-grade children were excited about it. They had learned all of the lyrics and wanted to sing it for the teacher and the class. | The teacher suggested a 'show' and the children wrote out the schedule, issued invitations, and wrote the lyrics to several songs that they planned to sing. They gave the printed lyrics out to the audience to keep and sing with.

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**Authentic Contexts → Authentic Literacy**

Colleen Stebner is a Kindergarten teacher in New Westminster School District in British Columbia, Canada. She writes about the many ways that she was able to invoke contexts in her classroom that called for a rich variety of authentic reading and writing. Read her account, also, for the ways that beginning one type of authentic reading or writing can lead to many others.

**Guinea Pigs in the Classroom**

By Colleen Stebner
Creating Authentic Literacy Activities K-3
Chapter Three

Introduction

I teach in a mid-sized, school district situated in the Greater Vancouver Regional District, within one of the oldest incorporated cities in British Columbia. The many Edwardian and Victorian era homes, located throughout the city, serve as sentinel reminders of the past and are fondly preserved as part of its heritage. The nine elementary schools come together in the spring to celebrate the long-time tradition of May Day, again emphasizing the city’s connection to the past, as well as its strong sense of community.

Class/Community Description

The community surrounding our school has a small-town, close-knit feeling. Many of the families have lived in the area for generations, with several of my students’ parents having attended the school themselves. Our principal attended our school as a child, as did her own children!

The school’s population is socio-economically middle class and culturally diverse. While the majority of the students in my Kindergarten class speak English as their first language, I have a few English learners who speak Farsi, Arabic, Romanian, Spanish, Slovak or Mandarin at home. Our school also hosts a French Immersion program.

Learning About the Literacy Practices of My Students
In order to acquire a thorough and complete picture of the environmental print my children were exposed to and the texts in their homes, I visited many locations in the community and conducted interviews with several parents.

To determine locations in the community which were important to my families (to observe, takes notes and take pictures), the children and I brainstormed activities they enjoy and where they go to do them. I asked them where they shop for clothing and groceries and where they like to eat. I wrote the children’s ideas on chart paper under the headings *Activity* and *Location*. The children came up with lots of places for me to visit, including favourite restaurants, the local grocery store and several popular community activity locations (skating rink, swimming pool, park, gymnastics arena).

To get a sense of the texts in the homes of my children, I asked several parents to take pictures of anything and everything in their homes that they and members of their family read and write. I gave a few examples: newspapers, monthly bills, instructions—so that they would not just take pictures of books. I reminded them to include writing samples as well: lists or work brought home from the office. I asked each parent to provide me with a CD of about thirty pictures. I then conducted the interviews to determine, for each photograph, the kind of text, who read or wrote these texts, the social context and the purpose for reading or writing each piece. I recorded this information on a table I had prepared ahead of time.

As I researched the home and community literacy practices of my children, I, of course, uncovered a huge variety of texts read and written by my families. In the community settings I saw washroom signs, Exit and Entrance signs, Rules for the Pool, bulletin boards, menus, posters, and more. In the homes, I documented catalogues, cookbooks, newspapers, self-help...
books, novels, manuals, labels on clothing, print on videos, information books, grocery lists, personal letters, many more.

For purposes of the classroom literacy activities, I focused on children’s informational texts (guinea pigs), as well as labels, lists, letters and instructions. The activities below use these authentic, familiar texts of my children's homes, to teach some of the literacy skills emphasized in the Kindergarten classroom during first term (letter identification and concepts of print).

**Skill Pre-Assessments**

**Letter Identification**

I always administer a baseline assessment for letter identification for each child in October. I then do a recheck at each reporting period: November, February, and May. In mid October, after filling out the class assessment summary sheet for letter work, provided in Trehearne’s *The Kindergarten Teacher’s Resource Handbook* (Trehearne, 2001), I found a small group of children that could identify only a few letters. This would be a group with which to work intensively on letter identification. I determined the letters that were most commonly missed by the whole group (*b, d, f, g, h, l, q, t*) and planned to emphasize these in my whole group activities.

**Concepts of Print**

I used the Concepts of Print Observation Checklist, again from *The Kindergarten Teacher’s Resource Book*. It assesses 18 items, including *features of a book, opening a book, where to start reading, directionality, page turning, ending the reading, voice-print match,*
concept of letter and word, periods and question marks. I determined that almost all children needed work on concept of word, voice-print match, author, title, periods and question marks.

Let’s Get Started!

We have guinea pigs in our classroom. The children observe them every day as they wait to wash their hands for snack time. The children really love to watch them and talk about them. They ask lots of questions and some children would like to take them home.

Set-up

“Boys and girls, I have noticed that you have been asking me a lot of questions about our guinea pigs. I can tell that you are very interested in learning about how to care for them. Some of you have even asked if you can take them home for the weekends or on longer holidays. I could certainly use your help to look after our guinea pigs in the classroom as well. I thought we could ask our Mrs. Thomas, our librarian, if she might have time to look for some books about guinea pigs. First, let’s figure out what we already know and see if we have some questions we’d like to have answered.”

Authentic Literacy Activities and Embedded Skills Lessons

Activity # 1: Science KWL

What do we know about guinea pigs?

What do we wonder?

What have we learned?

I had the children dictate the things they know about guinea pigs and what they wondered, while I
recorded the information on chart paper. We left the ‘What have we learned?’ part to be filled out after reading about guinea pigs.

**Activity #2- Letter to the Librarian- Shared Writing**

I asked the children what we could do to let our librarian know we needed books about guinea pigs. One student said, “Lets write a note!” Another said, “How about a letter?” We talked about why we write letters (to send a message to someone who wasn’t right there) and what elements needed to be included in a letter (date, Dear Mrs. Thomas, the actual message, closing salutation, signature). The children dictated the letter as I scribed onto chart paper. I suggested the beginning sentence of the letter to get things going:

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November 6, 2006

Dear Mrs. Thomas,

As you may know, we have guinea pigs in our room. We would like to learn more about them. Do you think you could look in the library to see if you have any guinea pig books?

Thank you for your time!

Division 18
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After the letter was written, we reread it aloud together to make sure it made sense to everyone. “Have we said what we want to say?” We read it a second time (using a tracking stick). I drew the children’s attention to the many features, included in the text (periods, commas, question marks, exclamation marks, capitals). I asked questions like: “What is a word? What are periods and questions marks and what are they for?” We hunted for letters and then for words. I printed letters and words from the letter on large stickies and the children took turns coming up to make a match.
We put the letter in a big envelope, and our special helper delivered it to the office, where it could be put in the librarian’s box.

The librarian made a big fuss when she came to our classroom with the books! She said she could only find four books about guinea pigs, and that she could sure use some more!

I read one of the books aloud to the children right away, and read a couple more over the following week or so. I also made a trip to the public library where I was able to find a number of additional guinea pig books to put in the reading centre.

As I read each book we talked about title and author; “Where is the title of this book? Where is the author and what is an author? How is this book different from a storybook?”

One of the books we received from the library was a story about a guinea pig, rather than an information text. This gave us the opportunity to talk about how the two texts were different. We noticed that the storybook had drawings, rather than real photographs, and we learned more about guinea pigs, and their care, in the informational text than we learned in the story. One of the children said, “One is ‘real’ and one is make-believe and couldn’t really happen!”

And of course, we added information about guinea pigs to our KWL chart as we read.

**Activity #3- Labels**

We made labels for our guinea pigs’ names to put on the cage so visitors would know their names. This
could be a shared writing activity, with the teacher scribing, or it could be an interactive writing activity, where the children come up to the board to print what they think the spelling is. I chose interactive writing. I asked children to come up to write the letters they thought would make up the correct spellings for Talker and Pepper, as I ‘s-t-r-e-t-c-h-ed’ each name. We made corrections together with small stickies and I copied the correct spellings onto cards for the children to put on the cage.

**Activity #4- List of Supplies**

I placed all of the supplies that guinea pigs need on the floor. The children sat in a circle around the items. We talked about what lists are and why we sometimes need them. The children talked about grocery lists, chore lists and so on. I suggested that it might be a good idea for us to make a list of guinea pig supplies, to be kept on hand in the cupboard where the guinea pig supplies were stored, so that we would be able to check periodically to see if we had everything we needed or if we needed to replace anything. I suggested that this would be especially important if the guinea pigs were to go home with someone for the weekend since we would need to have a way to check that they had everything needed to take care of them. As the children called out the supplies they saw on the floor, I wrote a list on chart paper. I then transferred each item from the list on to cards. Volunteers taped the cards onto the inside of the guinea pig supply cupboard. We also made a label for the cupboard itself; “Guinea Pig Supplies!”

**Activity #5- Acrostic Poem**
Previously, in casual snack-time conversation, we had talked about how our two guinea pigs have different personalities. I suggested to the children that it would be fun to write poems about our guinea pigs, so that the families they stayed with and visitors to the classroom, would know them a little better. I introduced them to the format of the acrostic poem. Starting with Pepper’s name, I told the children that when we write an acrostic, we start by printing the subject’s name vertically. We then had to come up with an idea for each letter. When we were stuck, I prompted the children by asking questions or giving clues. “How would you describe Pepper? She always runs away. What does that mean? Oh! She’s shy!” This is what we came up with:

- **Pepper** is shy.
- **Eats a lot!**
- **Parsley** is her favourite.
- **Pizza, she doesn’t like.**
- **Even eats cauliflower!**
- **Runs to her cage!**

- **Talker!**
- **Always eats a lot!**
- **Likes to talk.**
- **Kale, she enjoys.**
- **Eats more than Pep!**
- **Runs in her cage!**

As we constructed the poems, we talked about periods, commas and exclamation marks: “What are they for?” I s-t-r-e-t-ched a few words to focus on the idea that letters are put together, in a special order, to make words. Over the next few days, we read our poems, tracking the words, until we had memorized them. Then we used our poems for a number of other activities to help develop the concept of word and voice-print match. I also took the opportunity to begin introducing sight words.
I made two copies of the Pepper poem on sentence strips. I placed one in the pocket chart and cut the other apart into individual words. I had volunteers come up to the pocket chart to track the print while the rest of us read it aloud. I showed the children the second copy and we talked again about what words are. I invited the children to come up to the pocket chart to match the words to make complete sentences out of the individual words. We reread the poem, to make sure it had been put back together correctly.

After reading the poem together, using the tracking stick, I talked to the children about how some words in our reading and writing, are used more often. “So, these words are really important to learn!” Our poems have several sight words (is, a, she, like, to). I chose ‘like’ and ‘to’ for this activity. I printed the word ‘to’ on the board, telling them it was the word ‘to’. I asked for a volunteer to come up and find ‘to’ in our poem. I gave them a strip of coloured, overhead
transparency plastic, so they could highlight it in the pocket chart. I then asked someone to come up and build it with magnetic letters. I told them I had a really good way for everyone to be able to remember these kinds of words, so they could use them in their writing. I taught them to chant and clap the spelling of the word (Tompkins, 2006): “To, to, t – o!” I followed the same procedure for ‘like’ and then put the words up on our word wall, suggesting to the students that they could look up at the word wall, if they needed these words in their writing. We practiced using ‘like’ and ‘to’ aloud in sentences.

I typed copies of our poems onto 8.5 by 11 inch paper and gave each child a copy. We got out our reading folders. This is where we keep other poems we know and also where we keep our individual tracking sticks—coloured popsicle sticks with a sparkly pompom on one end. The children ‘read’ their individual copies of the poem aloud, tracking the print themselves several times. I took this opportunity to check to see who could track accurately and who needed help. Next, I handed out highlighter felts, so they could highlight ‘to’ and ‘like’ on their own papers.

Remember those students who only knew a few alphabet letters? We got together several times for letter hunts, where I asked the students to look for letters. “Find the letter m.” Sometimes I wrote the letters on stickies and the students found the match and sometimes they simply circled or highlighted the letters. On a couple of occasions, I partnered them with more capable students. We used our poems (on chart paper, in the pocket chart and our individual copies) as well as our supply list and the KWL chart we had created together, for the letter hunts.

**Activity # 6- Our Own Information Book**

This activity was the most fun! I reminded the students that when we had originally asked the librarian for books about guinea pigs, she’d only had four books! “Mrs. Stebner had to go to
the public library for more!” I suggested that we could make our own guinea pig book, with all the information that we’d gathered. “We could keep one for our class library, keep one for going home on weekends with the guinea pigs, as they visit people’s homes and give one to our school librarian as a gift for our ‘big’ library!” I told them I would talk to our Grade Two and Three Buddies’ teacher, to see if they could come down to do the writing for us and then we could draw an accompanying picture together.

The children were really excited about this idea. Once we knew our buddies were available, we made a web- ‘Guinea Pigs Need…’ And everyone, with some teacher help, came up with a different idea. Our buddies were excited when they arrived, as well, because they would have an opportunity to hold the guinea pigs! All the students worked hard. The Kindergarteners dictated sentences to their Buddies and then all set to work on the illustrations. One of the older students suggested handing out the ‘real’ guinea pig books to help draw better pictures. They were busy for close to an hour!
Post Assessments

Letter Identification

When I did a recheck for those students who were struggling with identifying alphabet letters, I was pleased to find that there was a definite improvement for all seven students. One of my students went from a score of three to seventeen alphabet letters! Other students scored, on average four to five letters higher than before this mini-unit.

Concepts of Print

I re-assessed the whole class for concept of word, voice-print match, author, title, periods and question marks. I again found improvement. Most children scored correctly for author, title and periods. Two students that previously had not been able to match voice to print or 'show a word', were successful. Only one student indicated an understanding of a question mark, so this will be something to work on in the future.

Reflections

Generally, I felt that all of the activities went well. The children were very engaged, learning about something so hands-on. I did, however, notice at times that if the activity went too long, the children would start to lose focus. For example, when I transferred the items from the supply list to the labels for the cupboard, it got very wiggly. Interactive writing is a challenge as well, since it can be time consuming. It is best to keep the activities short for Kindergarten!
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For teachers who don’t have a classroom pet or don’t want to make a long term commitment, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals in many communities have fostering programs, where people can foster an animal or animals until a permanent home is found.

References


Chapter Four
Real-Life Texts; Real-Life Purposes

Looking Back at the Research

It is important that we are careful about how we define authentic literacy activity. If we are to base our belief in the benefits of authentic literacy instruction on the research (and we are!), then we must adhere to the definition of authentic literacy that was evaluated in regard to different literacy outcomes in that research. It was the relationship between comprehension and composition scores and this specific version of authentic literacy that showed a significant relationship: The more that teachers used authentic reading and writing in their classrooms, the higher the scores. If we alter the ways that we operationalize authentic literacy, then we cannot assume that this relationship will be the same. The scores on the reading and writing assessments may not be as high and may even be lower. There is no way to know for sure. So, in this chapter, we will revisit and expand upon the crucial elements of authentic literacy that were used in the research.

Texts and Purposes

Throughout the two research studies, we focused our definitions of authentic literacy on two elements of literacy practice:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{the texts people read} & \quad \text{and} \\
\text{the purposes for which people read and write those texts}
\end{align*}
\]

Text types and Purposes for reading and writing them go together
Text types and purposes go together. News stories are read to learn the news. Recipes are read to guide cooking. Store catalogues are read to think about and/or to order from. Personal letters are read to catch up on what's happening with a friend. To-do lists are read to guide doing something. It's the same with writing. Bank checks are written on to pay for something. Story books are written to provide enjoyment for a reader. Journals are written to reflect on life or particular experiences. And so it goes. Text type and purposes go together.

Ashley McKittrick, an elementary school teacher in southern British Columbia, responded to a teachable moment when one of her students suddenly moved from Canada. Soon her students were engrossed in writing letters to their classmates to express how sad they were that he was no longer with them. With the real-life text type of personal letters and the real-life purpose of writing such letters to a real reader, Ashley's students engaged in an engaging and productive authentic literacy activity. Read on to see how Ashley responded to her student's requests for real-life literacy in the classroom and at the same time advanced their literacy learning.

Loving Letter Writing

By Ashley McKittrick

The Community

I teach in a bedroom community outside of a major metropolitan area. It takes about twenty minutes in any direction to get to a city centre. The community was originally developed for cranberry farmers and factory workers in the surrounding areas. As development and
housing costs grew in the Lower Mainland, families moved to the area for lower-cost housing near a city centre. There are three specific areas of the community—the original detached homes dating back to 1950, the detached house phase of the early 1990s and the town home phase of the late 1990s to the present. Many of the older homes are being demolished and rezoned for town home construction and at present there are two new town home complexes being developed in the area.

In the past three years an outlet chain has been constructed about seven minutes away from the community. There is a Wal-Mart, Home Outfitters, Best Buy, Hallmark and several clothing and retail stores. This is where many of the families do their shopping. There are also a few fast food chains including a Tim Horton’s, A&W, and Taco del Mar. A Starbucks and sushi restaurant have been completed within the last month, much to the excitement of the community. Prior to this retail development, the only place to shop was a strip mall built twenty years ago that most families continue to use. It includes a Price Smart, where families buy most of their groceries, a bowling alley, a Greek restaurant, a Chinese food restaurant, a pizza place, a hair salon, a dollar store/post office, a video store, a dental clinic, a medical clinic, a laundromat and two vacant spaces. Before the construction of the strip mall, the only location for community activity for families in this area was another small neighbourhood that was a ten-minute drive or twenty-minute bike ride away. This nearby neighbourhood contains a restaurant/pub, community centre, and water park.

**Community Diversity**

In the 1950s the community consisted primarily of Indo-Canadian farmers and lower-income Caucasian families. There was also a large German immigrant population in the area.
At the community church there continues to be services offered in both English and German. Since 2000, many new immigrant families have moved into this area. The majority of these new immigrant families come from the Philippines, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Lebanon, the former Soviet Union, and Somalia. It is truly a multicultural community with no less than 20 countries represented.

**The School**

Prior to 1989, the school was a five-room schoolhouse. The new elementary school/community centre is now the centre of the community. Families spend most of their time chatting with friends in the foyer of the school/centre and putting their children into programs at the centre. The only library in the area is the school library except for two book trolleys where families can trade novels on a leave one/take one basis.

The socio-economic statuses of the families in the community range from working poor to middle-class. Many of the poorer families are on welfare and assisted living. The community centre offers support for families who need out-of-school-care. The occupations in the community include business, service industries and the public sector. There are a few families that can afford to have a stay-at-home parent, or a parent with a part-time job. The new outlet centre has provided many families with part-time job opportunities, allowing parents to be closer to their children. There are only a few families with parents who are in professions such as teaching, nursing and dentistry.

The school is made up of approximately 420 students with class sizes ranging from 22 to 24 in the primary grades and 30 in the intermediate grades. On average English as a Second
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Language students make up one third to one half of each class. There are over 20 languages represented in the school.

**The Class**

My class is a Grade 1, made up of 11 girls and 11 boys for a total of 22 students. The predominant language in the class is English; however, Punjabi, Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Farsi, Dari Persian, and Spanish are also represented. There are seven designated ESL students. Parents are actively involved in the class and most drop off and pick up their children from the classroom each day. It is a wonderful time to communicate with the parents about the activities their children are involved in. The class has a full-time Educational Assistant (EA) who works with two children. One boy has been diagnosed as severely developmentally delayed and the other boy has many social/emotional issues including anxiety disorder, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and anger management. Generally it is a very happy group of hard working students. The abilities of the students are typical of any grade one class where some students are reading and writing independently, and others are working on letter recognition and sounds.

**Literacy Practices in the Community and Home**

In order to gain a better understanding of the community and family literacy practices of my class, I gathered information in a variety of ways.

**Community Literacy**

My first step was to understand more about the community literacy practices. I spent a few afternoons walking about the community and observing literacy practices in action. Print in the community is mainly in the form of environmental print. At the strip mall and the “big box”
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retail chain stores there are signs and symbols everywhere for people to read. There are sandwich boards that stand outside the stores, newspaper dispensers, and posters that cover the fronts of certain stores. On a “walk-about” I saw families shopping at the Price Smart, some with lists in hand. I walked over to the Baptist church where I saw pamphlets, bibles, message boards, posters and bulletin boards with upcoming events posted, all for the community to read.

Having the school and community centre attached to one another provided another convenient way to gain information about community literacy practices. In the community centre/school, there were posted signboards posted, advertising baby-sitters, upcoming community functions, PAC (Parent Action Committee) meetings and out-of-school care programs. On the community centre board there was an advertisement for the Tai Chi class (a very popular class at the centre), written in Chinese. There were also many pamphlets put out by the city and school district about literacy and family programs. These pamphlets are put out in both English and Mandarin and occasionally Punjabi. Most of the texts found in the community were for advertising purposes and gathering information.

After walking around the community myself, I took my class on a community walk to see if they could identify environmental print. In groups of four, the children were to be “print-detectives,” and each had a clipboard and pencil to record any print that they saw. Each group had an adult with them to ensure student safety. We began recording as soon as we went down the school steps. The first group spotted print right away and recorded the SLOW DOWN sign written on the pavement of the driveway. The students continued recording environmental print as we made it to the strip mall. As the students acted as “print-detectives,” I would ask if they knew what a sign said, and if so, how did they know? It was interesting to see that many
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students could “read” the signs, but only a few could answer how they knew. Most of those who could answer said they knew what certain signs said because their parents had told them.

**Literacy in the Home**

To gain a better understanding of the families in my class, a survey was sent home to find out about the families’ literacy practices (see Appendix 1). The survey was optional and 14 out of 22 were returned.

In addition to the survey, I asked four families of different ethnic backgrounds to take pictures of texts in the home with either their digital camera or a provided disposable camera. Pictures from a Caucasian family, an Indo-Canadian family and Asian-Canadian family were returned. The photographs that I received reflected many different text types. Environmental print, such as cleaning products and groceries in the refrigerator were photographed most often. All families took pictures of bookshelves with a variety of storybooks, novels, magazines and manuals. Two of the families photographed religious plaques that were inscribed with sayings in their first language.

After going through the surveys and photographs, I noted that most families’ literacy practices revolved around correspondence such as letter writing and emailing, entertainment, daily living and gathering information. It was with this knowledge of literacy practices in the home that I was able to create an authentic lesson for my grade one students.

**The Lesson: Part One**

Flexibility! Flexibility and using teachable moments are key in authentic literacy learning. I had planned to do a lesson around letter writing as my authentic text genre and had a “set up” ready to go later in the week. I chose letter writing for the authentic text to use in my
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lesson because 11 surveys out of the 14 that were returned stated that letter writing was a literacy practice found in the homes of my students. Most of the ESL families surveyed wrote that they wrote letters to family members living in different parts of the world. I was going to have the students write an initial letter to find out what the students knew about letter writing, and then after going to a Robert Munsch play, write a letter to Robert Munsch.

However, on arriving at school on a Tuesday morning, I was informed that one of my students would not be returning to the school. When I told my students that Jason, a very well-liked and kind member of the class, would not be coming back, the students were very saddened by the news and the fact that they did not get to say goodbye to Jason. As we sat at the carpet, this is the conversation that occurred.

“Well boys and girls, I have some very sad news to tell you. Jason has moved away and is not coming back to our school.”

“Not ever? Not even to visit? I’m gonna miss him!” were the cries of the students.

“Ms. McKittrick, we should do something for Jason! Can we write him a card?” shouted out a little girl.

“Yah!” agreed another student.

“How about emailing Jason. We should send him an email!” cried out one of his good friends.

“Well boys and girls these are all great ideas. Unfortunately I know that we can’t send Jason an email because his family doesn’t have a computer. Could we do anything else for Jason to let him know that we are going to miss him?” I asked the students.

“We could write him a letter!” shouted out one little girl.
“Yah! That’s a great idea!” agreed a little boy.

“Boys and girls, I think that Jason would love to hear from us and know that we are thinking of him. I think your idea of writing him a letter is wonderful. But do you know how to write a letter?” I asked. “How about you write down all of the things you would like to say to Jason and then we will come back as a group and share your letters with the group?”

“Ms. McKittrick, could we write our own letters and then write a letter all together?” asked Rachel.

“That’s a great idea, Rachel! Let’s write our own letters to Jason, and then take all the ideas from your letters and write one big letter together!”

“Can we still send our own letters to him?” asked Nick.

“Of course, Nick! Jason would love to hear from you. Now boys and girls, we were supposed to be studying about “Spiders” right now. Is everyone alright with writing to Jason instead?”

A unanimous cheer for letter writing came out, which I was completely surprised by. My students love science and for them to give that up was truly amazing!

The students quickly returned to their seats, took out their pencils and got straight to work. I grabbed some paper from the writing centre, had the special helper of the day hand it out, and watched my grade ones get to work! I walked around the class and noticed who knew how to begin a letter, how to close a letter and those who did not. I let them write for about fifteen minutes and then gave them a two-minute warning. If they had finished their letter to Jason, I had them draw a picture at the bottom of the page. Many of the students could have kept on writing, but I wanted to bring them back together at the carpet to share their letters and to
write a class letter to Jason. One by one, the students came up and shared their letters with the class. It was completely optional, however all students were excited to share. (See Figures 2-4 for examples of student writing.)

After the students shared their letters, I asked them if they had noticed any similarities or differences between their letters to Jason. We brainstormed their thoughts on chart paper about what they knew about letter writing (Figure 5). The students were able to note that letters needed to start with a “To” or a “Dear” and the person’s name. They realized that in ending a letter they needed to put a “love” or “from” the person writing the letter. The students also mentioned the convention of saying nice things to the person receiving the letter and asking them questions. Some students thought that writing the date at the top of the letter was very important.

Although letter writing is a skill that is taught in the grade four curriculum, it was interesting to see how much they knew, as first graders about letter writing. I asked the students how they knew so much about writing letters and most said that they had seen their parents either
write or read letters at home. We finished our brainstorm and then used their recorded ideas to write a class letter to Jason (Figure 6).

Once we finished the class letter, I gave each student an envelope to decorate. The following day, students came with cards and pictures for Jason. We placed these in a large envelope, and I modeled how to address the letter so that it would reach Jason at his new school. I had already bought the stamps for the package and modeled where the stamps go on a letter. The class walked across the street to the mailbox and mailed Jason’s letter. Many students had never actually mailed a letter before so were very excited to do so. This experience prompted many of the girls to spend time in the Writing centre during Centre Time writing letters and cards to different people in their lives.

Figure 5:        Figure 6:

While letter writing was, in itself, a new skill for many of the children in the class, I had planned to use the authentic literacy activity to help students with the print concepts of capitals...
and punctuation. I have my students write in their Writing book three times a week, and I had noticed that many were using punctuation inappropriately, if at all, and were misusing upper case letters. Most grade one students need work in this area, and although many students in my class ‘knew’ that capitals are needed to begin sentences and periods end them, most did not have an understanding of what that really meant in practice. By using an entry in their Writing books and a copy of the students’ letters to Jason, I was able to assess what each student knew at the beginning of the letter writing activity and what I needed to teach them.

I usually teach the usage of upper case letters to begin sentences and periods to end them in a variety of ways, all of them involving my writing with mistakes and the students catching my mistakes. I do this with Morning Message and other texts I regularly write with the children.

But kids love anything new or different in the class. As part of their letter writing activity, I decided to show the students an example of a real letter that I had received from my grandmother, and how she used capitals and periods. I copied a class set of the letter and gave each student a highlighter—something that I had never done before with them. They were to act as “capital and period detectives” and highlight any capitals and periods that they found in my grandmother’s letter. After they completed the task, I had a copy of the letter on the overhead and we went through the piece together, finding all of the capitals and periods. At that point I asked the students if they noticed anything special about the capitals and periods. Some of the responses were that there were a lot of them! Others noticed that a period comes before a capital. One student pointed out that there were periods in the middle of a sentence. I asked the student to come up and show me what he had meant. The little boy pointed to the period that he was speaking about and explained that it was wrong because his understanding was that the
periods should come at the end of the line. I modeled for the class how it would have sounded if the periods came at the end of a line instead of at the end of a sentence. They thought that was hilarious! I was not sure how many would actually be able to do this on their own, but it was a great lesson for showing capitals and periods in an authentic context.

The Lesson: Part Two

The students had been working on a Canadian author unit on Robert Munsch. To end the unit we were going on a field trip to the play, MunschWorks, to see six of Robert Munsch’s books in the form of a play. After writing the letter to Jason, learning the components of letters and working on the concept of print skills, I planned to assess what the children had learned by having the class write letters to Robert Munsch. Hoping to make it an authentic experience, I had wanted the idea to come from the students. Thankfully, one of the little girls who had begun spending much of her time letter writing in the writing centre, came up to me and asked if the class could write letters to Robert Munsch, telling him how much they enjoyed the play. Yes, these moments of excellence do occur in teaching! I asked the little girl if she would mind sharing her idea with the class the next day and she was more than happy to do so.

The next day, as we were sitting at the carpet, the little girl asked to share her idea with the class. Most of the students were more than excited to write a letter to Robert Munsch. I asked the students to write their own letters because each student had his or her own favourite story; therefore, a class letter would not work this time. One student shouted out that he did not want to do this. I told the little boy that he did not have to write a letter to Robert Munsch but he did have to write a letter to someone he knew. In the end, the boy chose to write to Robert Munsch like the rest of his classmates. Before the students set off to write their individual
letters, I asked them to remind me what they needed to include in their letters. They identified
openings, closings, kind remarks and questions. I asked them also to remember to put in capitals
and periods where they belong, to help Mr. Munsch read their letters.

To help my grade one students, I wrote the names of the books we had read and seen in
the play and Robert Munsch’s name on chart paper. The students wrote for a minimum of
twenty minutes. I walked around the class and chatted with the student about their ideas but tried
to do as little assisting as possible. When the students were finished they drew a picture or
coloured the border on the paper. At the end of the day, I asked if anyone wanted to share the
letter they had written with the class. Most students wanted to, so I chose five students to share
their work with the promise that we would finish sharing the rest of the letters the next day.

As I went through the students’ letters to Robert Munsch, I noticed that most students
were trying to use capital letters and periods in appropriate places. There was a definite
improvement in this letter compared to the letter to Jason (Figure 9). However, I believed that
my students could do a better job at identifying where they needed to use the proper print
conventions, as their input during our skill lessons was not reflected in their letters. The next day
I had the students go through their work as “Print Detectives” locating where they should have a
period and where upper cases letters were needed. Having them go back to their work and focus
on periods and capitals made it much easier for the students to find their mistakes because they
were working on one skill at a time.

**Figure 9.**
Once the students had completed the letters and shared them with the class, I brought out envelopes for them. They were so excited to put their own letters into their own envelopes! I knew that with grade one students most printing would be too large to fit onto an envelope. Therefore, I printed address onto labels, and each student placed the address label and a stamp onto his or her own envelope to Robert Munsch. For the return address, each student use the school address stamp. I realized that I could use formatting of an envelope as my next authentic text lesson! The class walked over to the mailbox and each placed their own letter to Robert Munsch into the mailbox. We then waited to see if Robert Munsch will write back.

**Reflections**

Over a three-week period, my class worked on the skills of letter writing and the print skills of capital letters and end punctuation. Although we use many “school-based” activities to teach these concepts throughout the year, the authentic lesson was an excellent way of assessing my students’ growth, in such a short time. Some of the improvements worth noting are within
the examples in this document. In Jenna’s first piece she was experimenting with punctuation, but did not understand how to use punctuation appropriately. For example, she would place a comma between each word. In her second piece there were no commas, longer sentences and improvements in capitalization (ex: from). With Joshua’s first piece of writing there was only one period at the end of the entire piece and the capitals were used incorrectly. In Joshua’s letter to Robert Munsch, however, he began to use capitals, question marks and had an improved use of periods. Celia also showed improvements from her beginning assessment to final letter. In her first letter, Celia wrote short, stilted sentences that were only as long as the line. In her letter to Robert Munsch, Celia began the wrapping of sentences and using question marks, which was a pleasure to see.

It was apparent that my students really did benefit from reading and writing authentic text. My Writing Centre has never been as popular and the students are already asking if we can write letters to Santa.

Real-Life Literacy Defined

After conducting observations in the community in which your students live, and learning about the literacy practices within their homes (Chapter 1), it becomes easier to think about real-life text types and the purposes for which people read and write them. Key to this is the understanding that real-life text types go beyond the ones most people think of when asked about
what they read and write: books, newspapers, and magazines. For writing, many people insist that they don't do any writing, thinking only of essays, stories, and other 'school-type' writing genres. All literate people read and write a wide variety of text types

**Reading**

Here are some common texts and the purposes for which people might read them. Each of these texts has specific purposes for which it is read. In other words, it is not possible to take the purposes for one type of text below – say *book reviews* – and use it for another type – say *recipes*. Texts and purposes go together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>PURPOSE FOR READING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Horoscope       | To learn one's future  
                  | To be entertained   
                  | To satisfy curiosity about other signs                                           |
| Recipe          | To see what to buy before cooking  
                  | To follow to make a food dish                                                   |
| Weather map     | To check if it's going to rain today  
                  | To see what the weather is like in Hawaii                                       |
| Comics          | To follow the story of a favorite strip  
                  | To relax   
                  | To get a good laugh                                                           |
| Movie review    | To learn what the movie is about  
                  | To find out if the movie is worth seeing  
                  | To see if the reviewer's opinion is the same as mine                           |

**Writing**
For thinking about texts and purposes for the activity of writing, we also need to think about *audience*. For writing to be authentic in the classroom, children need to write to *real people* – *real readers of their writing who will read their writing for real-life purposes* – the purposes that go with the texts that they are writing.

Below are some real-life texts and the reasons (or purposes) that people might write them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TEXT</th>
<th>PURPOSE FOR WRITING</th>
<th>AUDIENCE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Store sign</td>
<td>To name the store</td>
<td>People shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To attract customers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shopping list</td>
<td>To note what you need to buy</td>
<td>Yourself or someone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To make sure you don't forget to buy something</td>
<td>shopping for you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order forms</td>
<td>To order something that you want or need</td>
<td>The people at the company that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>will take your order and send it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement for Tai Chi class</td>
<td>To solicit people for the class</td>
<td>People who might be want to take Tai Chi lessons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal letter</td>
<td>To inform someone you know about your activities</td>
<td>Friend or family member</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Again, purposes for writing a particular text type cannot be used for other text types. It would be silly to write a personal letter in order to order something, or to create an advertisement for an activity to note what you need to buy. It would not be authentic to write a personal letter in order to complete an assignment to a teacher who will read it to assess its quality. This is because the teacher would read the letter as an example of what you are able to do in regard to writing a
Creating Authentic Literacy Activities
Chapter Four

letter and not as a friend who is interested in hearing from you. The double arrows in the list above indicate the essential relationships among texts, purposes, and audiences for writing. Authentic writing in the classroom respects this relationship.

The model lessons all demonstrate how this relationship can be accomplished when planning authentic literacy lessons. Allison Jambor, in Chapter One, led her students to write the real-life text of a "To Do List" for the real-life purpose of remembering which center to go to on which day. These lists were written to themselves as the real-life audience and not to Allison, the teacher, to grade.

Sarah Loat, in Chapter Two, led her students to write recipes for chocolate chip cookies to help their friends make them at home. They did not write the recipes to display on the wall to show they could write recipes.

In Chapter Three, Marianne McTavish's students read a catalogue for the purpose of ordering a gift. This gift was ordered and received. If the children had only read the catalogue to learn the concepts of print that Marianne was also teaching, and had never ordered the gift, this activity would not have been authentic.

Colleen Stebner, in Chapter Three, led her young students in the writing of a letter to the librarian in response to a real need – the lack of books about guinea pigs, needed by the children to take care of their class guinea pig. If they had written letters to imaginary friends to display for their parents on back-to-school night, the activity would not have been authentic.

Ashley McKittrick, in this chapter, involved her students in writing a letter to a real classmate who had moved. They did this for a real-life purpose – to express how sad they were that he was not longer with them and to say goodbye. These letters were mailed to Jason – the
real life reader who would read them for real-life reasons – to hear from his former classmates and to see what they had to say to him. If these letters had not been mailed, the activity would not have been fully authentic.

**School-Only Texts and Purposes**

The texts that people read and write in their daily lives to accomplish specific purposes we call *authentic* when they are used in the classroom. The other category of texts that are also used in the classroom are those that are specifically written to aid the process of learning to read and write. These are called *school-only texts* to reflect this teaching purpose. These are texts like basal readers, spelling lists, phonics charts, word walls, and so on. The readers and writers of these texts – school children – read and write them for the same types of purposes: To learn to read and write. These are *school-only purposes*. School-only texts are needed in the literacy classroom. However, we need to know what makes a literacy activity authentic (real-life texts for real-life purposes) and what makes it school-only (texts written and read for the purpose of learning to read and write). Following are examples of authentic texts and purposes for reading and writing them and school-only texts and purposes for reading and writing them.

### EXAMPLES OF AUTHENTIC TEXTS AND PURPOSES & SCHOOL-ONLY TEXTS AND PURPOSES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authentic Texts</th>
<th>Purposes for Reading/Writing</th>
<th>School-Only Texts</th>
<th>Purposes for Reading/Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Books</td>
<td>To enjoy a story; to talk about with friends</td>
<td>Worksheet for tracing alphabet letters</td>
<td>To learn how to form the letters of the alphabet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Absence list</td>
<td>To note who is not in stories with</td>
<td>Stories with</td>
<td>To practice reading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Authentic Texts for School-Only Purposes

Sometimes teachers believe that using authentic texts primarily to teach skills is authentic literacy instruction. This is not true. For example, a teacher may bring in some examples of trading cards that young children collect. Trading cards are an authentic text. However, the teacher may then proceed to hand them out to the students and have them, in pairs, identify all of the capital letters as a prelude to teaching about the need to capitalize the first letters of people’s names and of sentences. While this may make the lesson on capitalization more enjoyable for the children than one that uses worksheets, it is in essence a school-only purpose and not an authentic one. Following are some common ways that authentic texts are often used for school-only purposes.

**AUTHENTIC TEXTS READ OR WRITTEN FOR SCHOOL-ONLY PURPOSES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authentic Text</th>
<th>School-only Purpose for Reading/Writing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cereal box text</td>
<td>Students find letters to cut out and put on a poster</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>Students read to answer comprehension questions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“But why is this bad?” some would say. Well, it’s not ‘bad’; it is just not authentic literacy. And the more that you include authentic literacy activities in your literacy instruction, the more your students will learn to read and write, according to our research.

**SAMPLE AUTHENTIC TEXTS AND PURPOSES FOR THE CLASSROOM**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text</th>
<th>Example Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>To plan expenses for a field trip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Catalogue</strong></td>
<td>To provide information about items to be sold by the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To solicit buyers of items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Greeting card</strong></td>
<td>To convey greetings to friends and family as related to a particular holiday or special event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>To-do List</strong></td>
<td>To structure or remind someone of what needs to be done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Short stories</strong></td>
<td>To create a collection for the library.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To enjoy during rest periods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Newspaper</strong></td>
<td>To document events at school for others who are interested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thank you note</strong></td>
<td>To thank a parent who has come to school to talk about her job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Store signs</strong></td>
<td>To create a class store where things are sold or traded</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advertisements</strong></td>
<td>To advertise products for the class store or for an upcoming event</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work activity forms</strong></td>
<td>To keep track of which centers one has completed for the week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personal letters</strong></td>
<td>To communicate with a favorite teacher who has moved from the school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Books</strong></td>
<td>Read to enjoy and talk about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Write to take home to read to a younger sibling; to add to the school library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Poems</strong></td>
<td>To create a book of class poems for the library; to sell at the class store; To read to get inspiration for one's own writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name tags</strong></td>
<td>To identify oneself for someone who doesn't know your name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sign-in sheets</strong></td>
<td>To indicate that one is present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Weather reports</strong></td>
<td>To read over the intercom for the entire school so all can know the day's forecast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instructions for caring for a pet</strong></td>
<td>To be sure that the caretaker will know exactly what to do so that the pet is ok during vacation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Script for a play</strong></td>
<td>Write so that actors can perform the play; read so that actors can memorize their lines for a play to be presented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Science information books</strong></td>
<td>Read to get information about something you need or want to know; write to add to the library so that others can read for information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creating Authentic Literacy Activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Four</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Procedures for an experiment</strong></th>
<th>Read to follow to do the experiment; write so that others can follow to do the experiment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recipes</strong></td>
<td>Read to cook something to eat; write for others to use when fixing a dish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Jokes</strong></td>
<td>Read to enjoy and learn new jokes; write to make a joke book that can be sold at the school fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shopping list</strong></td>
<td>Write to give to teacher's aide to use when shopping for materials for a class activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phone book</strong></td>
<td>Read to find the name and number of the animal shelter to find help for an injured bird</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Schedules</strong></td>
<td>Write to organize care of the injured bird or to organize use of the computer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Invitations</strong></td>
<td>Write to invite a speaker to the class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nutrition labels</strong></td>
<td>Read to learn how much salt is in the box of cookies that you want to use for a party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Computer interface text</strong></td>
<td>Read to access a computer program; Write to enter your password</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Award certificates</strong></td>
<td>Write for winners of awards at school or within classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Directional signs</strong></td>
<td>Write to direct visitors to the school or classroom to specific locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alphabet books</strong></td>
<td>Write to give to kindergartners or pre-schoolers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Calendar of the Year</strong></td>
<td>Write to sell at Back to School night</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Feature stories (e.g. of 'person of the week')</strong></td>
<td>Write to include in the class magazine or newspaper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Expanding the Textual Worlds of Your Students** |

*Adding to Textual Repertoires*

Not every child in a class will have the same experiences at home with different text types or genres. Children who come to school with experience of people reading newspapers but not children’s books can learn about the literacy practice of reading books to others. Other children who come to school with experience being read to but no knowledge of people reading to acquire information can add that textual practice to their repertoire. And so on. Our emphasis on using familiar literacy practices of the children does not mean that we are not also concerned as educators with expanding the repertoire of genres of our students. This, in fact, is one of the
essential roles of schools. Several activities can be employed to expand children’s textual worlds in authentic ways:

‘Print Shares’: Learning From Each Other.

A wonderful way to begin expanding the textual worlds of your students is to ask the children to bring to class something (or two or three things) that people in their homes read or write for a ‘print share’. With this assignment, you will have alerted the children to the fact that the literacy practices in their homes ‘count’ in school. You will also begin to open their eyes to the literacy activity that takes place all about them.

As the different text items are brought to school, you can place them about the room, labeled with the students’ names that brought them. Be sure that they are displayed at the right height for young children to see and to explore. Each day, as new items are brought in, ask the children who brought them to share with the class: What is it? Who reads or writes it? Why do people in their homes read or write that text? Encourage discussion about these texts as other students report that people in their homes read and/or write the same texts! Before long, your room will be encircled with a multitude of texts that the children know are read and written in the lives of somebody for real reasons and that they too can read and write them or can do soon ‘after I learn to read!’ A classroom filled with cereal boxes, books, phone books, magazines, DVD covers, grocery lists, calendars, TV program guides, coupons, Bibles, pamphlets, schedules, and so on is truly a classroom for literacy learning and literacy practice!


When it is time to introduce a new genre to your class, it is very important to provide models and to explore through discussion the function of the text and its features. This is always
true for a genre that none of the children know well, like yearbooks, as an example. However, it is also true for genres that only some of the children know. If only one child in your class is not familiar with a particular genre (like recipes, for example, or storybooks), then it should be modeled and explained in functional terms. Let me describe, as an example of this process, what one of the teachers I know did to begin an authentic literacy activity that involved greeting cards:

The time of year was Halloween in the United States. This is one of the most child-active holidays in that country. Children dress up in costumes, go to parties with Halloween themes, and trick or treat. Recently, it has become common for people to send Halloween greeting cards to friends and family.

Tapping in to this high interest event, this teacher gathered her second graders around her to begin a discussion of Halloween: What kinds of characters the children were going to dress up as; what they were going to do on Halloween night; what they liked and didn’t like about the holiday, and so on. In the process of this, the teacher asked if any of the children ever sent or received Halloween cards. No one raised his/her hand.

At this point the teacher brought out some Halloween cards that she had purchased in the store and showed them to the group. She talked about why people send them (as a gesture of friendship; to ‘be nice’ to grandparents; etc.) She said that she thought it would be fun to make some Halloween cards to send to friends and family. The children all heartedly agreed, shouting their ‘yeahs’ and ‘I want to send one to my Dad’ and ‘Let me see one!’

Riding the wave of this excitement, the teacher distributed the children around five centers at each of which about five different Halloween cards were laid out on tables. She asked
them to choose one card to look at while she talked. Using her own card as the model, and
drawing upon the children’s observations, she then pointed out the features of the cards: They all
had pictures that related to Halloween on the front; Almost all of the cards also had some sort of
saying related to Halloween on the front like “Boo!” or “The Great Pumpkin.” All of the cards
had some version of the greeting, “Happy Halloween” written either on the front or in the inside.
And they all had space for the sender to write a short message to the receiver. Following this, the
children were given construction paper folded into card shape, markers, pens, crayons,
Halloween stickers, glue and scissors to make their own cards. They did so with gusto. The
teacher had written the key words (like “Boo” and “Happy Halloween” and any other words that
the children could supply as being related to the holiday) on chart paper for the kids to use as
they created their cards.

When the cards were finished, envelopes were provided and a lesson ensued on
addressing the envelopes and affixing the stamps. They were then all mailed to their intended
receivers.

With this lesson, the children were involved in authentic reading (of the model cards and
their own writing) and authentic writing (of the cards, the personal messages within the cards,
and the addresses). The writing was rendered fully authentic by the actual mailing of them to the
persons to whom the children wished to send greetings.

Don't forget that new genres should always arise from an authentic context (Chapter
Two). This context of activity will call for reading and writing real-life texts for real-life
purposes. It is not authentic to simple begin a lesson on a new genre without first creating the
need for its use.
I invite you to read Andrea Beatty's account of an authentic literacy activity below that focused around writing invitations. Note how she ensured that all of her children understood the invitation genre, drawing on their own experiences with invitation, modeling the genre, and talking aloud about the features and purposes of invitations.

RSVP: An Invitation

By Andrea Beatty

As I walk around my Kindergarten classroom, I observe children busy at work making hats and props for our play The Little Red Hen. Tomorrow is our little play and open house on our thematic topic, farming. The children are excited for their parents, grandparents and family friends will come to see their work and watch our play that we have been practicing the last few weeks. Invitations were hand-made by the children and sent home the previous week and we had
the list of people coming for our writing audience. The idea for this activity came from my investigation of the literacy practices in the children's homes and community.

Background Information

My school is situated in a suburb of Metropolitan Vancouver. The suburb is predominantly a detached residential area and the majority of the residents are upper-middle class families and retirees. There is a downtown area in the suburb, which consists of a mall, several businesses and apartment buildings. However, the community in which the school is located is about twenty minutes west of the main downtown area in a quiet neighbourhood of detached houses. It is surrounded by a creek and small forest and is near a variety of recreational facilities, such as a local ski mountain, which is a twenty minutes drive up the mountain, and a small public beach. Across the street from the school are a grocery store and a locally owned and operated garage. A small outdoor mall and high school is located about ten minutes away. The outdoor mall provides a variety of amenities to the community, such as a grocery store, produce store, Starbucks, dry-cleaning, dental services, video store, art gallery, and pasta restaurant.

The school is in a small public primary school, consisting of three classrooms from Kindergarten to grade three with a population of fifty-five students. There is also an attached, but privately-run preschool located within the building. Overall, the parent population is highly involved in various activities throughout the school from fundraising to volunteering in the classrooms.

My Kindergarten class has 19 children, ages four and five. The dominant language spoken in the classroom and in their homes is English, although there are three other languages spoken at home: Indonesian, German, and Cantonese. The majority of the students in the
classroom are from upper middle-class families. There are a range of abilities within the classroom, including one child with autism and another with a mild language delay.

**Community Literacy Practices**

In order to learn more about the students, to support their literacy learning and to design authentic literacy instruction, I needed to acquire information about the home literacy practices. I sent home a notice to all the parents, asking them to record what kinds of written text they used in their homes, how frequently they used each text and for what purpose (entertainment, daily tasks, work etc.). I also asked the parents in my classroom to record what language they speak at home. The survey was optional. I provided a paper to record their information and I also invited them to take pictures as well. (See Letters Home Appendix)

The results of the survey indicated that there were a variety of texts within the student’s homes and that a few texts were more widely used than others. Those most commonly mentioned were: grocery lists, to do lists, story books, newspapers, calendar, email, documents, bills, school forms, magazines, recipes, cookbooks, internet, letters and cards (invitations were included in this grouping).

I also wanted to get a sense of what kind of print was in the community and the uses of print in that environment as well. I wanted to experience what my students were observing outside of their homes. I visited the corner store and local garage across the street from the school and the small outdoor mall, about a ten minute drive away. I walked around the stores and services and took notes on the kinds of written text I observed. I also situated myself in a place where I could observe and record how people were interacting with the print in their environment.
In the mall, I saw a variety of signs (OPEN, Hot deals, Business hours, prices), sandwich boards (Subway specials, Safeway Now Hiring), menu boards (Starbucks, Safeway Deli, Pastameli’s) and a community bulletin board. The paper on the board advertised mostly health and fitness programs (boot camp, ballroom dance, Squash Club, Weight Loss Challenge) as well as instrument lessons (Cello and Piano Lessons), along with a Family Daycare, Cleaning Service and an advertisement for Miss Teen Canada Pageant.

Most of the print observed at the mall was used to advertise various prices, to indicate if the store was open, as well as what time their business was open. While observing people at the mall, I noticed that people were reading signs to know the price of items and to decide what to order to eat (Starbucks and Pastameli’s menu boards). The Community Bulletin Board was interesting to me as well because of the amount of advertisements for fitness and health programs. I believe the advertisements posted reflect the interests and needs of the community a great deal. I also took all of my observations and conclusions into consideration when reflecting about how we use print in our daily lives and how I could structure my classroom accordingly.
In addition to the survey and community walk-about, I asked the children as part of our “special helper” sharing time, to bring in “something people read or write in your home.” Each child is the special helper for one day and on that day they were invited to bring to school and talk about this specific sharing item. We recorded the item on a list and I drew a picture of that item (taking a picture would be more effective. It could be put together as a class book to read in the classroom and take turns taking home). After talking about the item, the other students in the classroom were invited to comment and ask questions about it. I introduced this activity to them by bringing in a newspaper and my pocket agenda/ calendar from my home. This was a great idea! This elicited a discussion around what kinds of print was in their homes. The children were very excited in anticipation for their special helper day and were already beginning to think about what kinds of things people read and write in their home.

**Authentic Literacy Lesson**

**Why invitations?**

I chose an invitation for this lesson for a variety of reasons. The students had already been exposed to this text several times so far that year. In its exposure, it had a real purpose for a real situation. Birthday invitations had already circulated my classroom a few times, a Halloween party invitation was delivered as well and invitations were listed on the home literacy surveys.

More importantly, the need for an invitation arose in our classroom in a natural way. Introducing the students to the purpose of invitations began with a theme on farms that we had been studying. The children had learned about what kinds of farms there are in Canada and what products we receive from them. We culminated our unit with a field trip to a local farm and
Creating Authentic Literacy Activities
Chapter Four

connected our learning to children’s literature. During the reading of *The Little Red Hen*, some students suggested that they wanted to do a play. I therefore suggested to the class that we could share our work on the farm with our parents and perform a Little Red Hen play. The response was unanimous in favour of inviting our parents into our class to watch our play, and so the context was set.

**Class Activities**

*Why do we need an invitation?*

Finishing our work on the farm unit, we set a date for when we wanted our parents to come in. As a class, we looked at our class calendar to decide on a day to *invite* our parents into our class. I used the chart stand to record our decisions on the date, the time and the place and I recorded this print in the correct format of an invitation.

As I wrote and elicited ideas from the class, I talked about how and why we write the date and time and why we need to include the place (ie. so people know where to go). I then asked the children, “How will the parents find out about when and where our play will be?” I had various responses, such as put it in a notice (which was a good idea and I did include it in our next newsletter), or put it on the door (our class door has become our parent notice board). A few suggested an invitation. I emphasized the fact that we wanted every parent to feel like they were personally invited, and that an invitation was personal and would make sure everyone knew they were invited. I concluded my lesson with the question, “Does anyone know what an invitation looks like?” Some responses were “It has stamps on it” and it says “Happy Birthday.” (I used the responses as a pre-assessment tool) I concluded that lesson by letting the class know that I would bring in a real invitation to share.
Do you have invitations at home?

The following day I showed the class a few invitations that I had collected from home (a wedding invitation and an invitation to a one-year-old’s birthday party). When discussing the purpose of the invitations, I emphasized the purpose: The invitation let me know that I was invited to an event and that the print inside the cards told me when and where the event took place. I also asked the class “what is the difference between a card and an invitation?” This was a very important discussion for some, because they had assumed that they were the same. I made the distinction clear, that an invitation was for an event to which you are asking them to come; a card is sent to bring greetings, congratulations or get well to other people. My final instruction for this day was to ask the children if they could look at home over the next few days and bring to school invitations that they had at home.

What does an invitation look like?

As the children brought in their invitations, they described what the invitation was for, who it was for and when the event took place. Most of the invitations brought in were intended for birthday parties, however we had one invitation for a show and one for a Halloween party. I collected all the invitations for a follow-up activity.

I wanted the children to have a hands-on look at all the invitations (by this time, I had collected a few more from colleagues), so the following day I spread them all out around the classroom and let the children walk around, pick up and look closely at them. I gave all the students some guidance and direction during the exploration. They returned to our meeting area after their exploration time to share two things that they saw on the invitations.
As the children came back to the meeting area, they shared what they found with a partner. After all had returned, we had a discussion about the features of invitations. Some were able to tell me that names were on the invitation, and I probed for them to tell, or show me, where on the invitation, the names were located. Some students recognized that there was a time on the invitations, and some students discovered there was a phone number on the invitations (next to the initials RSVP). Moreover, we came to the conclusion that an invitation needed to have a picture on the front, some text explaining what it was for, who it is addressed to at the top, the time, place and whereabouts of the event, RSVP information, and who it was from at the bottom. Next, I used the chart stand to record what our invitation to our open house and play needed to have.

Including High Frequency Words

As part of this activity, I was also interested in using an authentic text, such as the invitation, to develop a lesson that would introduce a specific literacy skill. As a Kindergarten teacher, I understood that most often the first word children learn to read and write is their name. We had spent the first few months of the year practicing to read and write their name with
various activities. I also recognize that children were somewhat familiar with the words *mom* and *dad*. These were all words that had meaning and use in their lives. I wanted to begin to develop a small bank of high frequency words that were somewhat familiar to them and that they were going to use for real purposes. I added the words *to*, *and* and *love* to the list of words that I was going to introduce to them.

Before I designed my activities around the high-frequency words, I was assessed the children for who was able to read and write the words already. As part of my initial alphabet and concepts of print assessment that I administer to all the children, I added a section on these high frequency words. The results suggested that developing some activities around mastering these words would be beneficial to most of the children.

I began the lesson with the chart stand where I had previously recorded the words in the context of an invitation. We played an eye spy game with Wikki sticks (sticks made with a sticky material that blend and stick to various materials. Plasticine works well too). The game is played with the teacher calling out the word and choosing one student to come up to the chart stand to place the Wikki stick around the word. The reason behind doing this was to take a closer look at each of the words by looking at what letters were in the word, observing whether it was a long or short word and practicing to segment and blend the sounds in the words (*m-o-m* = *mom*).

To ensure that all the students had some practical experience with learning the new high-frequency words (*mom*, *dad*, *love*, *to* and their name), I organized a few centres around the classroom that gave them practice recognizing, reading and spelling them. Some of the centres included a rainbow letter centre where students...
each word 3 times with smelly felts, a stamp centre where students could use the alphabet stamps to stamp out the high frequency words (each word was stamped on a flashcard and their name was stamped on the envelope, so they could take the envelope home to use), a white board centre and a Wikki Stick centre (you could also use pipe-cleaners, play dough or plasticine), where they could shape the sticks into the words.

Making the Invitations

The following day we were ready to make our invitations. I cut out card-shape paper from manila tag and prepared some of the text for the students to glue in: You are invited to our Farm Open House and Little Red Hen Play, along with information on the date, time and place and RSVP. I reviewed with the students what needed to be included in an invitation and we looked at the chart stand with all the information and read it together. I showed them their manila card and talked about where the picture and text needed to be. Along with drawing a picture about the farm and Little Red Hen, students needed to write who it was addressed to (To mom and dad) at the top and record the word love and their name at the bottom, on their own. At the end of the day, the children passed their hand-made invitations to their parents with excitement.

Follow-up and Assessment

I wanted to assess the impact of the activity on whether they could read and write the words mom, dad, to, love and their name and whether they understood the purpose and format of an invitation. I spent a few minutes with each child, assessing whether they knew how to write and read the words. The tasks were the same as for the pre-
assessment. The results were positive for both assessments.

To evaluate whether the children had really understood the purpose of an invitation and whether they remembered that the format of invitations, I began with asking the question to the class: “What is an invitation?” I then asked, “What do you see on an invitation?” After a discussion about the contents and purpose of invitations, I let the class know that they were going to make their own invitation to take home. I asked the class what kinds of events could you make an invitation for? I gave a few examples, like inviting someone over to play or a relative over to their house for dinner. I recorded all of their ideas on the chart stand. Next, they were instructed to make a choice about what they would like to make an invitation for. I told them that they needed to write who it was addressed to and who it was from. I would help them, by scribing, write their message inside. Each child received a piece of coloured paper folded in half to create their invitation. As they were working on their invitations, I circulated and began scribing their ideas on their invitation. I prompted their ideas with such questions as “where is this going to happen?” and “when is this going to happen?”

![Image of invitations]

**Reflections**

My students were thrilled to give their hand-made invitation to their parents and were excited about creating their own invitation as well. They discovered that they were “real readers
and writers.” By connecting their personal world to literacy activities that were intended for real readers with real purpose, students were able to explore the roles that literacy plays in their lives.
Chapter Five

Skills and Authentic Literacy Instruction

Authentic literacy in the classroom does not preclude the systematic and explicit teaching of the skills and strategies that young learners need to learn in order to become fluent and effective readers and writers. Authentic literacy is not a full literacy program in itself. It is always meant to work alongside the intentional teaching of reading and writing skills to young learners. On the other hand, authentic literacy is not to be taken as 'supplementary' to literacy instruction, either. Literacy skills increase in concert with students' engagement with authentic reading and writing. In this way, it is instructional in itself. However, I do not believe that it can be instructional by itself. The effective literacy teacher must always include explicit and systematic teaching of skills in her instruction.

Tazmin Manji's authentic literacy lesson is a nice example of the melding of skills instruction and authentic literacy. Read on to learn what happens when a teacher discovers previously unknown literacy practices in the community on which to build skill lessons as well as to engage her students in real-life reading and writing.

For Sale": Community Brochures for New Kids

By Tazmin Manji

The Neighboring Community

Located on the outskirts of Vancouver’s central urban area, the school in which I teach is approximately one hour away from the hub of downtown Vancouver. In spite of the geographical
distance, this rural community reflects many similar characteristics of any urban community within the Lower Mainland of British Columbia: It is highly culturally diverse and it is developing rapidly, with schools and neighborhoods in a constant state of new development.

**My Classroom Makeup**

The eighteen students that make-up my split grade one/two class come from two-parent families. Socio-economically, these families range from middle-class to affluent. Five out of eighteen children (of Korean descent), have English-speaking fathers who work in the Asia-Pacific market and therefore travel between Asia and Vancouver quite frequently. Parents of the thirteen remaining children are employed either in the business sector, education, or fine arts. Culturally, of these thirteen children, one child is of East Indian descent; another child is of Caribbean and Caucasian descent; another is of Spanish descent (she is also beginning to learn English); another child is of Filipino descent; two children are of Korean descent (one of whom is an English Language Learner); another child is of Russian descent; and those remaining are of Caucasian descent.

**Broadening my Community Experiences**

As I began my attempts to learn of the literacy practices in the community, I noticed how this residential neighborhood was complimented by its close proximity to coffee shops, bus stops, markets, insurance agencies, and dental/medical offices. In addition, mega-size stores (Home Depot, Staples, The Brick, Super Store, Wal-Mart, Save-On-Foods, Costco) were adjacent to the neighborhood, and ethnically diverse restaurants, (fast food, diners, and fine-dining places) were equally accessible by bus routes or private transportation as were the local library and shopping malls. It was incredible at just how much environmental print my students and their families were surrounded by!
In efforts to broaden this encounter with the community, I decided to spend some time being actively engaged in it. I had coffee at Starbucks (noting the menus for coffee and the print on the labels for food offerings) and visited the library. I also took photos of how literacy was present and abundant in the community. For example, an elaborate message board was present in the pediatric dentistry office in the neighborhood.

I felt that it was now time to invite my students for a "Literacy Hunt." I explained that I would bring my camera along so we could take some pictures. Their excitement was
clearly evident as we moved to writing a class permission form for our first field trip! This, of course, constituted an authentic literacy activity with a real life text (permission form) for a real life purpose (to obtain permission from parents to go on the field trip).

As we ventured off on our walk, students immediately started reading the first texts they saw, *For Sale* and *Sold*. I could not believe how many realtor signs were posted in this area! Other texts included addresses, signs within the schools, mailboxes, and print written on the sidewalk (e.g., *B.C. Hydro*). As we walked further, the excitement grew as they began to point out logo signs such as Mac’s, Starbucks, T.D. Canada Trust, Ralph’s Market, Esso, Tim Hortons, Subway, and Alpha Courses (from a Christian Church). We also saw several signs for lost pets and garage sales.

Because these texts contained more print, students were much more engaged and curious about the information. In fact, one of my male students, who reads at grade level but is quite
often reluctant to read, took great pride in reading these texts to the class! This was truly an important event for him.

As mentioned earlier, I was mystified at the number of realtor signs, so I thought it would be a good idea to use these texts as a numeracy assessment. More specifically, I was curious to know if my students could “see” math in the real world. To investigate, I posed the question, “Does anyone see any math in the neighborhood?”

“No” was all I heard. Thinking that their perception of math may be limited to number problems, I decided to probe a bit further by asking a more specific question. I asked if they could see any numbers in their neighborhood. The responses began to flood in as students pointed out phone numbers from realtor signs and posted speed limit signs. I also had one student point out a speed limit sign that read 60 km/hr, but she read the number as a six and a zero! What an authentic piece of assessment! Another revealing moment was when I asked how many houses out of 5 were sold (these were four posts with one sold sign). Interestingly, the students read both sides of the sign not as one sign repeated but as two different signs, and decided that two houses had been sold!

This field trip proved to be invaluable for me, as I had gained quite a bit of information about my students’ awareness of literacy, and some areas in which I could now plan instruction. For example, I noticed that many of my students had trouble elaborating on signs that contained phrases/ clauses. This perhaps could be due, in part, to limited vocabulary. Another observation was that some of my students were pointing out phonics patterns and parts of words they
recognized; thus, turning the activity into a phonics or decoding lesson. Lastly, it was clear that reading the realtor signs was a text that they were unfamiliar with even though they were surrounded by these texts on a daily basis.

**Involving the Family**

I sent a questionnaire home to all the families, titling it “Home Literacy Hunt”. Along with the questionnaire, I enclosed a mention about the fact that students were surprised to discover that “reading” encompassed environmental print, and how students would be in charge of teaching the families about this hunt. This was a good lead into helping expand parents’ perceptions of reading (that reading implies more than books). As expected, there were a lot of similarities with the texts found within these homes. Responses included everything from daily living routines, entertainment, sales, shopping flyers, school-related, work, and religion.

The differences between families were in the languages these texts were written in. What struck me was that the majority of my students used the computer to surf the web but only those students whose father’s were out of town, used the computer as a writing tool-- for e-mail.

**Connecting the Pieces**

To plan an authentic literacy lesson, I took some time to reflect upon the information I gathered from both our school and home experiences. To begin, I thought about the events that captured me and how they related to my student’s present lives. For instance, the numerous realtor signs piqued my interest! Moreover, it is especially interesting how this particular text lends itself towards a landscape encompassing this neighborhood. Many of my students had either recently moved to this school and/or neighborhood or were in the process of moving to the neighborhood. Through the ‘Home Literacy Hunt”, I also noticed that many families reported having realtor flyers sent to them in the mail. Given that this was a text found in their homes and
the community, I centered my theme on the neighborhood community. This was also advantageous as it naturally integrated with my Social Studies learning outcomes.

As part of this activity, I decided to also focus on the literacy skill of phonics, through a word study approach. With this instructional focus in mind (phonics and learning about the community), I now thought about an authentic text for this lesson. As we were going to be learning about the neighboring community, it seemed natural to have students create a brochure (informational text). However, I still had to find a real audience for this text.

Luckily, a realtor had dropped by the school to donate a pumpkin to each class. Given that he was familiar with the neighborhood, I called him and asked if he would be interested in talking to my class about his profession while also addressing inquiries about the signs themselves. I then went on to ask if he would “stage” a request to the students. Specifically, I suggested that it would be advantageous to have student’s create a brochure for children of similar ages who may, potentially, move into the neighborhood. With some laughter he agreed, and we decided upon asking the class to design a brochure explaining why they think other children would like to live in this neighborhood. By addressing the request in this manner, we would be sure to have the children’s point of view on the subject matter.

The day had finally arrived for our realtor visit! The students and I were quite excited about having a realtor in the classroom! It was fascinating to see them connect ideas from the Literacy Walk to the classroom. Some of
their comments included, “We saw that same board outside!”; “We saw your name outside!”;
“We have a realtor, too!” After a long interactive discussion, the realtor’s request was finally
shared. To add to the excitement, our “classroom realtor” decided that a prize would be given to
the group who designed the best brochure! These students could not wait to get started,
especially knowing that their brochures would be read by other prospective children moving into
the neighborhood! In fact, they were especially keen to pursue this task upon receiving the
information that their brochures would be posted on the realtor’s web page!

Instructional Planning

To keep my instructional focus at the forefront, I decided to assess where my student’s
spelling development was so that I could individualize their learning. To do this, I used the
Primary Spelling Inventory by Bear, Invernizzi, Tempelton, & Johnston (2004). This information
helped me plan for explicit word study lessons. Assessments indicated that a handful of my
students were Letter Name spellers (ranging from middle to late), while many others were
Within Word Pattern spellers (early to late). It was my expectation that students would have a
chance to practice specific word patterns as they planned for their brochures.
To do this, I asked my students to bring in their candy wrappers from Halloween. We also discussed the types of candies, along with other items, that could be purchased from Mac’s local convenience store, so that students could keep a focus on the topic for the brochure. I then “leveled” the candy wrappers according to their spelling results.

For guided practice, students mapped out a web (as part of the writing process) to brainstorm what children would love to purchase from Mac’s. In doing so, they had the opportunity to practice these spelling patterns in meaningful contexts. Using the brochure, students also had the opportunity to write about Starbucks and once again, they practiced spelling in meaningful contexts. As part of my post-test, I assessed to see if students had mastered the specific patterns taught.
What’s Community Again?

Unfortunately, Mother Nature had interfered with our learning. Following an atypical snowstorm, many instructional days were missed due to power outages and extreme weather conditions. As it had been a couple of days since students had the opportunity to engage in Literacy Centers, I decided to do a “temperature check” to assess students’ understanding of community so that I could plan for instruction. I asked my students to write about their community by responding to this open-ended topic, “Tell me about your neighborhood” and we first brainstormed events that occurred during the Literacy Hunt. Given that we had gone on a Literacy Walk, gone on field trips through the community, and written and orally discussed our community, I expected that students would have no problems in responding to this topic.

To my surprise, however, things looked a lot different than I had envisioned. The first comment that caught my attention was, “What’s community again?” Secondly, as I read through the responses, I realized that many of my students were either listing places found within their community without adding any details, or they had not made connections to classroom discussions relating to the topic (their ideas and information were irrelevant). “Why?” It quickly struck me that I had not prepared my students for writing the actual brochure. More importantly, my instructional focus (phonics/decoding) was not sufficient for the task. Yes, the task itself was authentic in that students were writing for a real purpose. However, without an understanding about the topic, would it be possible to write about it in a brochure? Needless to say, this assessment was now my new pre-test.

After recuperating from the initial shock, I realized that if I wanted my students to be successful at this task, I would have to expand my instructional focus. I decided that a focus on vocabulary and comprehension, through discussion, would support the writing of the brochures.
To do this, I used brochures from my students’ favorite places for a read-a-loud. This was especially meaningful as students were reading these brochures during silent and partner reading. Along with the read-a-loud, I chose three vocabulary words to have a conversation about.

I used the Text Talk framework (Beck, L., McKeown, G.M., & Kucan, L. (2003). Text Talk focuses on teaching vocabulary from texts that are read aloud to children rather than being read by children. This particular strategy attracted me since my students were reading these same brochures to each other and to themselves, but with limited comprehension.

In addition, students also had the opportunity to make schema connections to these words, thereby strengthening their understanding of community. For instance, after an interactive discussion about the words, students were asked if they could think about text-to-self or text-to-world connections. Probing questions such as, “Have you ever had a scrumptious tasting pizza with all the trimmings before?” often sparked all students to share. This strategy was especially important for students who were English Language Learners as they had time to conference with a partner during “think-pair-share”, as well as time to hear other responses before sharing.

After each oral session, students were asked to use some ‘delicious” words in planning their brochures so that they could practice applying these words in a different context. These “delicious” words were posted around the room for access. It was during this time that I could work individually with students to do some formative assessments. As well, to continue assessing my student’s on-going learning, I wrote these delicious words on slips of paper and placed them in a basket. At various points during the day, I would simply call out one of the words and have students use it in a sentence. This informal assessment allowed me to keep track of students who needed extra support with vocabulary development.
Assessment

For the post-test, I had students do a writing response for the same topic they had initially written about for the pre-test. “Tell me about your neighborhood community.” I assessed student’s writing by using the B.C. Performance Standards Rubric (Writing to Communicate Ideas and Information). More specifically, I looked at the meaning strand (ideas and information; use of detail), to assess the following; (a) Does the writing provide accurate and basic information based on class discussions? and (b) Does the writing include specific details related to the vocabulary words discussed in class?

Results

Students, in a very short period of time, demonstrated growth in both their understanding of community and their ability to communicate these ideas onto paper. For the most part, these sample assessments indicate the varying depths of response from the pre-test to the post-test. For
example, pre-test assessments included more recounts than a sharing of information. This is an important factor in that informational texts, such as brochures, are often read by an audience to gain in-depth information about a topic. Recall, students were asked to state reasons why other kids would like to move into this community. The post-test assessments indicated that the students applied their knowledge of language and understanding about the topic to write in a persuasive manner. They did this by adding vocabulary, specific details and information related to the topic.

Students were now prepared to write the brochure! Needless to say, many Writers’ Workshop hours were spent creating and designing the brochures. To keep the momentum alive and allow for a time frame, we decided to have a countdown to the official deadline day. The days passed, and the final celebratory moment finally arrived! Each students’ efforts were graciously acknowledged by the realtor (he gave each student a stuffed toy). Next, brochures meeting the criteria (detailed language and vital neighborhood information) were chosen for the web page. The class celebrated everyone’s success! This moment truly reflected a community of its own!

**Final Thoughts**

Designing effective authentic literacy instruction in classrooms needs to involve the students. This became clear to me the moment my students became part of the process. Reflecting back to our Literacy Walk, I realized that on several occasions, my eyes were shut to what students could see in their neighborhood. Moreover, as I continued to operate with my focus, a mismatch between my teaching and students’ learning began to surface. However, by reflecting upon this information and listening to their voices, I, in turn, was able to plan for purposeful and authentic literacy instruction that made sense to the students. In doing so, I
helped my student’s learn and conceptualize, in real and meaningful ways, the skills that I, as a practitioner, needed to impart.

Skills, Strategies, and Authentic Literacy Activity

Authentic literacy activity in the classroom can be a part of any type of literacy curriculum, whether it is considered primarily skills-based, balanced, or holistic. Following are some types of skills/authentic literacy relationships that can occur across a broad spectrum of models of early literacy instruction. Note that systematic teaching of beginning reading and writing skills and strategies requires a “skills curriculum,” and the ability to respond to teachable moments requires a deep knowledge of which skills and strategies are required for which phase of literacy development that students are in. It is not the purpose of this handbook to provide detailed information about how and when skills and strategies should be taught. However, for the convenience of teachers who wish to use this handbook to plan lessons, we have included several lists of approved scopes and sequences of early reading/writing skills in the appendix.¹

Following are some suggestions for ways that teachers can meld skill instruction and authentic literacy within their literacy programs.

Coaching

Many educators have incorporated skill teaching into authentic literacy activity by using the coaching metaphor. This metaphor works especially well in one-to-one teacher/student situations, and I have used it successfully in university-based clinics with students experience
difficulties learning to read and write. However, many teachers report that this vision of coaching is helpful in group settings also.

Coaching is often a part of learning a process. We think of it most often in the context of learning to play a sport like football, soccer, or baseball. It also is common, though, in the arts like dance, drama, or music. Teaching through coaching usually involves some time spent teaching about the skill or strategy, but most of the time is spent with the learner actually engaging in the process while the teacher ‘coaches’ from the sidelines. The coaching consists of feedback (‘Good kick! ‘Too slow!’ and so on) and targeted instructions (‘Straighten your leg!’ ‘Move to the right!’ ‘Higher! Higher!’). The underlying assumption of coaching is that learners will learn to do a process during the actual process of doing it and the job of the instructor is to help learners perform the process and improve it while they are playing, dancing, skiing, etc.

And so it is with literacy instruction. Teachers can respond to their students’ reading and writing attempts during authentic literacy activity (like writing invitations or reading recipes) with feedback that is designed to remind them of skills and strategies that previously have been addressed through explicit instruction. For example, a student who is reading aloud a recipe while someone else follows it will benefit if the teacher can coach her on the r-controlled sound pattern for the -ir in *stir*. This type of intervention is most helpful if it occurs at the time of the reading attempt and if it does not extend into a lesson that would divert the reader from the authentic reading. Thus, this coaching would proceed something like:

Reader: Ok, next you should ‘St…. the flour and sugar’

Teacher: Remember the ways that ‘r’ works with vowels. ‘ir’ sounds like /r-r-r/.

Reader: Ok… ‘stir the flour and sugar.’ Then ‘Add the salt.’
With this type of coaching, skills have already been presented through explicit lessons and the teacher is alert to moments during authentic reading or writing that require coaching in their use. Coaching does not require that the authentic literacy activity be designed or planned to apply particular skills. Rather it requires that the teacher be able to respond to teachable moments that call for the use of previously taught skills and strategies.

**Side-of-the-Pool Teaching**

While coaching occurs during the actual process of reading and writing, side-of-the-pool teaching takes place outside--separate from--the actual process of reading or writing real-life texts for real-life reasons. The side-of-the-pool metaphor allows us to think about skills teaching that is complementary to authentic literacy activity in another way. Further, it allows us to more clearly see the rationale for teaching skills in isolation along with authentic process activity.

It is not uncommon during swimming classes for teachers to gather their students alongside the swimming pool (or in shallow waters in lakes and ponds) to learn and to practice certain component swimming skills in isolation, outside of the context of actual swimming. Students can be taught kicking techniques, breathing techniques, or different types of arm strokes in such a manner.

There are several sound reasons for side-of-the-pool teaching during swimming instruction. One is that it makes it possible for teachers and students alike to focus on a component skill like kicking without the distraction of the entire process of swimming and the simultaneous operations of other component skills like stroking and breathing, not to mention staying afloat. It is simply too difficult for teachers and learners to focus on the acquisition and development of the component skills of swimming while in the full process of swimming across a pool or in a pond.
In such a way, literacy learning benefits from side-of-the-pool skill lessons and practice. Component skills such as decoding, spelling, and comprehension strategies can be isolated and focused upon for new learning and for practice for continued development. Phonics exercises, flashcards, spelling drills, punctuation lessons and practice, and comprehension strategy practice on specially prepared written text samples all constitute reasonable side-of-the-pool activities in early literacy instruction.

Side-of-the-pool activities, though, require that there is a pool and that actual swimming takes place in it. Authentic literacy activity can constitute this pool. Back to our learning to swim metaphor: People learn to swim better if they actually engage in real swimming, i.e. go from point A to point B through water without sinking and for a real purpose like fun or need to reach shore, etc. In the same way, we know that children learn to read and write better if they are engaged in real reading and writing, reading and writing real-life texts for real-life purposes, including real audiences for writing.

The most beneficial ratio of side-of-the-pool activity to authentic literacy activity during literacy learning is not established through any type of empirical research. However, research has shown that the relationship between frequency of authentic literacy activity and faster growth in reading and writing abilities is significant. This means that the more students engage in authentic reading and writing, the more likely it is that they will learn to read and write better and more quickly. So, the more time in the pool, the better!

However, even a little authentic literacy activity is better than none, so teachers who feel most comfortable teaching a skills-based curriculum should not feel that this excludes them from including authentic literacy activity in their literacy instruction. For those teachers, side-of-the-
pool skill lessons can predominate, and they can add only one authentic literacy activity per week, month, or term to their students’ benefit.

**Embedded Skills Teaching**

The previous two metaphors for the skills/authentic literacy relationship assume initial skill teaching outside of the context of authentic literacy activity. It is also possible to teach skills for the first time in an embedded manner, with the skills teaching occurring in the process of the authentic reading and/or writing. This type of instruction is difficult to carry off and requires a full knowledge of the scope and sequence of the early reading and writing skills that young children must acquire as well as an operational ability to include those skills in a developmentally appropriate manner at the same time as the students are engaged in authentic literacy practice. This type of literacy instruction is for those teachers who have a deep aversion to any teaching of skills in isolation. Thus, skills are often taught on an ‘as needed’ basis rather than in a sequential manner. Within this type of instruction, children ideally are always focusing on the whole process, on authentic reading and writing, while the teacher is acting very much as a coach during the process but a coach who also teaches new skills or strategies during the process.

A great deal of controversy exists in the field as to the effectiveness of this type of early literacy instruction. The main concern is that many children will miss out on some important early literacy skills that they needed but others didn’t during the different authentic reading and writing activities. My experience tells me that new skills can be taught in process, but this requires a very experienced and skilled teacher who is able to identify which new skills are needed for the authentic literacy activity at the moment. Since children vary in their knowledge of literacy skills, as well as in the time it takes to learn new ones, this embedded skill instruction
works best when working individually with students as in a tutoring relationship or with small groups.

**Whole-Part-Whole Instruction**

While a few teachers may be able to embed the teaching of all new skills within authentic reading and writing without isolating them, most teachers will approach the embedding of skills through a *whole-part-whole* model of literacy teaching. Within this model, teachers engage students in authentic reading and writing activity through the various set ups described previously, having planned earlier which new skills to teach as part of the activity. This is the first *Whole*. At some point during the activity, the teacher engages in a side-of-the-pool type of lesson to teach the new skill. This is the *Part* of the Whole-Part-Whole model. The new skills and strategies taught during this phase of the model are typically skills or strategies that will be needed for the authentic reading and writing and the need for them will be apparent when pointed out by the teacher. Following the side-of-the-pool teaching of the new skill(s), the teacher will move the student back into the authentic literacy activity, expecting them to apply the newly learned skills to their reading and writing. At this point, the teacher will typically move into a coaching mode, focusing on the new skill(s) as well as previously learned ones.

Several examples of the Whole-Part-Whole approach to teaching embedded skills can be found in the model lessons that begin and end each chapter in this Handbook. One example involved the teacher teaching capitalization conventions and end-of-sentence punctuation in the midst of a letter-writing activity. The teacher created the context that called for the children to write letters to a classmate who had suddenly moved away and got them started. She then called their attention to the need to use capital letters (for example with the *Dear* salutation) and the
need for a period before a capital letter at the beginning of a sentence. She used their letter drafts for this teaching. Following this lesson, the students completed writing their letters to send.

Tazmin Manji in this chapter worked in several different skill lessons into her authentic literacy activity of brochure writing. She included a phonics lesson, a vocabulary lesson, and a comprehension lesson while the children focused on preparing their brochures for the real estate broker to use on his web site.

One of the challenges of using the embedded skills method for skills/authentic literacy teaching is the danger that the authentic literacy activity will become only ‘practice’ for the skill teaching. This loses the authentic aspect of the activity. And remember, with the loss of authenticity comes the loss of the benefit to students’ growth that is related to authentic reading and writing. Teachers must be vigilant in maintaining their emphasis on the authentic literacy even while being strategic in choosing the skills and strategies to teach as part of the authentic activity. This means that the students’ real-life purposes for reading and writing should always come first. The embedded skills teaching should not drive the lesson but should be part of the support structure that the teacher puts in place to help the students achieve their primary goal of using the text in the same ways that they are used in the world outside of a learning to read and write context.

**Formative Evaluation**

The final essential aspect of authentic literacy instruction is that of formative evaluation. This is key to ensuring that authentic literacy activity in the classroom is truly part of an effective literacy instruction program and not only used to motivate and entertain children. Authentic literacy instruction is about more than motivation, although motivation is central to all learning.
When students are involved in truly authentic reading and writing, they are, by definition, motivated. They enjoy it, and they want to do more. However, research shows that authentic literacy instruction actually moves learning forward faster with better outcomes. It is about learning as much as it is about motivation.

Since authentic literacy activity is about literacy learning, as teachers we need to track that learning so that we can ensure that all of the students are progressing in their development as readers and writers. Formative evaluation in teaching allows us to assess the outcome of our instruction in order to plan for future teaching. We can assess student’s acquisition of abilities that we have taught for so that we can decide whether we need to revisit the skills, perhaps with a different approach, or move on to new ones. Formative assessment allows us to make decisions about the ways in which we taught a particular skill or strategy. If children had great difficulty with learning from that lesson, then we will construct it differently next time. Formative assessment also allows us to identify which students need more work with particular aspects of learning to read and write which will lead to targeted future instruction.

The key to good formative assessment is clarity as to what it was that you were attempting to teach. Did you teach the use of capital letters? Did you teach the names of the alphabet letters? Did you teach the V-C-V pattern? Did you teach the meaning of the un- prefix? Did you teach the elements of a personal letter? It is important to establish these purposes before the lessons are delivered. Then with clarity about the instructional goal of a lesson, or set of lessons/activities, teachers can design targeted formative assessments, focused on these goals. If the V-C-V pattern was the goal, then the assessment should be designed around that, and should
include enough items or instances to use the pattern to give us a fairly good idea of what the student knows.

Planning for Assessment

Pre-assessment

Pre-assessments need not be formal but they do need to be targeted. They can be isolated tests or embedded in more holistic tasks. Their construction should not take up a lot of teacher time and so can be short and informal. They should, though, result in that ability to note which skills have been mastered and by whom. They should immediately precede lessons that are designed to teach them. Teacher-made assessments are best since they are usually sensitive to the levels and natures of the students and sensitive to the individual district curricula.

The teachers who wrote for this handbook used a variety of pre-assessments early reading and writing skills. These included:

- High-frequency words assessment
- Genre knowledge assessment
- Action verbs assessment
- Letter identification assessment
- Concepts of print assessment
- Stages of spelling development assessment
- Vocabulary assessment

Post-assessment

The key to good formative assessment is clarity as to what it was you were trying to teach.
Once the lesson or lessons are concluded, and this includes the authentic literacy activity that accompanies either side-of-the-pool lessons or embedded ones, teachers can give quick post-assessments on the skills or strategies that they had targeted at the beginning. Often, enough time has passed to give the students the same pre-assessment as a post-assessment. However, teachers can also design another assessment for the post-test. It is important, though, to assess the same skill/strategy in both pre- and post- and to do so in the same way, if possible.

Assessments that position the skill in an isolated fashion are often easier to interpret than trying to figure out what students know from examining a piece of writing or listening to them read a short text. They can also be given to an entire group, too, and scored more quickly. As explained above, these pre- and post-assessments are not meant to be used in place of a more encompassing and inclusive assessment program. Rather, they serve as quick indications of the learning that student’s have gained from particular lessons and authentic literacy activities.

The goal of the assessment piece of authentic literacy instruction is to provide teachers with empirical knowledge of the instructional outcomes of authentic/skills literacy instruction. This knowledge arms the teacher with important information that will guide the next activity. Thus, it is a constantly recursive process that occurs across the school year. It is called formative because its purpose is to inform the instruction on an ongoing basis. It is never intended to serve as summative assessment which would provide reliable information about what the students knows about and can do with literacy. Its primary purpose is to give feedback to the teacher.

Below, Aimée Dione Williams, writing about using authentic literacy with a second-language immersion class, presents a wonderful portrait of how the explicit teaching of skills can be incorporated into real-life reading and writing in the classroom. Also, note how she uses formative assessment to help her plan instruction. As with many of the other lessons, clearly
authentic reading and writing opportunities unfold and nest within each other when students respond to the demands of contexts that call for real-life reading and writing.

**Writing with a Purpose**

By Aimée Dione Williams

**My School**

MacKenzie School is situated in a residential middle-class neighborhood. The area consists of a mix of newly built homes and older homes that were built in the late 1940s and 1950s. During the last 20 years, increasing Asian immigration, among other factors, has transformed the area greatly. The area is now predominantly Asian, notably Chinese and Korean. The school addresses the needs of its diverse population by translating monthly newsletters into Chinese and providing translators for Chinese, Korean and Japanese parents during parent-teacher conferences. The school library also has Chinese and Japanese books that the students or parents can borrow. Most of the students at MacKenzie originate from Taiwan, Hong Kong, China and Korea. A large percentage of these students do not speak English as their first language and approximately a quarter of them receive English Language support.

MacKenzie School is a large two-storey building with three portable classrooms, adjacent to a community park. The 516 students are in one of three programs: English track, Early French Immersion or Late French Immersion. There is also a Chinese language school that rents the school at night, and many of our students attend these classes.

Over half of the student population attends Early French Immersion. This is a popular program whose goal is to produce bilingual students. From Kindergarten to Grade 3, instruction
is given completely in French. Then in Grades 4 through 7, instruction is gradually given in English. In high school, the French Immersion students attend classes with the English students except for a few classes that are taught in French.

**My Class**

I teach a Grade Three French Immersion class. There are 24 students in my class: 11 males and 13 females. Two students are pulled out of class twice a week for additional Language Arts support and another gifted student is pulled-out once a week. All of my students speak French and English and several speak an additional language (primarily Mandarin or Cantonese).

**Community Literacy Practices**

I went about learning about the literacy practices of my students in several different ways. First of all, to get the children thinking about the different reasons they read and write, we went on a literacy tour of the neighborhood. We only traveled about a block in forty minutes! The students noticed print everywhere. They pointed out everything from the print on the street signs to print on the litter that was on the ground to the print that was on their own clothing.

A few days later I did my own literacy walk around the area. I started at the community park adjacent to the school where I noticed print such as graffiti, coyote alert signs, rule signs, writing on food labels of garbage that was on the ground and advertisements for basketball & baseball registration. While walking to the nearby stores, I noticed street signs, speed limit signs, addresses, real estate signs, classified adds posted on street posts, bus stops, a ‘lost kitty’ sign posted on a tree. When I arrived at the stores, which are located on a fairly busy street, I saw print everywhere. Most of this print was in English, but several signs were in Chinese and the stores had Chinese characters on the windows and inside of them. It would take too long to
note all that I saw, but basically all the stores were covered inside and out with print including: signs, advertisements, prices, product descriptions and hours of operation. There were also bus stops, newspaper boxes and street signs located in front of several of these stores.

**Family Literacy Practices**

Finally, I learned about my students’ literacy practices by asking the parents. I sent a short survey home with each child. Here are the questions that I included:

1. List the texts that are being read and written in your household on a regular basis.
2. Who reads and writes what texts in your household?
3. What do people read and/or write these texts for?
4. What texts are with the public environment of you child?

I included several examples of each of the questions so that the parents would not think that I was interested only in story book reading and children’s literature. The parents reports that they read and wrote regularly the following texts: food labels, grocery lists, restaurant menus, bills, newspapers, calendars, school newsletters, emails, work reports or presentations, magazines, recipes, web pages, letters, books/novels, flyers, notes to family members, articles (for work or professional development), to do lists, textbooks (especially by older siblings or work related), manuals and schedules.

Many of the literacy activities performed by the mothers were related to their family’s daily living routines such as scheduling activities, reading school newsletters and corresponding with the school, making shopping lists, writing cheques, reading bills, food labels, and calendars. Several mothers also read for work purposes. Only a few claimed to read regularly for pleasure.

Fathers, on the other hand, reported reading newspapers, magazines (such as National Geographic and Discover), online material for work and pleasure, writing cheques and writing
reports for work. The children in these houses are read to by parents and siblings for pleasure, read and write homework assignments, greeting cards, novels, magazines, instructions, recipes, notes and websites.

**Authentic Literacy Lesson**

From all the information gathered about the familiar literacy practices of my students, I decided that we would create board games for which they would write the rules. Although none of the parents who responded to my questionnaire reported reading game rules specifically, I knew from conversations with the children that all of them have had some, if not lots, of experience with board games in their homes. Further, several parent noted that they read instructional manuals and rule lists with their children.

Please note that I will be describing this unit as if it was taught in English to make it more accessible to the readers. As I have already mentioned, however, I teach a Grade Three Early French Immersion class, therefore the examples of my students’ work included here will be in French. Furthermore, some of the details that I explain during the mini-lesson have to do with the French language, but the mini-lesson could be taught in any language.

**Setting up the Authentic Lesson**

Although I had already planned on having my class create board games and writing the rules to accompany the game, I set it up so that the children would suggest the activity. This was actually quite simple because I was sure of how my class would respond to the scenario that I presented them.

**Class Meeting**

Once a week we have a classroom meeting where we discuss problems and congratulate people. The students and I can also write on the agenda, which is posted on the wall, if there is
something that he or she would like to discuss with the class. For this week, I wrote that I wanted to discuss rainy indoor days with them. During the classroom meeting, I told them a story about two Grade 2 students who came to talk to me at lunch hour one day last week because they did not know what to do when the weather dictated ‘an indoor day.’ I told my class how these younger kids felt sad and bored during rainy days because they did not have many friends and they did not have any indoor games to play. As it rains frequently where we live and there are many indoor days, the students could all relate to these bored younger students. I asked my class what we could do for Grade 1 and 2 students like these, and they came up with some very good ideas. We decided to narrow our list down to the two most popular ideas: playing with the younger kids during lunch and making games for them to play. As I anticipated, the students set up an authentic purpose for creating the board games!

**Genre Knowledge Assessment**

Now that the purpose of the lesson was established, I led my class in brainstorming different sorts of games that they could play indoors. We made a long list of board games that they like to play and posted them on the wall. The children were welcome to add the name of a game to the list whenever they thought of a new one. These children certainly had a lot of previous experience with playing games, which confirmed that this was an authentic literacy practice for them.

Next we talked about what is usually included in a board game and we listed these on another list. These included: the game board, game pieces, game cards, play money, dice, pencils and an instruction manual. This last item became the focus of our next couple of lessons.

**The Games**

**Authentic Purpose**
Why do games have written rule books?

Have you ever tried to play a game, but could find the instructions? If so, what happened?

This is how we began our discussion into the purpose or need to write game rules. The Grade 3 children had no problem understanding why games need rules. One child explained it well: “You would not know how to play the game without rules.” Another child added that you need written rules in case nobody is there to explain how to play the game.

Several of my students had stories about playing games for the first time and how their parents read the rules to learn how to play. I asked them why they needed their parents to help them read the rules, and the children told me it was because often the instructions are difficult to understand and their parents are better readers. I asked them if they wanted their rule books to be difficult for others to follow, and they were all in agreement that it did not make sense to make instructions that other children would not understand. The students decided that they needed to write clear instructions that other children would understand so that they would know how to play the game.

A Closer Look at the Rules

A recurring statement that my students made when we were talking about the purpose of rules was that it was their parents, not them, who read game rules. I thought that we should talk about who they would be writing their rules for before starting on the activity. First of all, I simply asked them who they thought would need the rules for the games that they would make. They all agreed that it would be the Grade 1 and 2 students because they would be the ones that
are playing the games. I then asked them to think of other people, even adults, who might read their game rules. Here is the list they came up with:

Who will we be writing our game rules for?

- Primary students
- Supervision-Aids
- Teachers
- Older students
- Maybe even some parents

As a homework assignment, I asked the class to think about what game instructions usually look like, what is usually included in them and what makes good instructions. To help them with this, they were to look at the games that they had at home and to note in their journals what they liked and did not like about the instruction manuals so that the next day they would have something to share with the class.

The class was quite enthusiastic about this task and several of the children brought the instructions from some of their games to school the following day. This turned out to quite handy since I decided to make a few copies of each set of instructions so that the class could compare the instructions in small groups. In their groups they compared how the instructions were organized and what kind of information was included. We decided as a class that all the instructions included how many players can play, an object, contents or equipment, setup information, how to play and how to win the game. The class noticed that some games also had an introductory paragraph about the game, scoring directions, pictures and diagrams.
As for what the instructions looked like (the format), the class noticed that some parts of the instructions were written in sentences, some in point form, but most of them were written in numbered form. As I mentioned above, I also asked the children to make note of what they did and did not like about the game rules that they looked at. When we discussed this, most of them decided that they liked the rules that were simple, easy to read and included pictures and diagrams.

**Embedded Skills Lesson on Action Verbs**

I made six copies of the ‘setup’ section of the game *Clue* for the class to look at in groups of four. I gave each group a couple of highlighters and asked them to highlight all the action words they found. We then wrote all the words they found on the overhead projector and discussed if they were all indeed action words (many were not).

I asked the class what they noticed about the action words that they found. One of the students pointed out that most of them were at the beginning of the sentences, which was something that I wanted them to be aware of. Similarly, I wanted them to see that there was no subject before the action verb at the beginning of the sentence. They did not notice this on their own, so I asked them to discuss with their groups why there was no subject before the verbs in
the sentences. One group explained that it was because the action words are meant for whoever is reading the instructions. Another group remarked that having no subject before the verb is the same as having ‘you’ before the verb.

Finally I wanted my students to look at the endings of the verbs (in French imperative, verbs usually end with an 'e' or an 's'). I had them make a list of the verbs that ended with an 'e' and a list of the verbs that ended with an 's', and then to figure out a rule of why some verbs take an ‘e’ at the end and why others take an ‘s’. The groups had a difficult time coming up with a rule, and none of them came up with the correct rule (verbs with the infinitive ending ‘er’ have an ‘e’ and verbs ending with ‘ir’ or ‘re’ have an ‘s’), but it gave them the chance to look critically at the language that was being used.

After we had tested their hypotheses and discovered that they did not work, I presented the actual rule to them which they copied down in their French Language notebook. I then wrote ten new action words in their infinitive form on the board that they were to conjugate to their imperative form in their notebooks as a grammar exercise. As I looked over their books that evening I noted that all but three students were writing their verbs correctly. I worked with these three students for about 10 minutes the next day while the others were writing in their Journal.
Skills Assessment

During our next lesson I assessed the students on what they had learned about action verbs. Although I had already looked at the verbs they had conjugated in their French notebooks, I wanted to see if they would be able to conjugate verbs correctly in the context of a set of game rules.

Go Fish

I prepared a text about how to play the game ‘Go Fish’, with blanks where the action words should go. I included a list of verbs that they could use at the bottom of the page; however, these verbs were in the infinitive form so the students had to conjugate them correctly within the text. We did the first sentence together to help the few students who had difficulty comprehending the directions.
Only two students in the class had a difficult time with this task. Unfortunately, these were two of the three students who I had already given additional instruction to the previous day. This made me realize that they did not really understand my explanations and that I would have to take another approach with them. I decided that I would hold off working with them until after I had modeled how to write rules with the class because I would be doing a lot of review and explicit teaching about action verbs while writing.

**Modeling the Procedure**

I decided to create a game collaboratively with the class as a model. I believed that the actual creation of a good quality game that would stand up to use would be difficult for the students, having had no prior knowledge of how to do this. **What kinds of games do Grade 1’s and 2’s like?**

First of all we discussed what kinds of games Grade 1’s and 2’s like and what their interests are. We brainstormed a variety of ideas and then voted on our favorites. The winning idea was to create a game similar to *Snakes and Ladders*, but with a dinosaur theme.

**Planning**

I did a sketch of what I thought the game should look like and showed it to the class to see if they wanted to make any changes. They were happy with what I had sketched. Next we made a graphic organizer to help us write the instruction manual. We included all the game elements that we had previously discussed in class (object of game, equipment, setup, how to play and how to win) on the graphic organizer. With the class’ input, I modeled what needed to be included on the organizer to help us write the instructions later. When this was done, we were ready to start writing our instructional manual,

**Collaborative Writing**
We wrote the instructions collaboratively on the overhead projector, and because we had already done the graphic organizer it actually was not as difficult as I had anticipated. A key element was that our game was not too complicated, so it was easy to write clear and concise rules. While writing, I put a particular emphasis on the action words to review what I had previously taught the class.

*Making the Game board*

I then showed them the materials that I had collected to make the game board and explained how I planned to use them. I did not make the game board in front of the class because it would have taken up too much class time. Instead, I made the board on my own, and put it on display afterwards so that the students could use it as an example or ask me questions about how I completed it. I also typed up the rules that we created for the game, added a small diagram of the game board in the ‘setup’ section and then put this on display beside the game board.

*Creating the Games*

*Step One: Conducting interviews*

The students asked if they could conduct interviews with their Grade One reading buddies as research for their own games. I told them I thought that was a fabulous idea, and the Grade One teacher let us interview her class that day.
Step Two: Planning

The students had been thinking about the type of game that they wanted to create since our original discussion. I had also said that they could work in pairs so they had been deciding who they wanted to work with. I put them into pairs based on who the students wanted to be partnered up with and on whom I thought would work well together. I then gave each pair a blank piece of paper so that they could sketch ideas for the appearance of their game. I also gave them a blank copy of the graphic organizer that we had prepared when making our collaborative game.

Some pairs got a lot accomplished during this period and others barely started. Because I noticed that some pairs needed more time to brainstorm and organize their ideas, I said that they had two days to finish their rough plans for their games and that they could work on them in class whenever they had finished their work or they could work on them outside of class if it was necessary. By the end of the week all of the groups managed to hand in their sketches and their graphic organizer to me.

Here is an example of one student’s blueprints:
Over the next couple of days, I met with each pair separately to go over their plans. The sketches were generally well done, so I had each group explain to me how they were going to make their final copy. I gave some pairs a few suggestions if I thought that there were going to be major problems, but mostly I just gave encouragement and let them be creative. I figured that if they ran into some difficulties later, it would be a good opportunity for them to work together and think critically about how to solve the problem. I did, however, correct all the words that were misspelled on the game board to ensure that they did not make the same errors on their final copies. The words that reoccurred (such as, *advance, token, ahead, square*…) were added to our word wall.
The graphic organizers, however, were not as complete as I hoped. Most of the children had a hard time grasping the fact that the rules are written for someone who has no idea of how to play the game. Instead they wrote the games as from their own point of view; leaving out many details and steps. I explained to the class as a whole that I was having a hard time understanding what their games were about by looking at their organizers. I reminded them that they were going to be writing their rule books for people like me who have never played the game before and so other people might not understand their rules either. What do you need to include in your rules in order to for them to make sense to the reader, I asked them. We wrote down their answers on a large piece of paper that we put up on the wall.

- **What do Good Rules Have?**
  - Lots of details
  - Write the rules in the right order
  - Number the steps
  - Don't leave out any steps even if they seem obvious to you
  - Correct spelling
  - Lots of action words

After our discussion, I returned their graphic organizers and asked them to make additions and changes based on what they had just told me. When they were done (or thought they were done) I met with the pairs again, and this time I highlighted the sections that I still thought were incomplete for them to continue working on. The organizers were much clearer and more detailed following this. Here is an example of one of the group’s graphic organizers after it had been
Step Three: Writing the Rules

We started the lesson with a quick review of the importance of writing the instructions for somebody who has no idea how to play the game and why it is important to write the steps in a logical order. I provided each pair with a template of how to set up their instructional manuals, so that they did not forget anything. I did, however, let them know that they were welcome to add anything they wanted and that they did not have to use my format for the good copy. Surprisingly, all the pairs got right to work and stayed busy for the next hour. I visited each of the pairs while they worked, but except for questions about spelling, they did not want much help. When the students were happy with what they had written, they shared their instructions with another pair and then handed them in to me for editing.
Step Four: Editing

I read each set of instructions on my own and highlighted the parts that were confusing or unclear. I also underlined all of the spelling mistakes and grammatical errors that the students were able to correct on their own. I, however, corrected the more difficult words and syntax problems for them (otherwise I believe that the editing process becomes too daunting). I met with each pair separately while they were working on the game boards.

Most of the students typed up the good copies of their rule books during our computer periods. A few of them did not want to type them, however, and wrote up their good copies on their own time.

Step Five: Creating the Game Boards

I handed out the rough sketches that the students had done to help them work on their projects. Although I had corrected the spelling mistakes that the students had written on their sketches, I emphasized the importance of using our word wall and making sure that all their words were correctly spelled on their final copies. I knew that some of them would also make changes and add things that were not included on their rough drafts so I asked them to double check before writing any new words on their boards.

This was the fun time of the project, and I encouraged them to be as creative as they like. The students had collected lots of materials, such as dice, stickers and cardboard, during the last couple of weeks for the games. They had also come to me if they needed something that they could not find at home and I provided them with colored paper, pipe cleaners, glitter glue, stickers and chart paper. I gave the students two afternoons to work on their game boards, which was plenty of time for most of them. Some of the more perfectionist students required more time.
to finish on their own time. Here is an example of one group’s final copy of their game board rules:

The Final Projects

The students were very proud of their projects! I laminated the game boards and instructions so that they would last longer. The students were so excited to play their games with the younger students that we arranged to play the games with the Grade One class during class
time instead waiting for the next rainy indoor day. Here are three Grade One students playing the game!

![Image of three Grade One students playing a game]

**Post Assessment**

After the games were finished I checked to see if all the pairs had correctly written all their action verbs. Each student also completed a self-evaluation about their work ethic and how they worked with their partner.

**Reflections**

I believe that the greatest thing about this lesson, and any other authentic literacy lesson for that matter, is the students are highly motivated to read and write. When literacy becomes functional for them, the quality of their work increases tenfold. I was so pleased with the instructional manuals that my students produced, and they were excited to do it because there was a reason for writing them. I was also able to include grammar instruction when we worked on action verbs which usually caused their eyes to glaze over. I believe that the fact that they wanted their rules to be written correctly helped them pay closer attention to the grammar lessons that I taught. Furthermore, they had the opportunity to apply their new skills to the writing of their rules.
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I must say that for me is the greatest thing about teaching authentic lessons is the effect it has on some of the less enthusiastic students. There are a couple of kids in my class who drive me crazy with questions such as, *Do we have to do this?* or *Why are we doing this?* Although I do have reasons for teaching what I do, my students do not always understand my reasons, and I believe that this impedes their learning. With this lesson, on the other hand, the class comprehended *why* we were learning about action verbs: In order to write instructions. Nobody questioned why we were learning about verbs, and better yet, they were motivated to learn about grammar!

References


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\[i\] Readers are also referred to current comprehensive methods textbooks such as Gail Tompkins' *Literacy for the 21st Century: A Balanced Approach* (Pearson, 2006) for classroom activities and lessons and lists of scopes and sequences for the teaching of skills.

\[ii\] See Chapter 3, "Loving Letter Writing"
Chapter Six

One More Time

Real-Life Texts for Real-life Purposes

Authentic literacy instruction is highly related to increased abilities to comprehend and compose written language. The research that was done to arrive at this conclusion used a specific definition of authentic reading and writing, and all of those components are described in the preceding chapters. The authentic literacy that shows a relationship to increased literacy abilities is students reading and writing real-life texts for real-life purposes. If writing, they write to real people who will read what they write for their own real-life purposes.

How do teachers bring more authentic literacy into their classrooms? Planning for authenticity goes beyond just assigning students to read, say, advertisements for McDonalds or to write post cards to friends. One of the basic truths about literacy is that people read and write in the midst of their daily lives – at work, at home with family, while shopping, while relaxing, and so on. This is real-life literacy.

Whose Texts are Real?

Before teachers can bring real-life texts into their classrooms, they need to find out about the real lives of their students and which texts are woven throughout them? When we use the term real-life, we are always referring to the real lives of the students. We are all aware of the increasing diversity in our schools. We can no longer assume that the lives and the literacy worlds of our students are the same as ours. Teachers must get out into the communities of their schools and gather information about the texts that are part of the public life of the community. They must gather information from the families about the many different texts that they read and write. These community and home textual practices constitute the students' literacy worlds. They
are part of the conceptions of literacy that all students bring to school with them. These are the texts that teachers will want to use in their authentic literacy activities.

**Authentic Contexts Call for Real-Life Literacy**

Teachers must import, or capitalize on, these real-life activities and situations if they are to engage their students in real-life reading and writing. These authentic contexts, then, are the springboard for authentic literacy. Parties need invitations, cooking brings recipes, plays require scripts, absent friends call for letters and postcards. All authentic literacy activity requires authentic contexts within which the reading and writing will take place.

**Skills Accompany Authentic Literacy**

The purpose of schooling is to teach and students attend school to learn. Authentic literacy boosts that learning; kids read and write better if authentic literacy is part of their experience in school. However, a basic part of literacy instruction is also skills instruction – the nuts and bolts of reading and writing. Teachers can use authentic literacy activities alongside or as contexts for essential skills instruction.

**Assessment for Instruction**

While kids are involved in reading and writing for real purposes, teachers must regularly assess their growth in the components of reading and writing. While reading and writing real-life texts for real-life reasons is fun and engaging, teachers must remain vigilant of the learning that is taking place. Only through intentional and systematic formative assessment, can teachers know which children need more help, who is ready to move on, how much learning resulted from individual activities and lessons.

**One More Time**
These are the pieces, then, of authentic literacy in the literacy classroom. Not one of them is sufficient alone. Authentic literacy means teachers involving students in familiar text types, informed by teacher research into the literacy worlds of the students, as the result of authentic contexts that call for authentic literacy. At the same time, essential literacy skills are being taught, learned, and assessed.

The model lessons shared in this handbook provide concrete and real examples of teachers applying these principles and implementing authentic literacy activities for children in the primary grades. These lessons are not 'model' ones because they are well-honed and perfect. They are model in that they serve as examples of how to get started thinking about and beginning to bring authentic literacy into the beginning to read/write classroom. The teacher/authors and I hope that together we have offered some inspiration and information for those teachers who wish to try authentic literacy also.

We conclude this handbook with Jason Hodgins’ account of a lively kindergarten class who learn about cookbooks, recipes, and concepts of print in the process of planning and holding a party.

Chapter Eleven-Food for a Party

By Jason Hodgins

Introduction

“Are going to talk about party today?” Prempreet asked as soon as he saw me after lunch.
“Can we look the cook books?” he inquired another day.

Prempreet is still only four years old; he’s turning five in a month. He struggles with listening and speaking English. He’s a young boy who is gradually adjusting to the routines of school. He only knows a few letters, fewer sounds, and still hasn’t mastered printing his whole name. Yet, he is excited about the reading and writing tasks we are doing. Such was the power of authentic literacy activities in my Kindergarten classroom.

Class/Community Description

I teach in a community in Greater Vancouver in a suburban bedroom community. The neighbourhood surrounding the school is almost exclusively made up of houses. There are a few townhouses and many basement suites but mostly single family houses. From the school you must travel seven or more blocks to reach a store, recreation centre, or public library. Most people drive in this community, though a few ride the buses, and even fewer walk. Public spaces are mostly commercial: Strip malls, big-box stores, small malls, and corner stores. These are all within a short drive of the school. The demographics are predominantly working and middle class. There is also a significant transient group that depends on income-assistance and rent some of the houses and basement suites in the area. In the last 20 years, the ethnicity of the neighbourhood has shifted dramatically. Twenty years ago it was almost exclusively white. Today there is a very large Indo-Canadian population along with a handful of other minority groups.

The school population closely mirrors the diversity of the neighbourhood. It is a medium-sized, public elementary school with one and a half to three classes per grade, kindergarten through grade seven. Many of our students come with language, learning, and/or economic/cultural barriers that add layers of difficulty to their school experience. Within the
The trend within the neighbourhood and the school is that more of the young families speak a language other than English. Looking from the grade seven classes down towards the primary grades there is a clear increase in the number of students from minority language groups. Between my two kindergarten classes of twenty-two students each, there are only twelve students who do not attend the ESL kindergarten. Students are eligible for ESL kindergarten if a language other than English is spoken in their home. Of the thirty-two ESL students in my classes, almost all of them were born in Canada, though a few immigrated after being born and one arrived during the current school year. Most of these students begin school with a functional level of English, though there are several with very limited English and others as fluent as a native-speaking five year old.

Mine is a fairly typical kindergarten classroom with a group seating area, tables, toys, dramatic play centre, painting centre, puzzles, books, writing centre and listening centre. The times are quite flexible to allow different focuses on different days and there are always lots of songs and movement activities thrown in to get the students up and moving. I try to create a learning environment where the students are active and lessons are fast-paced to hold their attention.

Gathering Literacy Data

To get a handle on the literacy worlds of my students, I sent home a parent questionnaire and I interviewed my whole class. The questionnaire asked parents to list the different type of texts they had in their homes that their children would be familiar with. I included what I
thought to be a thorough and approachable explanation of my purpose for collecting the information and how I wanted it filled out.

The internet was the only type of print mentioned by all of the respondents. It was used by a variety of people for different purposes, including:

- **Children playing games (both educational and otherwise)**
- **Parents and older siblings using it for news**
- **Parents and older siblings using it for research**
- **Bill and bank payments by adults in the house**
- **Adults searching for recipes**
- **Adults searching for music**

Families also reported using computers for emails, instant messaging, and toddler games. The next most common form of print was newspapers, used frequently by grandparents and parents in the children’s homes. Books were listed by many families as being used for entertainment, and storybooks read with children were explicitly named by five families.

Lists, notes to self and other family members, flyers and magazines were the next most common items. Lists were mostly used for shopping by the adults in the home. Many of the families reported writing notes to each other and themselves.

The other way I decided to collect information about my student’s literacy experiences was to ask them directly. I didn’t think I would be too successful asking specifically about reading and writing so I decided just to ask them what kinds of things they did with their parents and then infer the types of literacy likely involved. We did this as a whole group activity with me scribing their individual responses and asking for a show of hands from other students who had the same experience. When I polled the students in my classes about what they did with...
their parents, shopping was the clear favourite. In total, six out of nine places named were stores. The stores that were most familiar to them (as judged by a kindergarten show of hands so take it for what it is worth) were: Real Canadian Superstore, Save-On Foods, and Zellers. 

Superstore is a large grocery store that also has clothing, furniture, and seasonal departments. Save-On is a typical grocery store. Zellers is an economy department store. Clearly marked and labeled aisles, large price signs are common to all these stores. All three have weekly flyers with specials that are delivered to neighbourhood homes and are available at the front of the store. Other frequented stores were Wal-Mart, Fruiticana (a produce store very popular with the ethnic communities but rarely used by white families) and some dollar stores.

The only activity that a majority of the students raised their hand for that was not shopping was going to parties. We have a large Punjabi community at our school. Children of Punjabi families are usually very familiar with large parties that include food and dancing. The other students also reported going to parties with their parents although I suspect the scale and nature of their party experiences are somewhat different. Some students also reported going to the local recreation centre and one student named ballet class. (As an aside I decided to make a class book with photos of the common locations in the community. It remains a popular book in our book centre)

Introducing the Authentic Literacy Activity

As I thought about what to do with all this information, I was instinctively drawn to the idea of putting on a party. I think what drew me to this idea is that, while it is not a literacy activity, there are lots of reading and writing tasks that go on around it. It seemed like a natural fit to create authentic literacy activities. It was also an experience common to all my students, though the nature of their experiences was of course different. To get the ball rolling, I just had
to suggest the idea. It was no surprise that I got an immediate buy-in from the students. Our first task was to brainstorm a list of things we needed in order to have a party. They (with occasional prodding and categorizing from me) came up with food, decorations, music and invitations as the things we needed to plan for.

I decided to start with food. Cookbooks and recipes were one of the text types mentioned by some of my families in the survey. I decided to work with cookbooks for two reasons. First, I wanted to focus on concepts of print skills as we carried out the activity (e.g. print is the part you read, you start reading at the top left, and you read left to right and top to bottom). I also wanted the students to have a first-hand experience looking at books for a purpose other than pleasure. I scoured three community libraries looking for cookbooks that would be appropriate. My criteria were:

1. Each recipe in the cookbook had to have a picture of the food it made. (I wanted them to search through recipes to decide on the one they wanted to make.)
2. Each recipe needed a clear title and ingredients list
3. The cookbook needed to contain recipes for food suitable for a part.

Since five-year-olds can only focus on a task for a short amount of time, I broke up the lesson into a number of short sessions. During each session, a group of five or six students cooperatively shared a cookbook. The cooperative nature of the task added another layer of complexity to the lesson, but for the most part, the students managed it quite well. The sequence of sessions with the cookbook are described in Table 1.

**Table 1. Sequence of cookbook sessions.**

| Session 1 | -Locate the Front Cover, Back Cover, |

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Activity Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation and Spine, Title, Author</strong>&lt;br&gt;and parts of a book</td>
<td>- Open the cookbook and search for a recipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Session 2</td>
<td><strong>Titles and pictures as parts of a book</strong>&lt;br&gt;Title and left-right directionality&lt;br&gt;- Review Parts of Book, Title and Author&lt;br&gt;- Point to where to start reading the Title and Which Direction to Read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;Lists (Index and Ingredients as a feature of cookbooks, top-bottom directionality of print)</td>
<td>- Start at front cover&lt;br&gt;- Open pages one at a time to find the Index&lt;br&gt;- Point to first item in the index&lt;br&gt;- Find a Recipe, review Title&lt;br&gt;- Locate steps to follow&lt;br&gt;- Students look through cookbooks with their group searching for food they want to make</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Session 4</strong>&lt;br&gt;Selecting a recipe</td>
<td>- Students groups meet with me to look through their cookbook one more time and decide on their recipe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Session 5</strong>&lt;br&gt;Making a Shopping List</td>
<td>- Students use a photocopy of their selected recipe to write/draw a shopping list on whiteboards</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Session 6</strong></td>
<td>- Students take edited list to local</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Shopping</strong></td>
<td>grocery store to buy food (each group had 2-4 items to find in the store and at least one adult to help)</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
<td>-Adults draw student's attention to the print in signs, labels, prices on the products and on their own lists</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Session 7</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Cooking</strong></td>
<td>-Students follow photocopy of the recipe to make the food for the party</td>
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</table>

To begin our foray into the world of cookbooks, I began with three separate layers of connections. First, I read a story book that I found entitled *The Little Pigs’ First Cookbook* (Watson, 1987). It’s a charming little story of three pig brothers who take turns cooking. They set the menu and follow recipes from cookbooks. I chose to use this story to introduce the vocabulary words *cookbook*, *menu*, and, *recipe*. Based on my survey of home literacy I suspected that cookbooks and recipes were present in a good portion of the homes. However, that didn’t mean that the students had the expressive vocabulary to match (especially given the fact that English is not the primary language in the majority of my students’ homes.)

The next connection layer was reminding students that our party needed food. This established the need for cookbooks and recipes. Finally, I wanted to connect this experience to student’s home literacy environments. This is, after all, the point of authentic literacy activities: Real texts that exist in the real world used for a real purpose. I asked the students about cookbooks in their homes and had several students share their home experiences. If I had it all to do over again, I would spend more time on this piece. Nonetheless, I had 22 expectant faces
looking at me and the deadline of the already-planned shopping trip bearing down on me by the
time I realized this. So, into the cookbooks we plunged, sufficiently connected to their home
literacy experiences or not.

**Assessing for an Embedded Skills Lesson**

At the time we were planning the party, one of my instructional goals was to help my
students gain knowledge of, and solidify their grasp on, some fundamental concepts of print: (a)
print is the part of the page that is read; (b) one begins reading at the top left of the page; (c) print
is read left to right and (d) from top to bottom with a return sweep at the end of each line. I had
recently assessed these concepts one-on-one with my class using a simple story book. Thirteen
of my students were unable to demonstrate understanding of all four concepts. It was report card
season and I had not gotten to any direct teaching of these concepts since discovering these gaps
in my students knowledge. The cookbook activity provided a meaningful opportunity to focus
my students’ attention on these concepts. Since few of the students were likely to have looked at
a cookbook without an adult’s support, it actually felt quite natural to be this focused and
structured as we explored the book. Naturally, I had to balance the amount of structured concept
time with time spent on the students’ authentic task of searching for and using a recipe to make
food for a party. The reality is that they needed to learn some of the text features of a recipe
(title, list, steps) in order to start making sense of what they were looking at. It was the perfect
time when pointing out these features to review the directionality of print.

**Authentic Literacy Activity**

After the student groups had decided on the recipe they wanted to make, it was time to
make a shopping list. Lists were one of the most common text types mentioned by families in
the survey. I wanted the students to be involved in creating the lists. This was their chance to do
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an authentic writing task. We began with the idea that they were making the list to take shopping. It was their own list and they were the only ones who needed to understand it. I told them that they could draw pictures, print letters, print words, or copy words. In my mind this is a wholly appropriate emergent writing task since each child was representing at a level appropriate for their skills and stage of development. I had the whole gamut of representations. A few students sounded out words and used invented spelling, and many copied the words from the recipe and/or my white board. Most of the children drew pictures to go with their writing, and some just drew pictures. And, yes, I have to admit to those of you wondering that there were one or two who heard the draw pictures instruction and just drew things completely unrelated to the items in the recipe; it in itself a very telling thing to observe. Part of what I liked about this activity was that the act of copying and drawing pictures to represent items on a list are actually authentic parts of real-life lists. They certainly are for me. If my wife asks me to buy her some make-up or other feminine product, I’m going to copy the one she’s got before I go searching for it in the store. If I am buying a number of things that fit together, such as plumbing parts, I will often draw it out so that I get the right pieces that I need.

Of the eight groups that I worked with, all but one were excited about the task and required very little encouragement. They were excited and stuck with it for at least 10 minutes. Some of the groups had a very long list of ingredients, and I suggested abbreviations as we got near the bottom. Some samples of student-created lists are below. The unfortunate part of these lists was that, at the time, I couldn’t figure out a way to actually have the students use them when shopping. The timing was such that it just wasn’t possible to make the lists for all the groups and shop for the ingredients within the next few days. It would have been hard for the students to remember what they had written. Also, I had many groups that needed some of the same
ingredients. I didn’t want, nor could my budget afford, four different bags of flour, etc. So, unfortunately, the students couldn’t actually use the lists that they created themselves. Nonetheless, what I did do was assign each group 2-4 items from their recipe to find in the grocery store, with the help of one or two adults per group. I gave each of the students their own lists that I had made and had them use these lists on our shopping trip.

The shopping trip began with a tour of the store. The local grocery is happy to, and frequently does, give tours of the store for free. They do a very nice job of showing the students both the retail
area and the behind the scenes parts of the store, not to mention feeding the kids samples of pizza, oranges, and mini-doughnuts as they travel through the different parts of the store.

Once the tour was finished and we were back at the front of the store, we began part two, the shopping. I assigned each group to one or two adults and gave the adult(s) a package that included, a list of student names in the group, a shopping list of the ingredients I needed that group to find (enough copies for each person in the group) and some tips for the parents on working with their groups. I had each group go over their list before setting out and cross off or put a check beside each item as they put them in their basket. When the groups had finished their lists, they met at the front of the store and I paid for the items.

The shopping trip was a big hit with the students. They talked about it and asked about it for two weeks before we went. Even during the tour, quite a few were asking, “When can we do our shopping?” They really enjoyed having their own list and crossing the items off. When, I returned to the store with the afternoon class, the customer service manager asked me, “So what are you teaching these kids? Everyone just comes for the tour. I’ve never seen anyone actually go shopping!” I told her about the party, the cookbooks, the recipes and the students making

Tips For Adult Shoppers:
(Make sure you keep all the children in your group with you at all times!)

Remember, the point of this activity is to have the students use reading and writing skills while shopping. Try to involve them as much as you can in reading or noticing things in labels, aisles and sign markers, prices etc. Make sure each child is using her/his list.

1. Give each child in your group a list
2. Go over the list together
3. Look for the items in the store (try to point out the aisle signs to the children)
4. When you find the item, have each child cross it off his/her list with the felt
5. Meet the rest of the class at the front of the store when you have all your items.
their own lists, all the time reading and writing, at their own level. I was glad we weren’t just there for the tour. It was chaotic at times but felt so much more meaningful.

Now that we had a recipe and the ingredients, it was time to get cooking. I could only cook with one group at a time per day. I used some adult volunteers and worked with some of the groups myself. Each chef had their own recipe to refer to as we measured and added ingredients. Once again I had them tick off each item as we went.

Re-assessing for Concepts of Print Skills

By this time I had reassessed all my students on the four concepts of print. I used one of the cookbooks opened to a single recipe with a two-line title. I began by asking the students if they remembered what this is called (“recipe,” most knew without any prompting) and then asked them to show me the title of the recipe (nine had trouble but six of those were able to tell me when I reminded them that a title is usually the biggest printing on the page). Next I had them show me where to start reading the title, where to go next, and what to do when they got to the end of the line. Between assessments, the students unable to demonstrate their understanding of the concepts of print had dropped from 13 to 5. After the cookbook activity, four of the five students still struggling were only having difficulty with the return sweep. Interestingly, one of the five who had trouble with the cookbook assessment had shown no trouble with the previous assessment that used a storybook. I was not sure if she was unclear on the concept or if she had trouble with the cookbook activity for some reason. When I re-checked her concepts of print skills with a storybook, she easily demonstrated the concepts. It was interesting that her knowledge of print did not transfer to the cookbook despite the amount of time we spent looking at them.
Planning for the Party

I used the cooking time as an opportunity to focus the attention on my five students who were still struggling. Once again this was a natural thing to do, given the level of support required to work through a largely written text with emergent-literate children.

Using the recipes to make the food was the culmination of our cookbook project. But the literacy associated with the party did not end there. As a class we composed an invitation, and the students addressed and signed their own invitations to invite whoever they wanted to the party. I also sent home a small CD-shaped sheet of paper for students to write the music they wanted played at the party. I recruited an older student to be our DJ. She needed a play list. I told the students that if they wanted their music played at the party, they had to bring in the CD from home with the piece of paper with the CD Title and Track Number written on it so that the DJ would know what to play.

The party itself was a huge success. We had parents, grand-parents, siblings, teachers and administrators drop by. The students were the hosts. They took their guest’s jackets, and with great pride showed them the food that they had made. They even let their guests eat first. The party was close to Christmas break. The resulting combination of Christmas music, children’s music and Bhangra made for eclectic musical atmosphere. Prempreet’s mom came, and I don’t think he stopped smiling the whole time. We ate, played board games in groups, and listened to the music.

Reflections

As I consider this literacy activity, I can’t help but be thrilled with the results. I loved the energy and excitement and sense of anticipation it created in my room. It was hectic at times but thoroughly rewarding. Through it all the children were highly motivated. When we approached
a reading or writing task, there were about 3 out of 44 who said “But I can’t read/write”. These were a slim minority. The rest approached these tasks confident that they could do them, and they could. Whether, it was reading or writing, they could all participate at their level and they were all challenged to extend their skills and knowledge.

If I was to do it all over again, and I plan to next year, I would change two things. First, to begin talking about cookbooks, I think it would be great to have students bring a cookbook from home to share. This would firmly establish the connection to the literacy of their homes. It would be great to actually use some of them for the activity as well. Of course they wouldn’t all be useable for Kindergarten, but some might meet my criteria. The other part I would change is the way we composed the lists. When we were caught up in the process, my mantra was to do all the reading and writing with the kids so that they were involved in the literacy activities that went into the party. At the time, it just seemed to make sense to sit with the kids and have them write the shopping lists from the recipe. It did make sense and I believe that this was beneficial to the kids but unfortunately it meant that the lists were unusable. There were too many items for the students to have a hope of making sense of all their drawing/printing. There were also too many duplicate items between the different groups. After making the lists with each group, I had to sit down by myself and figure out how much of each ingredient we needed and which group was going buy which of items from their list. It didn’t occur to me until long afterwards, as I was writing this chapter in fact, that I could have done the arduous task of sorting through the lists of ingredients before meeting with the groups. Then each student would only have to include 2–4 items on their own list. We could have just read and talked about the other items in the recipe that they didn’t need to buy. This way I think they could have successfully used their own lists on the shopping trip. The task of writing the list would have been more authentic if
they wrote the list and used it themselves at the store. Despite these changes, I am still very pleased with the process and the outcomes of this activity.

When I talked to other teachers about what I was doing in my classroom I usually got one of two responses: “Wow, isn’t that great.” And “You must be nuts!” Sometimes it seemed to be a mixture of both, the first articulated, the second implied. There were times when it felt a bit hectic. The shopping trip was a little chaotic with parents and their groups heading in different directions all over the store. And, there were moments during the group work time with cookbooks that students lost it because they couldn’t wait their turn. Honestly though, it never felt unmanageable. I never felt like I’d bitten off too much. It also didn’t feel like I was pushing the students too hard to do things they were not ready for. There were times when I had to shorten sessions because of the time of day and the student’s energy level but they stayed motivated throughout the process. I believe the keys to this success were:

• **The reading and writing tasks were for an authentic purpose that the students were excited about.**

• **I kept each session short.**

• **The tasks were designed such that each child could participate and learn regardless of their level of understanding.**

Authentic literacy experiences are here to stay in my classroom. I am convinced that they are not simply add-ons to my real program, suitable for special occasions or when I have time. Instead they can and will be a cornerstone of my Kindergarten literacy program, giving my students real reasons to learn to read and write, and infusing my classroom and my teaching with the enthusiasm and energy that characterized this experience. I could have just gone and bought
the food myself. We could have simply gone for the tour of the store to learn about grocery
stores. But this was so much more fun, so much more real.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKILLS</th>
<th>I</th>
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<th>C</th>
<th>*Phonemic Awareness/Word Recognition/Decoding</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reading K/1</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>sounds of the letters of the alphabets and order of the alphabet with the same initial and final sounds,</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Concepts about Print</em></td>
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<td>knows which sound is in the middle/beginning/end, blends individual sounds</td>
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<tr>
<td>Identify front, back and title page of book</td>
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<td>Know basic phonetic principles - Rhyming words, identifies words</td>
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<tr>
<td>Follow words from left to right and bottom to top</td>
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<td>Distinguish letters from words</td>
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<td>Recognize and name all uppercase and lowercase letters</td>
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<td>Track print with fingers and eyes</td>
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<td>Imitates reading behaviours</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Listening/Speaking</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>Reading Comprehension</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand and follow 1 and 2 step directions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use pictures and context to make predictions about story content.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ask questions for clarification</td>
<td>Connects life experiences to information/events in text.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use descriptive words when speaking about people, places, things and events</td>
<td>Retell familiar stories.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recite poems, rhymes, songs and stories</td>
<td>Identify who, what, what, where, and how of a story(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer relevant questions and make contributions in small or large group discussions</td>
<td>Use context to help understand new vocabulary(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain focus on one topic when speaking</td>
<td>Identify/describe the beginning, middle, setting, characters and main events(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribute ideas during a shared writing activity</td>
<td>Can identify the difference between fiction and nonfiction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use basic writing genres such as, labels, lists, notes, captions, stories, message, letters etc.</td>
<td>explain cause and effects in stories(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use prewriting strategies like drawing pictures, recording or dictating questions</td>
<td>Uses the 3 cueing systems, semantic syntactic, and graphophonic to enable decoding of new vocabulary(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes by moving from left to right and from top to bottom(K)</td>
<td>Draws conclusions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes CVC words and spelling approximations for other words(K)</td>
<td>Identify types of print materials, storybooks, poems, newspapers, signs, labels and the functions they serve</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write his or her own name and other important words</td>
<td>Read graphs, charts, signs, captions and other informational texts to acquire information(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Descriptions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write all letters in upper and lowercase</td>
<td>Use alphabetical order to locate information(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dictate words/sentences for a story/message(K)</td>
<td>Knows various types of mass media and understand that the use of more than one medium influences how one thinks and feels</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with teacher support uses writing process , prewriting, planning, drafts, revises, edits and publishes(1)</td>
<td>vocabulary of school such as numbers, shapes, colours, directions and categories</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on a central idea in writing(1)</td>
<td>vocabulary to describe clearly ideas, feelings and experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses end punctuation and capitalizes initial words of sentences, names of people, “I”, days of the week and months of the year(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses complete sentences(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes simple informational texts(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prints legibly and spaces letters, words and sentences appropriately(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Writes brief narratives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spell three and four letter short vowel words and grade level high frequency words correctly</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SKILLS</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>E</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>SKILLS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Phonemic Awareness/Word Recognition/Decoding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>*Reading Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading 2/3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Decode 2 syllable nonsense words and regular multi-syllabic words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Reading Comprehension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Read aloud fluently and accurately with appropriate intonation and expression</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use glossaries and indices to locate information in text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Use a dictionary to learn the meanings of words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distinguish between main idea and supporting details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Know and use complex word families when reading to decode unfamiliar words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extract significant information from the text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Listening/Speaking</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makes connections and inferences based on text and prior knowledge</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Continue asking for clarification and explanation of stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses context clues to infer the meaning of new words</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Paraphrase information that has been shared by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows the difference between fact and opinion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Give and follow 3 and 4 step oral directions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explains inferences, determine important ideas, identify cause and effect, make predictions and draw conclusions from text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Speak clearly and at an appropriate pace of the type of communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use multiple sources to locate information such as encyclopedias, online, experts and dictionaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Provide a beginning, middle and end when telling an oral narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interpret maps, charts, graphs and diagrams</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Compare ideas and points of view expressed in media and distinguish between the speaker’s opinions and facts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Read with fluency at grade level aloud and silently</td>
<td>Listens and responds appropriately to others</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Writing</strong></td>
<td>Give oral presentations about personal experiences or interests</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Group related ideas and maintain a focus</td>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use legible hand writing</td>
<td>Understand the explain common antonyms, synonyms and homonyms</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understand the purposes of reference materials such as dictionary, thesaurus and atlases</td>
<td>Know the meaning of simple prefixes and suffixes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses the writing process and revises for improving sequence, elements of a narrative and more descriptive detail</td>
<td>Identify and use regular plurals and irregular plurals</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writes a variety of genres as well as learning how to write a proper friendly letter and personal narrative and simple informational texts</td>
<td>Knows basic characteristics of a variety of literary genres such as, fables, poetry, fairy tales, folktales</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses commas properly in a letter and with dates and items in a series</td>
<td>Understands different techniques used in media messages(3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Continue using capitals properly with titles and initials of people</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses question and exclamation marks correctly</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Uses quotation marks to indicate dialogue and apostrophes to indicate singular possession(3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spell irregular words correctly and basic short and long vowels</td>
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<tr>
<td>r controlled and consonant blend patterns correctly</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Use past/present/future verb tenses properly(3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Develop a topic sentence and include supporting facts(3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Arrange words in alphabetical order</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify subjects and verbs that are in agreement and use proper pronouns, adjectives in writing and speaking(3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punctuate dates, city and state and titles of books correctly(3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Capitalize geographical names, holidays, historical periods and special events(3)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Spell correctly contractions, compound words(3)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**I** = Concept Introduces; **E** = Concept Extended; **C** = Concept Consolidated
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>at</th>
<th>and</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>do</td>
<td>in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it</td>
<td>the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>can</td>
<td>go</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>me</td>
<td>my</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Attributes of Commonly Found Text Types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text Type</th>
<th>Essential Attributes</th>
<th>Optional Attributes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Catalogue Entry | • name of item  
                | • price of item                           | • photo/illustration of item  
                |                        | • brief description of item  
                |                        | • Options for color; size, etc.  
                |                        | • item reference number for ordering |
| Greeting Card | • form of greeting (e.g. Happy Birthday; Merry Christmas, etc.) | • other text such as a poem or verse  
                |                        | • pictures/illustrations appropriate to greeting  
                |                        | • space for writing a personal message |
| Newsletter    | • name of group/community for whom it is intended  
                | • title of newsletter  
                | • date of publication  
                | • individual items of interest to intended audience (e.g. | • printed in newspaper-type columns  
                |                        |                        |                        |                        | • photos/illustrations  
<pre><code>            |                        |                        |                        |                        | • names of contributors |
</code></pre>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>announcements; upcoming events; reports of events, etc.</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program</strong></td>
<td><strong>Recipes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• name of event</td>
<td>• name of dish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• date of event</td>
<td>• list of ingredients with measurements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• event items listed according to order of occurrence</td>
<td>• ordered list of procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• numbers, bullets, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• preheating instructions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• number of servings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• nutritional information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• photo/illustrations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• anecdote/information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “From the Kitchen of…”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• suggestions for accompanying foods</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Parents,

Blake’s school goal for this year is to improve reading comprehension in the area of non-fiction. In order to plan language activities which meet this goal and the needs of your child Ms. XXXXX and Mrs. XXXXX (Div.12’s Resource teachers) are interested in finding out what types of literacy experiences your child has at home. By finding out this information, we may connect the kinds of experiences your child is having at home to the literacy experiences at school.

Please answer the following questions with your child:

1. Who do you see reading in your house?
   
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

2. What kinds of things are they reading? i.e. novels, newspapers, recipes
   
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

3. What do you (student) like to read?
   
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

4. Who do you see writing in your house?
   
   _______________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________

Parent Questionnaire
October, 2006
5. What kinds of things are they writing? i.e. letters, checks, bills, lists

6. Do you go to the library? How often do you go?

7. What types of things does your family borrow from the library?

8. How many languages does your family read or write? Name them.

9. What kinds of things do you (parent) do with your child at home to help them learn?

10. What kinds of things does your family do together for fun?

Please return by ____________________.

Thank you for your time and support in answering these questions.

Note:
Your child has been asked to document where they see print or text in their home by taking pictures with a disposable camera over the next few days. For example they might take a picture of a bookcase in their bedroom, notes on the refrigerator, or someone reading or writing in your home. This is to gather information on the variety of texts in our lives.

Thank you for your co-operation!

@Sarah Loat

From Chapter Three: "Loving Letter Writing" by Ashley McKittrick

Dear Parents,

One of * school goals for this year is to improve reading comprehension in the area of nonfiction reading. In order to plan activities that meet the school goal, and the needs of your child, I am interested in finding out what types of literacy experiences your child has at home (either in English or a first language). By finding out this information, I may connect the kinds of experiences your child is having at home to the literacy experiences at school. This questionnaire is completely optional and is due back to school by *.

What is the language spoken at home? English Other_________________________

A piece of text is anything that is written or read, showing that print conveys meaning. Think about the purpose of reading/writing in your life. Please think about literacy used for daily tasks, for official purposes, at your job, for entertainment, relaxation, information, shopping, worship and with your child/children, spouse, friends and coworkers.

Thank you for your time and support in answering the questions!

A. McKittrick

What types of texts are read/written in the home? (If the text is in a language other than English, please specify.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Text</th>
<th>By Whom</th>
<th>Duration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex. Newspaper - English</td>
<td>Mother and father</td>
<td>Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex. Recipes</td>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ex. Magazines</td>
<td>Mother, father, older siblings</td>
<td>Occasionally</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


From Chapter Three: "RSVP: An Invitation" by Andrea Beatty

Home Literacy Survey
Completed by

__________________________________________________________________________

My address/ community

__________________________________________________________________________

What language do you speak at home?

__________________________________________________________________________

What kinds of things do you and other family members read and write at home? What is the frequency? What is the purpose?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Texts</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex. Email</td>
<td>daily</td>
<td>Communicating with friends &amp; family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
From Chapter Five: "Food for a Party" by Jason Hodgins

. Letter Home to Parents

Dear ___________________Families,

One of the key objectives in early literacy teaching is to build on what students already know. In the home, students learn both about the many purposes of reading and writing, and the different kinds of texts that go along with those purposes. By the time they come to school, children have likely experienced many different kinds of texts, such as menus, newspapers, bills, flyers, internet etc. I need to get an idea of which kinds of texts my students are familiar with in order to create lessons and learning experiences that have meaning for the students; lessons the students find meaningful already are more likely to work. I would really appreciate you taking the time to fill out the form below. Your answers will really help me design effective lessons for all the children.

When completing the form please keep two things in mind:

1. Try to think of everything you and others in your house use reading and writing for. Stories and newspapers are probably the first things that jump to mind. Try to think about the less obvious ones as well, such as everyday tasks like email, lists, notices, notes to others etc.

2. Consider especially activities that your son or daughter has experienced personally (ex. Receiving birthday cards) and things they observe others in the house doing often (ex. Reading recipes)

For each bullet below list the texts for reading and writing that are used in your home and that your child is familiar with. If it is not clear please include who uses it and what they use it for.

• for daily tasks?

__________________________________________________________________
__________________________________________________________________
• with your children? with your spouse? with your friends? with your co-workers?
______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____

• for official purposes like getting a visa or work permit or paying taxes?
______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

• at your job?
______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

• for entertainment?
______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

• for relaxation?
______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

• for information?
______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

• for shopping?
______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

• for worship (or religious purposes)?
______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

• Internet?
______________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________

Thank-you for taking the time to complete this sheet. Your responses are an invaluable resource for me to design educational experiences that will work for your kids.
I would love to meet with a few people to have a more in depth conversation about this. If you are willing to meet with me for about 10 min please check the box below.

Yes I would be willing to meet to discuss reading and writing in my home

Thanks again for your time,

______________________________
Date: __________________

Dear Parents and Guardians:

Thank you for your continued support of our class. Part of our literacy program this year will include reading and writing activities that reflect the children’s experiences with reading and writing at home. Although you may not realize it, your homes are rich with many reading and writing activities either in English or another language. You and the members of your household are the first models for your children. Watching others read and write, no matter what the form, inspires the children to read and write. In order to plan some activities that reflect the experiences they have, I would like to interview some of you, and / or have you fill out the following form and return it by __________________. I have provided some examples to show how you might fill in the form. As well, if anyone is willing to have a camera sent home to help document examples of these varied reading and writing activities, please let me know. The form does not need to be complete for you to bring it back. As you can see from the examples below, valuable examples of reading and writing activities are not restricted to story time or helping with homework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What (Reading or Writing)</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>Reading newspaper</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>To learn information about current events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Writing letter</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>To keep in touch with distant family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Reading T.V. Guide</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>To find the correct time/channel for a TV show</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>Reading bills</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>To know how much money to pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandma</td>
<td>Reading a recipe</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>To prepare a meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who</td>
<td>What (Reading or Writing)</td>
<td>Where</td>
<td>Why</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Reading a menu</td>
<td>restaurant</td>
<td>To know what to order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Reading a map</td>
<td>car</td>
<td>To know how to go somewhere</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please write down as many reading or writing activities that you can; remember that no event is insignificant. Thank you again for aiding me in planning activities that will be relevant and fun for the students.

_____________________

(teacher’s signature)
Dear Parents and Guardians:

Thank you for your continued support of our class. Part of our literacy program this year will include reading and writing activities that reflect the children’s experiences with people reading and writing at home. Although you may not realize it, your homes are rich with many reading and writing activities either in English or another language. You and the members of your household are the first models for your children. Watching others read and write, no matter what the form, inspires the children to read and write. In order to plan some activities that reflect the experiences they have, I would like to interview some of you, and / or have you fill out the following form and return it by _______________. I have provided some examples to show how you might fill in the form. As well, if anyone is willing to have a camera sent home to help document examples of these varied reading and writing activities, please let me know. The form does not need to be complete for you to bring it back. As you can see from the examples below, valuable examples of reading and writing activities are not restricted to story time or helping with homework.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who</th>
<th>What (Reading or Writing)</th>
<th>Where</th>
<th>Why</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>Reading newspaper</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>To learn information about current events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Writing letter</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>To keep in touch with distant family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sister</td>
<td>Reading T.V. Guide</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>To find the correct time/channel for a TV show</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mom</td>
<td>Reading bills</td>
<td>Office</td>
<td>To know how much money to pay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grandma</td>
<td>Reading a recipe</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>To prepare a meal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dad</td>
<td>Reading a menu</td>
<td>restaurant</td>
<td>To know what to order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brother</td>
<td>Reading a map</td>
<td>car</td>
<td>To know how to go somewhere</td>
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</table>
Please write down as many reading or writing activities that you can; remember that no event is insignificant. Thank you again for aiding me in planning activities that will be relevant and fun for the students.

(teacher’s signature)
# Teacher’s Data Collection Table

Date_________________

Grade________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Text</th>
<th>Purpose(s) for reading/writing</th>
<th># of Respondents</th>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix

Integrating Common Text Types into Different Subjects

1. ‘To Do’ or Item List
   a. Student led conferences
   b. ‘Centre Time’ list
   c. Editing list
   d. ‘Student Helper’ jobs
   e. In class homework that need to be finished by week’s end
   f. List of science experiment supplies to bring in
   g. List of supplies for a field trip
   h. List of homework buddies to call
   i. List of chores for the weekend

2. Invitations
   a. To parent teacher conferences
   b. To a guest speaker or performer
   c. To a parent or guardian to visit the class for a special presentation or party
   d. To another class to come view a presentation
   e. To a school board official to view a special assembly or performance

3. Letters
   a. To pen pals
   b. To a relative in another country or city requesting family or cultural information
c. To the editor of the local newspaper voicing their opinion on a relevant topic
d. To an special adult in their life thanking them for something
e. To a company requesting supplies/furniture/money or other aid for a special project they want to do
f. To a government organization requesting information for a project
g. To an author the students are reading or studying
h. To next year’s class advising them on class and teacher expectations
i. To a student who has moved away
j. To have students create their own ‘morning message letter’ for the class to read

4. **Procedural Text (experiments, how to’s, step by step instructions)**
   a. To teach a science experiment to the class
   b. To teach the class how to complete an art activity
c. To inform a visitor how to get to the school
d. To bake or cook a recipe for a school/class party or event
e. To help teachers or others remember ‘How to work the school TV/DVD/VCR’ or any other confounding electronic equipment!
f. To teach others how to e mail, build a website, create a pod-cast, create a power point, work the I-pod, etc.
g. To provide step by step instructions on how to take care of class pets or plants
h. To teach others how to play a class game or game that student’s have invented themselves

5. Information Pamphlet or Brochure
   a. To teach others about the class pet
   b. To give new students information about the school and community
   c. To teach others about their own culture and hand out from the office or library
   d. To inform others at the school or in the community programs or activities that might be offered at the school
   e. For fundraising activities, For eg. Terry Fox run for Cancer Research or Jump Rope for Heart Campaign, students could create an information brochure to send home to parents and others in the community explaining what the fundraising is for, the details about how to support the campaign and information about the disease.
   f. Information Pamphlets on common animals or plants in the area that could be displayed at the local parks information stations.

6. Newspapers
   a. To locate sports scores or statistics
   b. To find information on local movies
   c. To write and read letters to the editor
d. To comparison shop for things needed for the class in the advertisements or classifieds

e. To determine the forecast before planning outside field trips or activities

f. To find ferry schedules or bus schedules for traveling or field trips

g. To find information on topics the students are already interested in

h. To study the form so they can produce a class/school/community newspaper or newsletter.