

Through the Lens of Story Workshop:  
Untethering the Prescriptive Bounds of Traditional Literacy

by

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## **Abstract**

The new BC Curriculum honours and recognizes that the world is changing, and that students need more than the basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The revised curriculum puts an emphasis on the need to provide children with opportunities to explore their passions and interests, develop their critical thinking and collaboration skills and have access to personalized learning opportunities. Story Workshop is a classroom structure first introduced by Opal School in Portland, Oregon, where children are invited to develop and enhance their “language and literacy skills through play and exploration of materials such as clay, paint, props or blocks”. Story Workshop is an authentic way to evoke past memories, provoke curiosity and ignite the inner story that is within each child. Dewey’s (1929) theory of hands-on learning supports the intention of Story Workshop as it aims’ at children’s interests as a vehicle to knowledge acquisition. Story Workshop honours the Universal Design for Learning platform, embracing ways of learning that appeal to the critical habits of mind, strengthening skills like perseverance, critical thinking, flexibility, innovation, wonder and joy. Story Workshop is a progressive approach to infusing literacy in an authentic manner into the classroom.

## Chapter 1

As a teacher of young children, I want to provide my students with authentic learning experiences to develop the skills they will need to be successful in the future. Wagner (2014), stated that the seven traits that children need to develop to be successful are: critical thinking, collaboration, agility and adaptability, problem solving, effective oral and written communication, accessing and analyzing information, curiosity and imagination. The new BC Curriculum honours and recognizes that the world is changing, and that students need more than the basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (BC Ministry of Education, 2013). The revised curriculum puts an emphasis on the need to provide children with opportunities to explore their passions and interests, develop their critical thinking and collaboration skills and have access to personalized learning opportunities.

In the cross-curricular competencies framework, education is considered to influence and be influenced by the context in which it occurs. That is, it takes place within the unique context of each student's life, occurring in interaction with the student's experiences outside the classroom. In this way, students' learning within the school system has the potential to enrich their whole development, as that unfolds in their school years and in preparation for their future lives and further learning (BC Ministry of Education, 2013, p.3).

Throughout my graduate studies, I have thought about how I can create a classroom environment that contributes towards untethering my students from the prescriptive nature that bounds traditional education.

### **Principles of Funds of Knowledge and Cultural Identity**

Filippini (Edwards , 1998, p. 181) (Filippini, 1990), made a great connection between the classroom and a game of catch, recognizing that in order for a classroom to hold the most impact on learning it needed to be reciprocal in nature, one that was fluid between the educator and student. A reciprocal relationship between the adult and child allows the 'rich child' to

arrive; one who is “an active subject, a multi-lingual creator of knowledge and identity from birth, connected in relations of interdependency with other children and adults, a citizen with rights” (Moss, 2006, p. 129). I believe that my students are capable, competent and responsible for their learning. When given the opportunity, children can share their natural skills of researcher, critical thinker and creator of knowledge (Moss, 2006). Children carry “funds of knowledge” (Hedges, Cullen, & Jordan, 2011, p. 189) that are all connected to their “funds of identity” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014, p. 36) they gather through their culture, community and life experiences. The term ‘funds of identity’ was coined after the term ‘funds of knowledge’, acknowledging that children are influenced by their culture, family history and social experiences, and these factors impact their self expression, understanding of the world around them, and beliefs (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2014). I believe that each of my students brings with them “funds of knowledge” that are waiting to be shared with peers (Moll, 1992, p.133). As educators I feel it is critical to foster learning platforms in which children can construct their own knowledge, inviting opportunity to communicate and collaborate with peers and adults; encouraging children to become empowered as they share their knowledge, proving them to be powerful and important citizens (Malaguzzi, 1993; Bruson Day, 2001; Gandini, 2011, p.6). Our classrooms are filled with diversity: physical, cultural, ability, gender and motivational. It is critical that teaching philosophy and practice invites change, evolution, and understanding of differences. It is vital that educators are responsive through action with facilitation of dialogue amongst and listening to students’ voices, hearing the nuggets of knowledge and curiosity that arrive, waiting to be shared and explored further. Moss (2006), referred to a concept known as ‘hegemonic globalisation’, defined as “globalisation of a particular local and culturally-specific discourse to the point that it makes universal truth claims



and localizes all rival discourses” (Moss, 2006, p. 127). In this sense, our school systems have, too, taken on a traditional Western approach to education that fosters a Western vision for learning concepts and teaching styles. Our schools are no longer homogenous, and so, teaching, too, must become untethered from traditional ways, embracing diverse and multiple ways of knowing and doing.

### **Importance of Open-Ended Materials**

Open-ended rich materials provoke and activate prior knowledge that children have hidden inside their minds, which shine through when prompted to expand their thinking by allowing time and space for collaboration, flexibility with thinking, and shared knowledge (Curtis & Carter, 2015). When the environment and materials are flexible, and open-ended, children’s natural desire to create and problem solve set the stage for meaningful learning to take place (Moss, 2006, p. 6). Miller (2008) quotes Jean Piaget who stated that, “each time one prematurely teaches a child something he could have discovered himself, that child is kept from inventing it and consequently from understanding it completely” (Miller, 2008, p. 58).

Children’s cognitive, physical, social and emotional development are intertwined within each other (Curtis & Carter, 2015). For one aspect to develop, it is critical for the other aspects to develop alongside. Factors such as socialization, experimentation, and culture all have an impact on the language development of a child. The materials an educator chooses to set out sends a message to a child about their potential, value and capabilities. Malaguzzi states “children need the freedom to appreciate the infinite resources of their hands, their eyes and their ears, the resources of forms, materials sound and colour” (Eke et al., 2009, p.185).

Literacy and learning needs to be joyful and fun, as this releases endorphins in the brain, allowing learning to be memorable. Literacy needs to have an aesthetic appeal, one that promotes

curiosity and can touch the heart of the learners. Literacy needs to be cultural, one that goes beyond the Western culture, and invites the diverse multiculturalism that flows amongst the children, promoting cultural literacy and identity. Story Workshop is an avenue that crosses and intersects all these roads that are vital to building literacy skills in our children.

### **Motivation around Story Workshop**

Story Workshop, as defined for the purpose of this capstone, is a classroom structure first introduced by Opal School in Portland, Oregon, where children are invited to develop and enhance their “language and literacy skills through play and exploration of materials such as clay, paint, props or blocks” (<http://opalschoolblog.typepad.com/files/equity-and-access-through-story-workshop.pdf>, 2015). Story Workshop is an authentic way to evoke past memories, provoke curiosity and ignite the inner story that is within each child. Students are invited to engage with the materials in a way that is meaningful and appealing to them, in hopes, allowing them to tap into and share their funds of knowledge and funds of identity that they each carry. Story Workshop has no boundaries, no rules and no prescribed outcomes which makes the potential endless and infinite and invites children to become authors to their unique stories.

Story Workshop provides an opportunity for children to experience and play with materials, that honor the child as a protagonist, one who is capable of being a thinker and a knowledge-builder, and provide an outlet for the child to express and discover ideas that are hidden within their minds (<http://www.portlandcm.org/about-us/our-philosophy>, 2015). Moss (2006), referred to knowledge as a rhizome, something “shoots in all directions with no beginning and no end, but always in between, and with opening towards other directions and places” (p. 131). Story Workshop fosters this sense of rhizomatic knowledge to occur as encounters with provocations will be met and explored differently by each student.

Story Workshop is an avenue where children can begin to see themselves as a resource, make sense of their funds of knowledge, develop empathy and collaboration with others, and ignite themselves as authors of their own stories.

This capstone will address how children's engagement with open-ended materials provokes and evokes creativity, collaboration and literacy in early years' classrooms through the lens of Story Workshop.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The following theories frame my examination of the literature on children's engagement with open-ended materials in the early years' classrooms and how this impacts literacy development: Dewey's (1929) theory of knowledge acquisition; Eisener's (1967) theory of organic curriculum; Friere's (1970) theory of dialogue and reflection; and Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory. All of these theories draw from social constructivism and the pedagogy of active listening. Social constructivist theory maintains the perspective that "knowledge is seen as constituted in a context through a process of meaning making in continuous encounters with others and the world, and the child and the teacher are understood as co-constructors of knowledge and culture" (Rinaldi, 2006, p.5). All of these theorists' address teaching with integrity and intention. For the purpose of this capstone, I define teaching with integrity as a means to respect the voice and abilities of all children, and accept that children are valued citizens of the community with curiosities and knowledge that drives and impacts the learning that takes place everyday in a classroom (Miller, 2008). Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory supports the notion that cognitive development stems from social interactions, within the zone of proximal development, as children interact and co-construct knowledge (Rinaldi, 2006, p.5; Bodrova et al., 2013). Vygotsky also believed that the

environment “determines the development of the child through experience of the environment” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll , 2014, p. 33). It is through the vehicle of dialogue that the child’s social and emotional capabilities are strengthened and enriched, as the child enters a play that is rich of negotiation, compromise and empathy (Rinaldi, 2006). Along with cognitive and social emotional development, open-ended materials provide rich opportunities for physical development as they invite chances for risk taking, building and gross and fine motor development (Curtis & Carter, 2015).

### **Value of Active Listening.**

‘Active listening’ involves giving attention to others that goes beyond the hearing of sound (Paley, 1986). To listen requires mindfulness – being present in the here and now. “To be present means to be focused on what is happening right *now* and to be open to and see the possibilities among the people, the space, and the materials within the environment” (Kashin, 2014; Rinaldi, 2006, p. 146). “Listening is the premise of a learning relationship” (Rinaldi, 2006, p. 88). As Paley suggests, educators need to take caution that their words do not “circumvent the issue” or silence the children by providing answers that close the subject (Paley, 1986, p. 4). As an educator, it is important to reflect on our practice and ask ourselves, how much am I feeding dialogue versus how much am I facilitating dialogue? For the intention of this capstone, I will define feeding dialogue as unintentionally asking closed questions or prompting conversation that directs the learning outcome as planned by the educator. Facilitating dialogue will be defined as prompting conversation with open questions and statements that invite the conversation to expand and navigate without prejudice. Feeding dialogue can often fulfill the lived experiences of the educator; while facilitating dialogue invites children to play out their lived experiences. Active listening navigates the pathways of learning and shared knowledge

(Paley, 1986, p. 6). Story Workshop encourages educators to re-position themselves in a way that they can learn from the children. It requires educators to document and reflect on encounters that children have with each other, with the educator, and with the materials, inviting a reciprocity of understanding between adult and child (<http://opalschoolblog.typepad.com/files/equity-and-access-through-story-workshop.pdf>). One must think about materials as being non-prescriptive, in that they can become anything the child would like it to be at that time; the material does not have a particular definition attached to it, thus it promotes creativity, problem solving and perseverance (Curtis & Carter, 2015).

### **Importance of Hands-On Learning.**

Dewey's (1929) theory of hands-on learning supports the intention of Story Workshop as it aims' at children's interests as a vehicle to knowledge acquisition. Dewey believed that schools were to be a social institution which should reflect an individuals lived social lives, and thus curriculum too should be based in and arise from students lived experiences (Dewey, 2004, p. 19). Story Workshop supports the Universal Design for Learning model, allowing all children to share their lived experiences in a safe and creative way, as there are no barriers or confines within a provocation of materials. Elliot Eisener (1967) was a strong believer that curriculum needed to be organic in nature. Story Workshop falls within this theory as the invitation to be the author of one's story is organically unfolded as the children play with the materials set out. He believed in the professional growth of a teacher through practices such as reflection and observation inside one's classroom and school. Story Workshop's pulse lies within documentation and reflection of the interactions of the child with the materials and adult. It is through this documentation that the educator can grow and develop understanding of the child's knowledge, capability and thus provide an environment that is reciprocal in nature between the

adult and child. Eisner supported the holistic development of children. He strongly believed that the development and process behind a final piece of work, is far more valuable than the display on a bulletin board. Understanding the process and the engagement with the materials is vital to the recognition of the achievements, interpretations and meanings developed within each child during the activity. Eisner stated “what we need to create is an educationally interpretive exhibition that explains to viewers what problems the youngsters were addressing and how they resolved them... I am talking about getting people to focus not so much on what the grade is, but on what process led to the outcome” (Eisner, 2004, p. 303).

### **Significance of Student Engagement and Interaction.**

Paulo Friere, educator and philosopher, suggested that learning comes from within, and that the role of the teacher is to “grow learning”. Reggio Emilia built on this philosophy with the concept of the environment as the third teacher. Friere had a firm belief that when students and teacher interact in a natural way, it allows the discourse of curriculum to be more relevant and organic. He had a beautiful saying of “teaching is letting learn” (Friere, 2004).

### **Rationale**

The image of the child is where my teaching philosophy begins. I am a strong believer that young children are vital citizens who are ready and capable of making a difference in the world around them. Children come into this world curious, ready to learn, share and inherit knowledge.

My personal definition of traditional education, is one that invites the teacher to be the main holder and distributor of knowledge, the creator of units and lessons based on their, the teacher’s personal interests, and one which invites an output of knowledge through closed question and response mediums. The classroom environment feels ‘sterile’, is cluttered by

commercial manipulatives and slogans, and the child is nowhere to be seen. The child is a mere student on the class registrar.

When I received my first contract working with adolescent children with intensive behaviour designations, my definition of the image of a child was greatly impacted. It all begins with the integrity that is cast upon the child by the educator. These children came to me with lots of 'labels' inflicted on them. They carried a sense of anger and hostility when they first arrived in my classroom, because prior to this, the classroom was not a place where they felt emotionally safe. Sadly, these children felt that these labels were never going to be eliminated. I knew that my goal as an educator was to restore this image. I wanted each of my students to leave the program feeling confident, capable and valued as citizens of their neighbourhood, school and community. In order to accomplish this, I needed to remove the hegemonic ways of traditional education, and offer a program that was meaningful to their interests and culture, while providing an environment that was inviting, understanding and open. We began every morning with a 30 minute quiet time, where the children were invited to sit in their cubicle and address their needs by either sleeping, eating, reading or resting. This gave me time to check in with them individually and find out how they were doing. This time truly allowed the children to believe that someone cared to listen to them. The UN Rights of a Child Act (1989), reminds us that every child needs just one adult to listen and connect with, and for these children this was a critical element that needed to be provided in their educational learning environment (UN,1989). Aside from the importance of active listening and safe environment, the materials provided needed to provoke their intelligence. We used newspapers to address literacy, while flyers and weekly allowances addressed mathematics where they participated in discussions and group work. The day that stands out for me the most was the day the children wanted to buy a pet fish. At first I

thought it was going to be a classroom pet fish, but soon, I realized that they each wanted their own individual fish in their cubicle. So, with the mindset that these children are capable, we began to plan. They phoned a local pet store (literacy), found out how much the fish and tank would cost (mathematics), designed a campaign to raise money (collaboration, critical thinking), advertised the campaign (oral language development, self confidence), and purchased and maintained the health of the fish. By the end of the project, the children were so proud of themselves and believed that they could do anything as long as they tried.

In the early years' classroom, I believe that a similar stigma often gets imposed on young children. However, in my experience as a Kindergarten teacher, the young child is a valued knowledge holder. This knowledge also has the potential to shape the curriculum in a classroom. I believe that children's knowledge is best shared through their experiences with rich and tactile open-ended materials. From my perspective, materials speak to how we view children. When we place plastic prescribed toys out for play, we invite children to play out prescribed situations in society, as those materials are familiar and often do not become something else. When we present materials that are open-ended and not bound within prescription, we invite a sense of curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, and inclusivity. With open-ended materials there is no right or wrong, which creates a safe atmosphere for children of all genders, ages, abilities and ethnicity to experiment, explore and share their funds of knowledge. Providing children with materials that are fragile, such as glass or china, that are found in real living spaces portrays to children that we trust them, and that we believe that they are capable of handling such beautiful things. My experience with Story Workshop has been just that. Story Workshop honours the Universal Design for Learning platform, which allows for all students to feel proud of their story. Story Workshop levels the playing field for students within a classroom as it invites thought and



creation from each and every child. The materials and invitation provide accessibility for the diversity that shines within the classroom. Through dialogue, prior knowledge of story elements, collaboration with peers and critical and creative thinking students are able to create a story. The process of storytelling is organic in nature, as their engagement invokes creativity, and/or past memories stories naturally unfold. A natural curiosity ripples throughout the class and the creativity is contagious, as the children play, listen, talk and create a collaborative story together.

In my Kindergarten classroom, I have enjoyed placing out beautiful materials such as colourful cloths, items from nature, buttons, jewels, and tea lights, then observing how the children engage with the materials and listening to the stories that blossom as a collaborative effort. Listening, through the lens of an educator, to the many voices of the children as they create, negotiate, experiment and fail, is inspiring for me, as I believe that all of this organic learning would never have taken place through the lens of traditional education.

... if we believe that children possess their own theories, interpretations and questions, and are protagonists in the knowledge-building processes, then the most important verbs in educational practice are no longer 'to talk', 'to explain', or 'to transmit'... but 'to listen.' Listening means being open to others and what they have say, listening to the hundred (and more) Languages with all our senses. (Rinaldi, 2006, pp. 125-126)

## **Significance**

Brain-based research has been influential for educators; enabling them to create successful learning environments that enhance the holistic development of children. Scientists now know that the brain is not genetically predetermined, "but rather is influenced and impacted by children's experiences with people and their surroundings" (CMEC, 2008, p. 4). The following are vital to providing students with an optimal learning environment:

safe environment that nurtures the social emotional aspect of learning, uses real, tangible materials to allow the concept of an object to be concrete, provides hands-on practices, uses an integrated approach for teaching materials, allows time for questions and sense making, and taps into prior knowledge (Schiller and Willis, 2008, p.3-5).

The literature review, as part of my capstone, supports a classroom that fosters the implementation of provocation in Story Workshop to generate conversation, inquiry, and develop literacy skills that may arise organically. As children engage with materials that are open-ended, their innate curiosity becomes stimulated, which creates a ripple of integrations amongst the children in the classroom. Malaguzzi calls this engagement ‘the tangle of spaghetti’, Moss (2006) referred to this form of learning as a rhizome, where the learning is not linear, but rather “shoots in all directions with no beginning and no end”, integrating the multiple perspectives of each learner (p.131). This teaching approach is very different than that of a traditional classroom.

As stated by Greenman (1988) in (Curtis & Carter, 2015), *Designs for Living and Learning*, “we need to find terms other than ‘classrooms’ – terms such as ‘home bases’ or ‘learning spaces’ – to convey an image other than school for children’s early learning experiences”, he continues by stating that “they need opportunities to be trusted with real tools and breakable materials” (Curtis & Carter, 2015, p.23). I am a strong believer that curriculum goes beyond the prescribed learning outcomes enforced by the government, and that the most meaningful learning comes from the children themselves.

Over the past three years, I have transformed my role as an educator from the traditional teacher to more of an observer and documenter of the children’s actions, engagement and dialogue. “The pedagogy of listening, observing, and communicating is one that is vital for an educator to understand, so that the image of a child, as a capable and competent person who has

rights, rather than just needs, is justified and met” (Rinaldi, 2000, p.123). The role of the educator is not merely to transmit information to the children, but to provide a safe atmosphere where children feel authority to have an authentic voice that screams of their curiosities and interests (Rinaldi, 2000, p.125-26). Providing children with a voice is not solely limited to words and dialogue; voice can be heard through actions, drawings, the atmosphere of a classroom, and silence: when a child may be reflecting. Providing children with the opportunity to have a voice can only happen when the educator becomes a listener and observer, and the image of the child is seen as “powerful and rich in potential and resources right from the moment of birth” (Rinaldi, 2000, p.123). Teaching with integrity, and with recognition that the child is a valued citizen, reinforces the respect and trust that an educator has for the words and curiosity of a child. Children are intuitive to this relationship and thus feel empowered to ‘re-cognise’ and understand the world around them, as they know they, and their wonders, are respected (Paley, 1986, p. 6).

### **Project Outline**

In Chapter One, I introduced my topic, which focuses on the importance of presenting children with engaging, open-ended materials to inspire story writing thus enhancing and developing literacy skills. I expressed my interest in this area and how it has impacted my teaching philosophy and theory.

In Chapter Two, I will continue to examine how the theoretical frameworks have influenced my topic and will include a literature review that addresses the research around early childhood literacy and materials. I will also investigate the impact documentation has on literacy in the early years.

In Chapter Three I will propose how to implement story workshop in the early years classroom, and I will identify the benefits of Story Workshop as an avenue to provoke and

inspire children to become the authors of their own stories. I will propose strategies for how to document and record the children's stories, and how these documented jewels develop a sense of pride in oneself as a learner and writer for children. In this chapter, I will also break down and dissect individually the: role of educator, role of child, role of environment, role of curriculum, role of open-ended materials, and finally the role of dialogue and documentation. I will provide an outline for a three session workshop for colleagues in my district. Within the workshop series, I will provide analyses of the environment as a tool for inspiration in early childhood literacy, the reflection of the child in the environment, the engagement that the children have with materials and how through this engagement, the language arts curriculum becomes visible through a summary and review of further literature and research in this area. As we embark on a new school year with a revised curriculum, I will analyze the implications for teachers and how this capstone supports notions within this revised curriculum, including the challenges and victories, and supported by research that validates this teaching approach. I will make recommendations based on research.

In Chapter Four, I will reflect on how Story Workshop has impacted my teaching philosophy and style, and how it brought the language arts aspect of story writing alive in my classroom. I will also suggest strategies that will allow Story Workshop to be a valuable avenue across the elementary years, beyond primary.

## Chapter Two

Young children have a natural affinity to learn and be curious about their environment (space, peers and materials that are within it). Children are naturally social beings and learn best through play (Rinaldi, 2000). As educators, we need to recognize that our students have varying learning styles and that our classrooms are rich with diversity, setting a platform for educators to embrace the heterogeneous culture within and produce new ways of learning. One avenue that embraces the rich diversity in student's knowledge, lived experiences and unique perspectives is Story Workshop. I first was introduced to the concept of Story Workshop from Opal School: Portland Children's Museum. Opal School is a museum for children and is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach, supporting the notion that children are capable, competent and creative citizens (retrieved from <http://www.portlandcm.org>). Below is the school's philosophy around Story Workshop:

Story Workshop is an opportunity for children to strengthen their language and literacy development by playing with a variety of objects and materials to tell ideas from their real or imaginary lives. They develop competence with the story form and communicate their stories using a wide variety of media (retrieved from <http://www.portlandcm.org/teaching-and-learning/opal-school/opal-beginning-school>).

Story Workshop embraces ways of learning, thereby appealing to the critical habits of mind, strengthening skills like perseverance, critical thinking, flexibility, innovation, wonder and joy. Story Workshop is a progressive approach to infusing literacy in an authentic manner into the classroom. It follows the Universal Design for Learning principles, in that it is flexible and versatile, appealing to students of all ethnicities, abilities and genders (Edyburn, 2005). We are not a homogenous group of people. Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, and how we see and understand concepts will vary too. Story workshop weaves in children's natural affinity and curiosity to learn. Research shows that curiosity is a vital factor for children's

engagement. In a recent study at the University of California, 19 volunteers were connected to an MRI machine to monitor brain circuit activity, testing to see how curiosity “lit up” the brain, affecting the area of the brain that controlled pleasure and released dopamine (Singh, 2014). The study provides evidence that the release of dopamine is important because affects the cells that are critical for learning, thus increasing one’s ability to learn. “Curiosity really is one of the very intense and very basic impulses in humans. We should base education on this behaviour” (Singh, 2014).

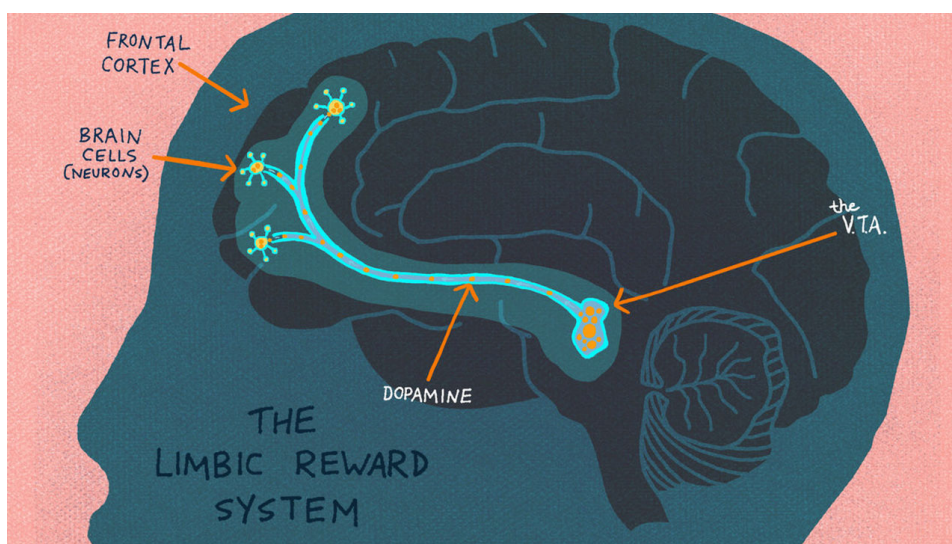


Figure 1. The Limbic Reward System lights up when curiosity is piqued. (LA Johnson/NPR) (Singh, 2014)

Through Story Workshop children learn how to collaborate, cooperate, problem solve and respect diversity. The children’s voices and knowledge are what create, develop and bind the curriculum. I am a strong believer that children are competent and inquisitive beings, and when provided opportunity, their brilliance and capabilities can shine through. Story Workshop is a vein that supports literacy in early childhood beyond reading and writing, drawing and oral

language, because it promotes and fosters children to share nuggets of their knowledge, culture and identity through interactions and encounters with the materials and their peers.

Research on the functionality of Story Workshop as a teaching methodology towards literacy is minimal, thus I have chosen to breakdown Story Workshop into four elements:

1. play and social emotional development in literacy,
2. principles of universal design for learning, accessibility to all learners, and cultural diversity
3. intention of materials and time to experience, explore and enhance creativity,
4. role of teacher and importance of child's voice.

### **Play and Social Emotional Development in Literacy**

Play is a natural vehicle that can drive children's learning experiences and curiosities. "Learning does not take place by means of transmission or reproduction. It is a process of construction" (Rinaldi, 2000, p.125). When children are engaged in play, they are making sense of the world around them, they are "re-cognising" the knowledge they already know, they are solving conflict and learning negotiation (Rinaldi, 2000, p.130). The classroom now becomes a haven where the child is "re-understood" and has rights to voice their learning interests, motivations and curiosities (Rinaldi, 2000, p. 130). "The act of teaching became a daily search for the child's point of view... the search was what mattered – only later did someone tell me it was research – and it provided an open-ended script from which to observe, interpret, and integrate the living drama of the classroom" (Paley, 1986, p. 3). Story Workshop untethers the traditional role of the teacher as dictator and controller of knowledge, and gives permission for the teacher to become a facilitator and observer of authentic play in action. Story Workshop has aspects of play-based learning and free play, both of which have importance, but are very

different. With respect to play-based learning, Story Workshop fosters an intention to provoke and develop language and literacy in an authentic natural setting; however, Story Workshop caters to free play in that the interaction with the materials, the language and literacy that evolves through the interactions with the materials, and the duration of time spent at the provocation are all open ended and dependent on the child's curiosity and interest with the materials at hand. The teacher, as facilitator, can provoke curiosity with questions, wonders, and connections. Story Workshop allows a teacher to observe students engaged in play, and through this observation, get to know the students interests and knowledge as they become uncovered and revealed through play.

*Figure 2. (Takhar, 2016)*



This is an image of a boy engaged in transferring his play scene to paper. He was very curious about spelling and labelling his picture. In this instance, the teacher was able to help prompt his letter knowledge and provide guidance fulfilling his language and literacy needs at the time.



“Free play is positively associated with socio-emotional development and is related to positive outcomes in language and literacy learning” (Hirsh-Pasek, Skolnick Weisberg, & Michnick Golinkoff, 2013, p. 105). Free play as defined within this capstone is play that is “fun, voluntary, flexible, involves active engagement of the child and (has) an element of make-believe” (Hirsh-Pasek, Skolnick Weisberg, & Michnick Golinkoff, 2013, p. 105). Guided play, as defined within this capstone, “incorporates adult-scaffolded learning objectives but remains child-directed... adults might initiate the the play sequence, children direct their own learning within the play context” (Hirsh-Pasek, Skolnick Weisberg, & Michnick Golinkoff, 2013, p. 105). Play provides an authentic experience for children to engage in dialogue with their peers. Developing peer relationships is vital for community building, self confidence and learning. “Children experience the pleasure of being given back pieces of their own knowledge, enriched and elaborated on by the contribution of others through this system of communication and exchange” – play (Rinaldi, 2000, p.127). Children’s perspective and understanding of the world is continuously developing and changing as they experience and interpret their interactions with people and the material around them. Children need dialogue that is authentic, that permits the time to validate and understand their perspective of the world, and of their knowledge, as all children carry ‘funds of knowledge’ that are unique to each individual. These ‘funds of knowledge’ are exposed, shared and experienced when provided a safe platform to socially engage in play with their peers (Esteban-Guitart & Moll , 2014).

*Figure 3. (Takhar, 2016)*



Two boys interacting with the materials provided in the provocation, and each other, creating a play scene of animals stuck in a forest fire. One of the boys shared his knowledge of water bombers, and the other boy shared his knowledge of forest re-growth after a fire. This engagement of dialogue supports the need for dialogue and for children having an invitation to share their wisdom with each other.

Every child has a story to tell. Every child has a voice that needs to be heard. Every child has a right to be seen as capable and competent. All of these virtues can and should be seen and heard through the vehicle that children drive best – through play; play that is navigated and created by the organic curiosity that lives in each child, supported by a “dab of glue” from the educator (Paley, 1986, p.8). Pretend play fosters language development as children practice telling stories strengthening their oral language skills, organically developing the blocks of reading and writing for later years.

*Figure 4.* (Takhar, 2016)*Figure 5.* (Takhar, 2016)

Gosso and Carvalho (2013) state that “play should not be opposed to learning activities or to ‘serious’ work, but rather seen as an important arena of children’s lives, a condition for children’s welfare and a legitimate right of the child” (p.1). This statement is supported by the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child, where in Article 31 it is stated that children have “the right to play and rest” (UNICEF).

A recent article written in the Kaiser Health News, called Learning Soft Skills in Early Childhood Can Prevent Harder Problems Later, stated that a study conducted by Duke University called Fast Track, reported that children who were provided opportunity to practice “soft skills” such as self-regulation, empathy, socialization and cooperation fared better than children who were only taught “hard skills” such as physics (Shallcross, 2015). The 1990’s study followed and examined close to 900 students, from their first year to their 10<sup>th</sup> year, who were randomly placed in two intervention groups. After initially finding that the children in one of the intervention groups, that afforded the time to practice socialization and self-regulation, crime and delinquency rates were reduced. The researchers then proceeded to investigate why this finding occurred, and found that developing empathy, was a key factor to a child’s success as an adolescent and adult, beyond that of the reading and writing academic skills. Story Workshop

supports the development of empathy as the children are tangled in play while creating stories.

This requires the children who are engaged in the play to turn take, listen, collaborate, cooperate and empathize with their peer's perspectives.

### **Principles of Universal Design for Learning, Accessibility to All Learners, and Cultural Diversity**

Story Workshop follows the Universal Design for Learning model making it accessible for all learners, and invites creativity and imagination for stories to be created multi-modally. The new BC Curriculum lays a foundation for teachers to have autonomy with our teaching and environment. Story Workshop invites the silent voices to be heard, cultural gems to be shared, and beautiful stories to be created, while ensuring that each child sees themselves as an author, and as a competent, valued citizen of the classroom.

Story Workshop's pulse lies within the framework that there is no right or wrong way to interact with the materials provided in the provocation. Each child is invited to engage in dialogue as the materials affect them and provoke past memories, invoke curiosity and drive imagination.

Gosso and Carvalho (2013) state that although play is a "universal trait of humans", play is affected and determined by cultural context (Gosso & Almeida Carvalho, 2013, p. 2). This finding was seen during a Story Workshop session: a child was engaged with materials that provoked a memory of her grandmother cooking ethnic food. This child shared her knowledge with her peers while playing, which sparked several other children to share their connections to the materials in the provocation. Story Workshop provides children with security and safety to share their thoughts freely, building each child's self-confidence as a learner, a knower of unique knowledge, and a valued member of the classroom.

Below is a picture of the child engaged in play; when asked she responded:

*Figure 6. (Takhar, 2016)*



“I am making dahl with my dadima”.

Pahl and Roswell (2014) support the funds of knowledge work of Luis Moll and colleagues (1992), recognizing the importance of the ‘habitus’, the everyday experience and cultural meaning making of material objects (p.9). Story Workshop, tugs at the cultural lifeline that runs through each child. Children come into the classroom exposed and immersed in culture that is created by family values, community, or religion. During the un-interrupted play with the provocations, children naturally gravitate to telling stories that exude their cultural knowledge. This is a precious moment because it is through this dialogue with their peers that children develop empathy, understanding and new ways of knowing and doing.

Pahl and Roswell (2014) stated that a new theory of artifactual literacies was needed when ethnography and multimodality was combined. “Artifactual literacies combines a focus on texts as multimodal together with the situated account of literacies as material and artifactual within home, school and community settings” (p. 7). In this respect, Pahl and Roswell further their research stating that “it can shift the relationship between literacy and power” as it brings

forward the unheard voices into the literacy platform, crushing inequalities and biases that may have occurred with traditional literacy modes such as reading and writing. In this respect, Story Workshop allows the unheard voices to be heard, because the platform is safe, and open-ended, inviting an endless potential to be unfolded through play and authentic dialogue.

“Consciousness is a complex psychological phenomenon that manages behaviour. In other words, behaviour is driven and mediated by consciousness and consciousness means experiencing lived experiences” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2013, p. 34). Children come into our classroom naturally curious. They have an innate ability to make observations, ask questions, and share knowledge. The knowledge they share with their peers is gathered through their life experiences from birth to when they arrive at school. As Esteban-Guitart and Moll (2013) have stated in their article “These funds of knowledge are the result of people’s lived experiences, including their social interaction, ... and varied language-related activities” (p. 36).

“Funds of knowledge are repositories of identity to which people have access. Consequently, the funds of knowledge are funds of identity when people use them to define themselves” (Esteban-Guitart & Moll, 2013, p. 37). When I listen to the children’s stories, I can hear dialogue that I know has come from their family. An example of this was during a Story Workshop session when we were playing in the courtyard and some of the girls saw a table that reminded them of a medical clinic. They immediately began role playing where one girl was the nurse and one was the patient and the patient was getting a needle. A little boy heard them playing and went over. He automatically shared his knowledge stating that needles were good for you as they prevent you from getting sick. This knowledge then ricocheted and the other children began sharing their knowledge and understandings of vaccinations. This is just one example of how funds of knowledge are shared every moment of the day. Pahl and Roswell (2014) concur

that identity is a key component in artifactual literacies and that identity and artifacts are often intertwined (p.9). “Communities carry with them a host of artifacts, and if we pay attention to these artifacts, new voices can be listened to” (Pahl & Roswell, 2014, p.9). This notion of artifactual literacies supports the intention of Story Workshop’s appeal to diversity. Story Workshop opens the doors for conversation, unfolding the cultural fabric that lies within each child, as they share their cultural suitcase through oral story telling, and story building, with their peers. Inviting literacy to become an organic learning process, breaking down the traditional hegemonic walls of teaching literacy through paper, pencil and worksheet teacher-centric methods. This method embraces multi-cultural, multi-modal literacy which promotes joy and self-confidence in oneself as a learner. It allows the child to prove themselves to be capable, competent, intellectual citizens in the classroom with a voice and identity that envelops the walls of the classroom.

### **Intention of Materials and Time to Experience, Explore and Enhance Creativity**

The classroom environment that I try to provide promotes creativity and invites children to play out the inner story within them. Every child comes to school with curiosities and stories that are waiting to be shared and explored. Fleer (2003) pointed out that we have “created an artificial world – with child-sized furniture and home equipment, materials such as thick paint brushes, blocks and puzzles, and an outdoor area with carefully designed climbing equipment for safety” (Fleer, 2003, p.66). Fleer further stated that authentic learning takes place when concrete materials can be manipulated, and so materials presented to children should be real representations of what would be seen in the adult world (p.68). “If we are to embrace an image of the child as competent, capable constructors of theories, and an image of teachers as co-

researchers alongside children, then we must also reconsider materials and environments” (Atkinson, 2015, p. 59).

By providing rich, tactile, and thoughtful materials, such as loose parts, it ignites their imaginations and creates a contagious ripple-effect providing a safe and open platform to co-construct their learning by sharing the funds of knowledge that each individual child brings. An example that evidences the above are the following photographs, which speak to an invitation to experience the material, explore the material and create with the material. The children were not given any instructions, they were not divided into groups, and there were no time restrictions. The children were greeted with this unexpected provocation following an outdoor break. It was amazing to watch how children approached the carpet with caution and curiosity. Wonders and questions as to what the block was made of were very interesting. One child stated it was a “brick” another said “it is not red, it must be made of stone”, and yet another realized it was “clay” as his mother makes pottery from clay. Very quickly the children swarmed the brick of clay; however, the play was unique in that the children naturally collaborated and cooperated to construct and create. There was no pushing, or claiming of authority, or entitlement.

*Figure 7. (Takhar, 2016)*



*Figure 8. (Takhar, 2016)*





*Figure 9.* (Takhar, 2016)



The stories that unraveled were beautiful, and sparkled jewels of the children's knowledge that would never have otherwise shined through. One girl authored a story about a pet sanctuary. It was amazing to hear her explain to her peers what a sanctuary was. Another group of boys developed a story about a snake pit that was underground in Egypt. Again, one of the boys was from Saudi Arabia and was able to share knowledge that he had learnt about snakes and structures.

*Figure 10.* (Takhar, 2016)



A bird in a sanctuary, protecting her nest.

A group of boys building and developing a story about a snake pit in Egypt.

*Figure 11.* (Takhar, 2016)



*Figure 12.* (Takhar, 2016)



The world is not silent. As citizens, we have a voice that shapes our existence, and so should a classroom for students (Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2004, p. 125). Their voice matters, and so it should shape the atmosphere and learning that takes place within the classroom. A silent classroom is not a learning classroom, because it is through talk that children learn. They learn skills that are not teachable, skills such as compassion, perspective taking, humility and confidence. Friere (2004) believed that authentic education could only take place when the educator and students created the learning together. The learning was not through the lens of the teacher alone, but rather, like a kaleidoscope of ideas merging together (p.128). Education needs to be built upon the communication of its learners, otherwise the system will fail (Friere, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 2004, p. 128). Story Workshop is built upon communication and talk that occurs between and amongst the children in the classroom. It is this talk that connects and webs together the learning that takes place, as the teacher can notice and discover the motivations of the children, and it is that motivation that then should drive the learning within the classroom.

### **Role of the Teacher and Importance of Child's Voice**

As educators, it is our responsibility to see each child as not only capable and competent, but also as driver's of their learning journey, as they have motivations and interests that are valued and worth exploring and sharing. Classroom environments are not only racially diverse, but they are also culturally diverse, ability diverse, knowledge diverse and motivation diverse. As an educator, I need to take the time to recognize the identity of each of our students, as in essence, this is when the image of the child is genuinely acknowledged. This identity should not be just reduced down to seeing a child for their racial identity, as Edwards (2006) has mentioned in *'Stop Thinking of Culture as Geography': early childhood educators' conceptions of sociocultural theory as an informant to curriculum*, but recognizing that each of these children have had lived experiences with their culture: artifacts, people, religion and arts. The knowledge that a child has accumulated, and their ways of knowing and being, are an asset to any classroom as they prove to be another way of understanding concepts that are being investigated.

Ted Aoki (2000/2005) referred to the curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived. The lived curriculum allowed children and educators to be present in the classroom. He compared the Western way of knowing to the Indigenous ways of knowing. He spoke about teaching with integrity, which gave permission to not know or understand everything, but to allow the questions to lead into learning. These "cracks" or "spaces" opened the doors and allowed the light to shine through, the light bringing in new ways of knowing, knowing that came from the children's funds of knowledge and funds of identity. Aoki spoke about "a bridge that is not a bridge", a metaphor that described the bringing together of two perspectives, and this created a connection which created a third space for new ideas and new perspectives. My interpretation of Aoki and the Funds of Knowledge and Funds of Identity approach is that curriculum is a bridge;

a bridge between the prescribed curriculum (learning outcomes) and the un-prescribed curriculum, the child's voice.

Dialogue is pertinent for authentic student learning. In this capstone, dialogue will be defined as reciprocal talk between children engaged in play, and the teacher engaged as facilitator; dialogue that is built upon, interwoven and layered with each child's contributions, motivations and wonders. Through dialogue, children share and reflect on their knowledge, strengthening their skills of becoming a metacognitive learner (McPhillips, Shevlin, & Long, 2012, p. 59). Building student voice into the classroom provides an atmosphere that is engaging and motivating because learning is now felt to be meaningful and exciting, and thus powerful. Students as co-creators and co-sharers of their learning, gain a sense of control, draw upon the inclusive framework, which carries a vision of children as citizens that should be treated with dignity and respect.

Falchi, Axelrod & Genishi (2013) did a 5-year ethnographic research study on children in multilingual early childhood classrooms. The researchers used a sociocultural framework as their lens to understand children. "Literacies are situated and meaningful ways in which people produce, transform and make sense of the world, and sociocultural framing of children's literacies considers learning to be both social and cultural, involving interactions and dialogue" (Falchi et al, 2013, p.4). The study concurs with Luis Moll's funds of knowledge theory, stating that "children construct their understandings of languages and the cultural meanings of what they know and what they are learning" (Falchi et al., 2013, p.4). The research finds that children's spoken and written modes are intertwined with their semiotic systems and therefore they "gesture, mark and play with meanings, created in ways that are intricately connected with their verbal and written language for specific purpose" (Falchi et al., 2013, p.4). The study takes place

in New York City in which researchers observed 3 and 4-year-old children in a Head Start programme. Data was collected through observations, interviews and artefact collection. During the time at the Head Start programme, the curriculum was child-centered and play based. Children's languages and cultures were honoured. The learning environment was flexible and the children were provoked with playful activities that motivated them.

The researchers found a significant difference when the children then carried forward to traditional Kindergarten and Grade 1. The Kindergarten philosophy supported and fostered a balanced literacy approach. In this study, balanced literacy was defined as an "approach to literacy instruction that combines both instruction of specific literacy skills, such as phonemic awareness, with the use of authentic texts" (Falchi et al., 2013, p.7). The children were given time and space to act out stories, draw interpretations, and develop vocabulary at their own pace, and thus the learning was accessible. The study then continues to follow two children, Luisa and Miguel, the following year into grade 1. Here is when the researchers noticed a change in the two children's language and literacy. Grade 1 was very much performance based and it did not invite time for children to pursue their own personal motivations or interests. The study showed how Luisa was able to continue on a path of becoming a "good student" as she maintained her focus and was able to tap into her home life and experiences when asked to write a story. Miguel, on the other hand, was not able to write a story as he lacked motivation. He was quickly claimed to be a child at risk. However, the researchers noticed that when he was presented with an activity that tugged on his interests, he was quite expressive and was able to write a story with expression and language through his drawings and writing. A key finding in this study was that Miguel was able to identify what aspects in his life were important to him in that literacy activity; he was able to share little gems of his identity, "as recent literacy scholars have noted children often take

up identities as literacy users” (Falchi et al., 2013, p.11). Another key finding was that Miguel was able to focus deeply on a task if he found it interesting and meaningful to him. The researchers were able to compare their findings of when Miguel was in Head Start and how he was able to make “elaborate stories during play, (and) a stark difference with his somewhat simple stories from first grade” (Falchi et al., 2013, p.11). Miguel was able to show excellent performance when offered multi-modal opportunities to express himself, and spent incredible time focused on the areas that were important to him. It was interesting to note that when only allowed to write the story, the length was short and simple, but when provided the opportunity to draw aspects of the story on a story mountain, the final piece of writing was substantial.

This study supports the multi-modality of Story Workshop, and more so supports the importance of play, dialogue, cultural identity and personal interests that Story Workshop invites. Story Workshop is a platform in which children, like Miguel, can bring their own curiosities and interests to the provocation at hand and encounter the materials as they so choose. Story Workshop supports invitation for dialogue amongst peers to share their nuggets of knowledge, collaborate and cooperate, and together build and discover new information creating unique stories that organically unfold. Children are invited to have their story dictated, or they are invited to draw or write their story as they so choose during their play. Finally, this study supports the notion of time and space that children need in order to discover the story within them. Children need time to engage with materials, explore with their peers and play out the meaning the artefacts hold for them. Each child brings with them their own meanings based on their lived experiences, and educators need to be flexible with their curriculum to support this diversity. We need to let go of a “school culture (in which) teachers and children are funnelled into tight spaces: those mandated by literacy curriculum that values certain types of written text”

(Falchi et al., 2013, p.17). These destructive values have the ability to defeat a child's self confidence as a learner, especially if they internalized the performance standard results as definitive to their intelligence. As for Miguel he could write in two languages and was literate, yet his performance scores placed him at risk. What is risky, is the detrimental effect that authoritative discourse can have on a child's self perception.

### **New Revised BC Curriculum Through the Len's of Story Workshop.**

Story Workshop fosters the philosophy of British Columbia's Revised Curriculum. The revised curriculum stresses emphasis on three core competencies: Communication, Thinking and Personal & Social development. The curriculum also places importance on a KDU model (know, do, understand), which supports personalized learning opportunities. Providing time and space to explore interests and ignite passions in our students is what the new BC Curriculum affords. The Kindergarten and Grade 1 Language Arts learning outcomes focus on a few Big Ideas: Language and story can be a source of creativity and joy; stories and other texts help us learn about ourselves and our families; stories and other text can be shared through pictures and words; and everyone has a unique story to share ([curriculum.gov.bc.ca](http://curriculum.gov.bc.ca)). The Revised BC Curriculum also strives to support authentic and personalized assessment. Student voice activates authentic learning and assessment. By including children in the assessment process, an educator invites true understanding of the child's knowledge. Assessment becomes a tool that helps move the learning forward in a way that meets the child's needs, whether that be the child's ability or learning style, inviting assessment for learning, rather than assessment of learning (McPhillips, Shevlin, & Long, 2012). Story Workshop presents opportunity for all of the above mentioned, as it operates under the belief that everyone has a story to tell, and stories can be told in a variety of ways. Students develop their language and literacy through play and talk as they represent their

story using different objects. The big idea of story workshop is that everyone is an author of their own story, stories can be found in different places, and materials can invoke and provoke memories that ignite stories within children. As children share their story, they can also decide how they would like their story to be changed, adapted or published.

### **Development of Whole Language Through Story Workshop.**

Vivian Paley proposed a storytelling curriculum that supported Whole Language development as opposed to the National Reading Panel's review of on effective reading strategies of: phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension (Cooper, 2005, p. 234). Whole language was defined here as an "approach (that) immerses young children in reading and writing activities that are deemed authentic, that is revolving real purpose or genuine attraction" (Cooper, 2005, p. 235). Furthermore, storytelling was seen to occur during 'fantasy play', supporting Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, in which, through play, children develop their cognitive abilities, and develop their self regulation, which is essential to rule making and following, thus developing their critical thinking skills which are crucial for learning (Cooper, 2005, p.237). The storytelling curriculum develops oral language, expression, syntax, vocabulary and sentence patterns. "Paley's insistence that children's choice of topic should not be restricted when they compose...(invites) stories to arise from their imaginations (Cooper, 2005, p. 242). During Story Workshop, the role of the teacher is to scribe the dictated story that the child tells. Scribing the story removes the roadblocks that may occur due to an inability to handle such intense fine motor and cognitive skills. Rather, it gives each child the opportunity to be creative, imaginative and become an author of a story that is beyond their ability to produce it.



“Early experiences in literacy and language are meshed with their own embodied and tacit experiences of care-giving and receiving. These experiences are cultural and shaped by language” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2013, p.4). Children come into our school system in Kindergarten naturally curious, carrying authentic gems of knowledge that are unique to each of them. Story Workshop is an authentic way to evoke past memories, provoke curiosity and ignite the inner story that is within each child. Students are invited to engage with the materials in a way that is meaningful and appealing to them, allowing them to tap into and share their funds of knowledge and funds of identity that they each carry. “When people tell stories of their lives, they create opportunities for space and place to be evoked and within these spaces, objects exist. People tell different stories about the same object” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2013, p.5). Story Workshop has no boundaries, no rules and no prescribed outcomes which makes the potential endless and infinite and invites children to become authors of their unique stories.

In Chapter Three, I will design a three-session workshop. Session One will address the value and intentions behind Story Workshop, and also how Story Workshop authentically lends itself to meeting the criteria within the New Revised BC Curriculum. Session Two will explain how to create a provocation using tactile, open-ended materials. I will also address the logistics of Story Workshop. Session Three will propose ways to move forward with Story Workshop through documentation, creating a classroom book, and engaging children beyond the primary years.

### Chapter Three

Story. A phenomenon that is present all over the world, whether it be oral stories/legends, cultural folk/fairy-tales, or stories in books, most children have been told stories since before they could walk. The concept of a story is organically understood; there are characters, beginning, middle and end, and usually some kind of a moral or lesson to be learnt. However, when we teach story writing in a school setting, it is often fragmented apart into isolated parts, making the cohesive element of a story frayed. The element of fluidity evaporates, and thus the story lacks many elements. Why does this occur? Is it because we expect children to write about specific topics in a linear, frigid style? What if we change our belief that children need to be taught prescriptively, and acknowledge that children already come to us naturally understanding the concept of a story? What if we provided them with materials that stimulate and provoke the hidden story within each child? Children are naturally curious beings, that absorb and are fascinated by their environment. How would their story writing change if we provided them opportunity to play with materials that spark imagination, trigger creativity and ignite curiosity? Story Workshop responds to these queries, by honouring the children's intelligence and capabilities. Within the realm of Story Workshop, all children, regardless of race, gender, ability or motivation, are fostered to become authors of their unique stories.

I strongly believe that Story Workshop should be an important aspect in classrooms when addressing the learning outcomes for language and literacy. In this chapter, I propose three one hour session workshop series. I believe that this approach will best suit my intentions for sharing this unique and authentic strategy to developing language and literacy in primary classrooms, as it will provide dialogue amongst our greatest resource, each other.

As an opening to my series, I have designed and will present a graphic of a tree in a forest symbolizing the strength of Story Workshop. My vision is of an educator tending and nurturing the soil, preparing and caring for it, enabling the tree to grow. The rings within the base of the tree represent each child that is coming into the classroom. Unique in their own way, but coming together as one community. The roots of the tree are the core competencies of the curriculum entangled together: personal and social, thinking and communication. The trunk of the tree is the main artery that supports literacy and language development, the vessel from which Story Workshop flows, and each branch that shoots out of the trunk represents an avenue that Story Workshop endeavours to develop: creativity, collaboration, problem solving, critical thinking, shared knowledge, dialogue, confidence, cultural identity, and there are some branches that are empty because these branches are areas that are unique to each learner. The leaves that emerge from the buds on the branches are the stories and knowledge that develop through the experience. Some leaves have fallen down onto the soil, symbolising that as children move forward through the year and their skills develop, they co-construct the learning environment with the teacher. They, too, now help to tend and maintain the soil that nurtures the tree. The classroom becomes more of a reciprocal relationship rather than a hierarchy relationship between the teacher and the child.

Figure 13. (Takhar, 2017)

THROUGH THE LENS OF

*story workshop*



### **Session 1: Why's and What's of Story Workshop and Curriculum Connections**

In session one, I will introduce Story Workshop, and its background, to my colleagues. I will credit *Opal School Portland Museum for Children* by sharing their website and the short videos on the website that speak to the intention behind Story Workshop. Following this, I will link the importance of Story Workshop to the revised BC Curriculum, and point out specifically how Story Workshop fits into our classrooms. I have designed a graphic image to help facilitate my connection of Story Workshop, and how it authentically filters through the Literacy and Language component of the curriculum in the primary years, and even the years forward.

The image I have chosen is a tree, and at the roots of the tree are the core competencies of the curriculum, symbolizing the base and foundation of learning in our classroom: thinking, communication and personal and social development. I have labelled the trunk of the tree as Language and Literacy development as this is the vessel that learning filters through. Children are constantly developing their language and literacy skills through play, dialogue, and everyday interactions with peers and materials. This aspect of learning is strong, authentic and meaningful when provided the opportunity to unfold naturally. Story Workshop caters to this authenticity, as it is play-based and the materials within its structure have no prescription and are open for manipulation and interpretation. The branches of the tree are just a few of the areas that become strengthened through Story Workshop, as the children are free to explore, collaborate and create stories together, sharing the jewels of their knowledge with their peers, with no judgement or prejudice. Through collaboration, engagement, and dialogue, a unique story is created, inviting all children to become authors of their own story. Instead of the learning objectives in the curriculum leading the students' education, the students, through rich

dialogue, are transforming the curriculum and creating a true education by bringing the objectives to them. Naturally, children are engaged in thinking, communicating and developing their personal and social competencies through the lens of Story Workshop. The role of the teacher, is to listen openly to the rich conversations, facilitate conversations and highlight learning interests and motivations through documentation. I want to respect my fellow colleagues who may have reservations as this requires risk and courage to let go of being the sole knowledge holder and information provider, but I also want to provide them with the confidence that observing children in action, authentically, will lend a hand in understanding their students thinking, and will organically uncover the curriculum objectives in a meaningful and motivating way. I will inform my colleagues that at first it may seem chaotic, but I also want to assure them that through this chaos there will be calm. The dialogue that the students engage in while investigating may not be a linear path, and there may be some problems along the way. Aoki (2000) would call these problems “cracks”, and these “cracks” should not be viewed as a hindrance, but rather a solution, one which creates a pathway for critical thinking and learning. In and amongst all of these processes lies communication, and through this experience with themselves, their peers, the materials, their environment, the curriculum is transformed (Doll Jr., 2004). Sylvia Kind (2014) states in her article *Material Encounters* that “materials are described as the bones of curriculum” (p.866). Story Workshop honours this aspect of the curriculum, inviting all children to engage, be successful, and build confidence in themselves as a creator of story and knowledge holder, thus untethering the hierarchy that may occur in a traditional classroom, providing opportunity for diversity, culture and multiple perspectives to shine through and navigate learning.

The education system is quickly changing, and educators need to prepare the children of today for the unknown jobs of tomorrow. Preparing children to be problem solvers, efficient communicators, critical and creative thinkers, and effective collaborators (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2015). Story Workshop fosters the opportunity to develop these skills as it incorporates the use of open-ended materials, materials that can be transformed into anything the child is imagining at the time. The ability to transform materials removes the prescription of right or wrong, and allows all children to feel equal, adequate and important contributors to the play and story creation. Open-ended materials support a child's sense of belonging and thus strengthen the child's self confidence and social emotional development. Daly and Belogovsky state that play and engagement with open-ended materials increased children's collaboration skills, negotiation skills, conflict resolution and communication skills and ability to problem solve. Each child comes into the classroom with different lived experiences, different cultural infusions, approaching the story provocation with a unique lens, igniting conversation and shared knowledge.

The following slides are the core competencies, from the BC revised curriculum, infused with elements of Story Workshop.

**Strongly connects to the Core Competencies: Communication**

- To share and develop ideas
- To explore topics in their stories that are of interest to them
- To work through their theories and understandings
- To work together to create a story
- To tell about their experiences
- To reflect on their learning during story workshop



Figure 14. Retrieved from <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/CommunicationCompetencyProfiles.pdf>

Figure 15. (Takhar, 2016)



Acting out a story they had seen in a First Nations emergent reader.

### Thinking

**Creative:**

- deeply collaborative
- children come into the classroom with “funds of knowledge”
- their stories have value to them

**Critical:**

- when they are involved in decision making they are in essence problem solving, analyzing, inquiring into theory – ex: how does this stack?
- creating and carrying out plans
- synthesizing information
- knowledge has the capacity to be transferred into aspects of local or global issue discussions
- Testing theories

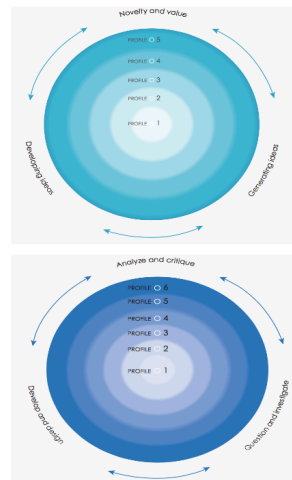


Figure 16. Retrieved from <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/CreativeThinkingCompetencyProfiles.pdf>

The following is an example of a Story Workshop session outside in our school’s courtyard. The children had to negotiate, problem solve and cooperate for a common goal, making a home for the worms...



*Figure 17.* (Takhar, 2016)*Figure 18.* (Takhar, 2016)

We are building a home to save the worms.

While they were digging the hole and constructing the home for the worms, one of the boys stated: “if we put water in here (pointing to the stream) we will kill all the worms, because they get too much water and they will die”.

At first, one of the boys was rather upset that the others had began to fill up the hole with soil to absorb the water. He began yelling. Then, one of his friends communicated to him that the worms do not know how to swim, and if the hole was full of water, the worms would not have a good, safe home.

After negotiation, the boy who was upset said that he agreed, and said “ok I agree with you, let’s fill it up!”

They all worked together to fill in the hole. Through their negotiation, they had compromised to fill the hole and keep the stream as another part of the home.

Figure 19. (Takhar, 2016)



“We are building a river so the plants can grow bigger and stronger. The water sinks in and feeds the plants.”

(Figure 20. (Takhar, 2016)

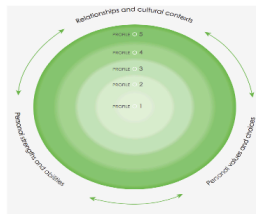


(Figure 21.(Takhar, 2016)



## Personal and Social

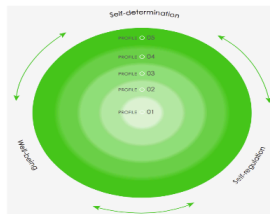
### Positive Personal and Cultural Identity



Children bring experiences and cultural contexts to their play and their stories.

See traces of their understanding of identity through relationship with materials.

### Personal Awareness and Responsibility

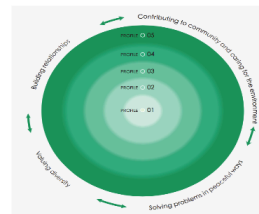


Listen closely - we see determination on their faces.

They share their own stories and with pride.

They persevere with challenges.

### Social Responsibility



Story workshop is highly collaborative. Children create and share stories with others.

Through play with materials may explore environmental issues, how to take care of selves, others and the world.

Figure 22. Retrieved from <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/sites/curriculum.gov.bc.ca/files/pdf/PPCICompetencyProfiles.pdf>

Story Workshop maintains a social constructivist lens, supporting the perspective that learning is both co-constructed amongst peers and teachers, and that learning is a social process, a process of continuous meaning-making. Thus Story Workshop encourages educators to re-position themselves as: facilitator, documenter, and co-constructor of knowledge alongside the children. Story Workshop fosters a sense of reciprocity between the adult and child as they engage and experience the materials in the provocation.

Literacy should be joyful. School should be fun. This releases endorphins in the brain, making learning memorable. Literacy should be cultural, embracing multi-culturalism and inviting cultural identity. Literacy should be aesthetic, touching the hearts of children through wonder and curiosity. Infusing play into the classroom through Story Workshop elicits organic and authentic experiences for story creation and story writing. The materials and engagement with the materials spur children to become the authors to their own story. This element fosters a sense of confidence in children, and levels out the playing field so that all children feel successful to be story creators.

Rasinki (2017) stated that children should develop 1000 words a year, that's approximately 10 new words a day. Story Workshop provides for this learning as the vehicle that drives story workshop is dialogue. The dialogue between the children as their share their thoughts about the materials, their knowledge, their predictions, their inquiries all fosters oral language development.

Here is an example: one day in my classroom during Story Workshop, a boy (Lucas) asked another boy (Eoghan) how to spell his name.

Eoghan replied: "E-O-G-H-A-N"

As Lucas wrote his name on the paper, Eoghan noticed that the letter 'a' was different to how he wrote the letter 'ɑ'. Eoghan asked Lucas about this letter, and tried to correct him on how to print the letter 'ɑ' correctly. They both then realized that the letter A could be written like 'a' or 'ɑ'. This knowledge sharing would never have occurred if not presented with the opportunity to talk.

*Figure 23. (Takhar, 2016)*

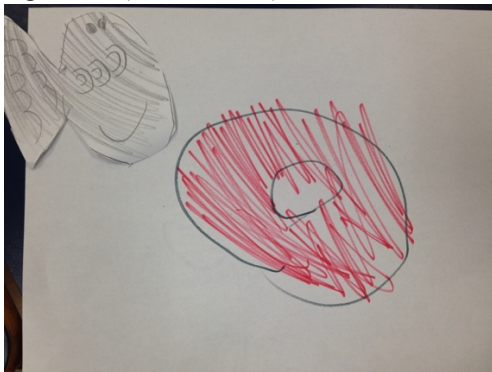




Dr. Tim Rasinski concurred with John Dewey quoting that “what happens at school should also happen in real life” (Rasinski, 2017). Story Workshop fosters this notion as materials are found objects that are from and portray real life. The materials are rich and open-ended in hopes to provoke past memories and invoke and ignite the inner story within each child, just as children read pictures and develop inference skills. Story Workshop sets the tone for children to infer into the provocation, and to develop their language, both vocabulary and the spoken word.

Dr. Jan Mort stated that emergent literacy is the first stage of literacy development (Mort, 2017). Story Workshop is a platform that sets the stage for literacy development as children have the opportunity to pretend write on paper, practice writing their name, and act out the story using the materials and dialogue with their peers, each building on the others ideas, thoughts and actions.

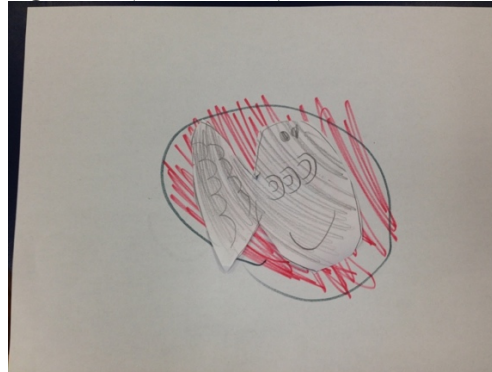
*Figure 24.* (Takhar, 2016)



This is my fish.

By: Reid L.

*Figure 25.* (Takhar, 2016)



I cooked it.



An educator, could take this story journey with this boy to continue to develop missing words and descriptive words, to discuss concepts of organizational writing (beginning, middle and end, terrific title etc.). One aspect of Story Workshop that is vital to the process, not just for language and literacy development, but also for confidence building, is reading the child's story to the class at the end of each session. After reading the story, invite children to act it out. The author of the story could then add details to their story to expand their writing, as when watching his/her peers act out his story, he can become aware of the language gaps in his writing.

After collecting children's stories and printing them off onto paper, a classroom book can be created. The children love reading their peer's stories, and are often inspired to create a story like their peer, or even build on their peer's existing story, creating a chapter 2 per se. The opportunities are endless, and the creators of the opportunities are the children. As educators, it is vital that we facilitate these curiosities to explore and further language and literacy development.

Vulnerability in the area of literacy is a concept that many educators face in classrooms today. Recently, at the *Joyful Literacy Summit: When Struggling Readers Thrive*, held in Victoria, BC, Dr. Jan Mort, and several other researchers, shared their knowledge and strategies to help children who may be vulnerable learners. A common thread that ran through the many presentations was the notion of bringing back joy to reading and writing. Removing traditional literacy drills and replacing them with play-based literacy strategies that are joyful, opens the pathways for children to be stress free when learning. Ruth Culham mentioned a quote from Pam Allyn at the Literacy Summit: *When Struggling Readers Thrive*, she quoted, "Reading is breathing in; writing is breathing out", I am going to add to that by stating that dialogue is the heartbeat within that breathing system (Culham, 2017). Story Workshop is an avenue that runs

through a town called Literacy. Promoting dialogue, writing, story creation, critical thinking, creativity, and ultimately reading the finished product in a classroom book on the bookshelf.

Below is an example of a girl who worked for over an hour creating this story about magical elves. She persevered when the blocks fell, and continued to push to create the perfect platform for her story to unfold.

*Figure 30.* (Takhar, 2016)



Once upon a time there were a few little elves. They were magical. If any of the feathers fall off they would lose their magic forever. The mommy and daddy could power up their powers and keep them safe.

Then it started to snow. It snows like ‘olden times’. The biggest snow storm ever covered their house and they were freezing. Their house wrecked. The snow storm knocked it over. The elves built another and they were safe and sound. Now it is summer again (she puts away all the snow/cotton), and they were happy again. Then the mommy and daddy were making a surprise. They were making a rock garden.

By: Cameron

*Figure 31.* (Takhar, 2016)





It is clear that that this child was tapping into her culture when speaking about the rock garden. She also used familiar dialogue that she had heard in other stories, such as ‘safe and sound’ and ‘olden times’. The children around her were captivated by her story, and were exposed to her language, and inquired into her knowledge.

### **Session 2: Diving into Story Workshop**

In this session, I will have provocations set up for educators to see, touch and play. Just as it is vital for children to learn through doing, it is as important for educators to learn through doing. I want the educators to see and feel inspired by the materials, and understand how a provocation can stimulate one’s memory and/or imagination. Through their entanglement with the materials and fellow co-workers, I hope that dialogue will occur, and shared knowledge will become contagious, thus mimicking the events that would unfold in a classroom amongst their students. I anticipate my classroom to look similar to the following images:

*Figure 32. (Takhar, 2016)*



Figure 33. (Takhar, 2016)



Figure 34. (Takhar, 2016)



I am in the process of receiving three testimonials of teachers in my district that have tried Story Workshop in their classrooms, and have enjoyed the experience thoroughly. They

claim that the students were engaged, cooperative, and the stories were unique and had story elements.

### **How to Introduce Story Workshop to the Children.**

I have always started out with a brainstorm of what the children knew about story elements. After that conversation, I inform them that I have set up tables with materials that I am hoping will inspire a story within them. I explain that unlike center time, where materials can be moved around the classroom, during Story Workshop, the materials need to stay at the table where they are set up. A conversation around respecting the materials also takes place. Following this, the children and I walk around the provocations, (we) call it a museum (walk), so that they can see all of the provocations. We stop at each one for a few seconds so that the children can absorb the materials within that provocation. After the museum walk, the children are invited to go to any provocation that is calling to them. There is no time limit, thus they can stay at any provocation for as little or long as they desire. The power is theirs. That is the beauty of Story Workshop, it invites the Power to Be anything you want during that entanglement with the provocation.

I will explain to the teachers that they should not be discouraged at first, that it may feel chaotic. This is truly the excitement amongst the children as they decide where they want to play and create a story. Within 15 minutes, the room will be busy with creativity, cooperation, collaboration and critical thinking.

I do not set a time limit for Story Workshop. You will know when your class is ready to move on. At this point, it is important to instill within your students the importance of cleaning up together. I often ask the children at each provocation to put the materials away. This not only makes it easier for you as an educator, but it also speaks to how you view your students, and that

you believe they are capable of helping. It requires the children to work together, and ask where things go if they do not know. The notion of asking for help is important in supporting the child in recognizing themselves as a resource, and to not be solely dependent on the adult in the room.

### **Diversity within Materials.**

During this session, I intend to speak to the importance of respecting diversity when providing materials from other cultures. It is critical that educators understand the cultural context for which the materials are used so as to not disrespect the culture. For example, if creating a provocation using props and artefacts from India, one should not put an image/statue of a God or Goddess on the table with shoes. Another aspect to remember is to avoid commercialism, as some students may not be able to relate, or it may trigger a sense of inferiority if it was an item their family could not afford. It is critical that materials are open-ended and can be transformed.

### **Affordability of Materials.**

I will also discuss the use of materials with the workshop group, as many of the materials in Story Workshop are open-ended loose parts, and are inexpensive if collected tactfully. I have often used recycled objects, asked families to send in gently used materials, purchased some of the materials from the dollar store or garage sales, or collected found objects from the forest or beach.

- Fabrics on the table tend to really captivate and highlight the materials on the table. These fabrics can be old table clothes (solid colours are best), bubble wrap from old packaging, or burlap from recycled potato sacks
- Beads add an element of colour and can be collected from broken necklaces

- Tree cookies: I have asked families to send in tree cookies if they were cutting down or trimming trees in their yard. I have also asked arborist companies to donate some small pieces
- Rocks, shells, beach glass and small pieces of driftwood I've collected from nearby beaches
- Horse chestnuts, feathers, and pinecones I've collected from nearby forests and parks
- Gems and coloured stones I've purchased from the dollar store

The key is to get families involved in collecting open-ended, beautiful materials. Families want to help, and providing opportunity for them to contribute to the classroom supplies by collecting these materials makes them feel valuable. It may even trigger memories for story writing in the children when they see their found object in a provocation.

### **Storage.**

I will share with the group the two ways that I have stored materials for Story Workshop. At the district level, where teachers can request the Story Workshop bin, I have stored the materials in a plastic bin related to a theme. For example: the beach theme bin has rocks, drift wood, burlap, wooden people, Natural Pod rainbow and books about the beach. Another example is a First Nations themed bin that contains some finger puppets, Natural Pod fire, tea lights, wooden paddles, blue fabric and burlap, tree cookies and cedar branches.

In my classroom, I store my materials on the shelf in natural wicker baskets. That way I can access which ever material I need, and I am not limited to specific pieces of material; here, I can infuse many different layers of materials to see what may unfold.

## Documentation.

It is important for educators to realize that they will not be able to write every child's story in each Story Workshop session. I have often aimed for documenting 5 children's stories during each Story Workshop. Another strategy I have used is inviting parents in to help with documentation. Parents are always wanting to be a part of the classroom, and in this light they can help to document the stories. I have asked administrators, ELL teachers, LA support teachers, and IST teachers to come and help document the stories. It is a great way to share what your students can do, and to also build a sense of community beyond the four walls of the classroom, spreading out into the school. Student teachers are another valuable asset when documenting student stories.

In one of the sessions I will provide the following handout:

Figure 35. Handout for participants at Session 1 Workshop

<p><b>Engaging Learners Through Story Workshop:</b> <u>Where will you find your story today...</u></p> <p>We first came across this practice from the Opal School Children's Museum in Portland. Story Workshop is an authentic way to evoke past memories, provoke curiosity and ignite the inner story that is within each child. Students are invited to engage with the materials in a way that is meaningful and appealing to them, in hopes, allowing them to tap into and share their funds of knowledge and funds of identity that they each carry. Story Workshop has no boundaries, no rules and no prescribed outcomes which makes the potential endless and infinite and invites children to become authors to their unique stories.</p> <p>Thinking with Inquiry we wondered:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How active play experiences with a rich variety of materials inspire children's stories and support children as communicators?</li> <li>• What is the relationship between materials and story?</li> <li>• What happens to our understanding of the image of a child when we view all children full of imagination, creativity and wonder?</li> <li>• How does a child's culture, family and community impact their life experiences which then affects their relationship and exchange with materials in the classroom? (for example... a child may be exposed or be curious about construction or home repairs; this curiosity will transfer over into the classroom world, as the child begins to try to make sense of the world around him/her through play. It is an opportunity for children "to take parts of their lives to make a meaningful whole through sharing their stories."</li> <li>• How can we integrate the essential skills of literacy and mathematics into story workshop?</li> <li>• What may we hear when we truly and actively stand back, withholding our judgments and biases, and listen to the voices of the children?</li> </ul> <p><i>"If we are to embrace an image of the child as competent, capable constructors of theories, and an image of teachers as co-researchers alongside children, then we must also reconsider materials and environments" (Atkinson, 2015, p. 59).</i></p> <p>In story workshop, rich, tactile, and thoughtful materials, such as loose parts, invite children to use their imagination and build their language and literacy through their playful engagement with the materials.</p> <p>The role of the student is to engage with the materials, that appeal to them, collaborate with their peers and co-construct and communicate the story that comes alive. The role of the teacher is not only to provide meaningful materials, but also to be actively listening, noticing and open to the negotiation and collaboration that may occur amongst the children. The teacher also needs to document (video, photo, scribing, recording, clipboards/paper for them to write) the stories.</p> <p><i>"Materials live in the world in multiple ways. They can evoke memories, narrate stories, invite actions, and communicate meanings." (Kind, 2014, p. 865).</i></p>	<p>Some materials that we have found to entice children have been: sand, beads, clipboards, paper, sharpies, battery candles, ferns, cedar branches, wood cookies, rocks, plastic animals, paint, paintings, flowers, clay, other random open ended items from nature (pinecones, sticks etc.) One tip - covering the tables with a cloth, blanket, bubble wrap, burlap etc, really makes the provocation clean and come alive!</p> <p><b>Links that inspired us were:</b> <b>Story Workshop at Opal School:</b> <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTtPau0O4ZA">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTtPau0O4ZA</a></p> <p><b>Oral storytelling using materials at the intermediate level:</b> <a href="http://blogs.sd38.bc.ca/sd38mathandscience/category/storytelling/">http://blogs.sd38.bc.ca/sd38mathandscience/category/storytelling/</a></p> <p>Some things that we noticed were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The social and playful engagement with materials led to authentic sharing of children's understanding of mathematical thinking and emergent literacy.</li> <li>• Collaboration, negotiation, perseverance, risk taking, problem solving</li> <li>• Children, sharing, testing and exploring their theories about worms and other issues.</li> </ul> <p><i>"Materials are described as the "bones" of curriculum" (Kind, 2014, p. 866).</i></p>
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**Session 3: Round Table Connections and Collaborations**

In this session, I will engage the group in a roundtable conversation that invites educators to share their experiences in the classroom when engaged in Story Workshop. I am interested in listening to both success and failure stories. I truly believe that we are our best resource, and that we should share our experiences and ideas about how we could move forward and grow within this structure. I will share my classroom Story Workshop book that documents the many stories the children have written, and hope that my fellow colleagues will be able to share their student's stories as well.

**Continued Connections and Collaborations.**

I recognize that our colleagues are our best resources, and so to honour this I will be requesting that each teacher attending the sessions provide their email address. I will also create a Folioz page that teachers will be added to, enabling them to connect and have forum discussions with their fellow teachers who are facilitating Story Workshop in their classroom. The Folioz page will have a brief summary about Story Workshop with some samples pictures and student stories. On the Folioz page there will be link to a shared google doc inviting teachers to add Story Workshop ideas that they have tried in their classroom, inspiring their colleagues with new ideas. My intention for the Folioz page is to continue to facilitate connection amongst colleagues who attended the workshop series, and enable conversations around things that worked, and perhaps things that did not work, and also to provide opportunity for resources and materials to be shared amongst each other. On the google doc, I will have provided information about the Story Workshop bins that are already created at the board office that staff can have delivered to their school via school mail. At the workshops, I will encourage teachers to continue

to add their Story Workshop sessions to the google doc, and to also add examples of pictures and stories written from their classrooms on the Folioz page.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Reflections, Realizations and Growth**

“Free play is positively associated with socio-emotional development... and is related to positive outcomes in language and literacy” (Hirsh-Pasek, Skolnick Weisberg, & Michnick Golinkoff, 2013, p. 105). Story Workshop supports this model of free play because the materials proposed in the provocation hold no prescribed meaning. The children create meaning through past reflections, experiences and conversations with their peers. Stories naturally unfold, and story elements organically appear through interaction and engagement. Children share their knowledge with their peers, and are in turn gifted knowledge from their peers. The interaction and play is reciprocal and symbiotic in nature. The free play that Story Workshop offers removes an essence of artificial story creation, and provides opportunity for natural, creative and meaningful stories to appear. The materials and play, intrinsically, ignite the inner story within each child, inviting them to become an author of their own imagination and creativity.

There have been several key learnings that have drastically impacted my teaching philosophy throughout my Masters journey: culturally responsive teaching, honouring student voice, intention of the environment, and development of language and literacy using a Universal Design for Learning framework. Our classrooms are immersed with diversity. The revised curriculum honours and provides opportunities for teachers to embrace meaningful and engaging learning platforms in which the students are a part of the creation. Story Workshop is a stage that fosters all of the above. Teachers can create provocations that provoke and inspire children in ways that tend to culture, gender, and multiple abilities.



I have always believed that children are naturally curious human beings that bring joy and wonder to any classroom. My belief has been pushed further by learning about Luis Moll's "funds of knowledge" approach. My understanding was deepened with the knowledge that children come into the classroom with rich knowledge waiting to be shared with their peers and extended through collaborative exploration. The concept "funds of knowledge" was then further dissected by Esteban-Guitart and colleagues to the concept of "funds of identity", in which children are shaped by their culture, community, and lived experiences, all of which shape their identity. Honouring each child's identity, knowledge and curiosity has become a pivotal aspect in my teaching practice.

Vygotsky's sociocultural development theory has shaped much of my classroom's interactions. Children are naturally social beings, and providing a platform that fosters their socialization is critical, because it is through these interactions that children learn and develop. Social interactions ignite conversations amongst the children, and these conversations become a source of their knowledge, motivations, and wonders. Children learn through play, and through play they learn skills that will set up them up for success, such as problem solving, collaboration, turn taking, risk taking, and empathy.

Throughout my first year in my Masters, I reflected daily on my practice, examining where and how I could change and adopt my new key learnings. Beyond developing my own teaching practice and philosophy, I wanted to search for a concept that encompassed my key learnings, which I could then use in the classroom. Story Workshop honoured these key learnings, because it catered to the abilities of all through the use of open-ended materials that hold no prescription. Story Workshop ignites conversation, provokes curiosity and taps into the "funds of knowledge", bearing the "funds of identity" that children carry with them.

The revised curriculum calls for children to develop three core competencies: personal and social, communication and thinking. Story Workshop meets the expectations of the BC Curriculum, at the same time as meeting the needs of the organic curriculum that children naturally create through conversation. Story Workshop is a flexible learning platform, because the backbone of the framework is stabilized through the use of open-ended materials, through the infusion of the child's interpretation and engagement with the materials, thus making it accessible for all learners. Regardless of culture, gender or ability, children come together through the connection and inquiry of a provocation. It is the provocation which stimulates critical thinking, conversation and creation, and it minimizes the element of academic hierarchy within a classroom, and strengthens the element of shared and co-constructed learning.

As I continue to strive to become a facilitator and co-researcher in my classroom, I consistently remind myself to try hard to not let my lived experiences influence, or affect, my students learning process. I aim to ask open and provoking questions that encourage my students to take risks, and persevere with their learning curiosity. I want to continue to encourage my students to problem solve, and be successful on their own merit, using their own methods of investigation. I believe that all of the above provides my students with valuable opportunities that help develop and shape their own lived experiences and learning.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations within the Story Workshop framework. Story Workshop requires open-ended materials, which many educators may not have. The collection of these materials take time to gather, and often that time is outside of school hours and encroaches on a teacher's personal time.

Storage can also be challenging; one needs to be creative to find space to store all the materials. The materials can often be big and oddly shaped, requiring baskets to store the materials. Often the materials need to be sorted in categories i.e. pinecones, stones, shells, beads etc., rather than topic bins because they may be used in several different provocations, which requires storage space.

Another limitation is time. Story Workshop requires time, and this can become a challenging factor if an educator is feeling pressured to address other areas of the curriculum. Story Workshop generally can last up to an hour, sometimes longer, it depends on the connection that the children have to the materials, and each other, on that day. Often, meaningful engagement with the materials can take up to 20 minutes, because the children need time to experience the materials before they settle down to play, collaborate and create.

Documenting the children's stories can also become a limitation, as often it can be challenging for one teacher to scribe every child's story during a Story Workshop session. Having parent volunteers or an Educational Assistant present to help with scribing the children's stories makes the documenting process easier. An educator needs to give themselves permission to document 5-6 children per Story Workshop session. This, too, could be seen as a limitation, as not all the children's stories will be documented every time.

### **Future Thoughts**

I strongly believe that Story Workshop is a valuable strategy to encourage story writing, and the development of literacy and language in an authentic and meaningful manner. For this reason, I will continue to share my vision of Story Workshop with my colleagues through workshop sessions and afterschool collaborations. The shared google doc will provide open communication amongst educators in the district, enabling conversations of successes and

wonders. It will also provide opportunity for other educators to become inspired, and possibly the sharing of materials amongst colleagues.

As an active member on the revised curriculum implementation team in my district, I will continue to voice the importance of teaching with a culturally reflective lens, one that honours students voice, and advocates for a learning platform that is accessible for all learners.

### **Conclusion**

I believe that I have grown as an educator through my Master's process. The most important nugget that I have taken away from the past two years is my ability to reflect on my practice and question why I am doing what I do. Thinking beyond the traditional walls of school, and taking risks to improve my practice by working alongside my students. I strongly believe that children are very capable and competent citizens in the classroom, and so I strive to learn and discover new ways of teaching that are inspirational and tap into the motivations of my students. Story Workshop is one avenue that sets the stage for each and every child to be successful.

This journey has taught me so much, and I look forward to being able to share my new knowledge with my colleagues and future teachers. The classroom is a magical place full of diversity, where each child can offer their own unique gems of knowledge. As the educator, I am excited to provide a learning environment that supports, inspires and motivates each child to shine their brightest, feel safe, and be proud of who they are as individuals.

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