

# Edmonton Regional

# Early Childhood Education Council



ERECEC

Spring 2018

## President's Message

Dear Colleagues,

Happy Spring Break or almost Spring Break to you all! Yay! Spring is in the air finally; I can smell it. I can't wait for the snow to melt, the mud puddles, the umbrellas, the raincoats, and the rubber boots, as well as the green grass and blossoming flowers. Spring is a time to foster children's curiosity, inquisitiveness, inquiry, and investigation. Spring is a time to get outside, connect with nature, get dirty, and have lots of fun playing and learning together with your students!

Our regional council has met and planned an amazing PD for this April. We are excited to welcome Keri Devlin and Donna Brown from Roberta MacAdams School. This half day workshop will be held on Saturday, April 28th at Roberta MacAdams School. Come prepared to learn and play. Our learning will focus on nature pedagogy, outdoor play, and loose parts. Dress for the weather because we will be venturing into their Forest School space as well. Space is limited so register early. I hope to see you there.

Your work as Early Childhood Educators is so invaluable. Please take some time during your Spring Break to recharge, relax, and re-energize as we head into the last stretch of the school year. Here's to your continued adventure. I wish you all a wonderful end to your school year with your classroom full of artists, scientists, engineers, architects, authors, and mathematicians!

Sincerely,

Melanie Lee, Edmonton Regional Early Childhood President



*"Play is the highest form of research."*

*-Albert Einstein*

- ◆ Documentation (2-10)
- ◆ Book Reviews (11)
- ◆ Professional Development (12)
- ◆ App Reviews (13)

# Documentation

## The Story of Creation

-Jennifer Baeta, Grade One, Christ the King School

The story of creation is one of many stories we explore and learn about in grade one with Edmonton Catholic Schools. As teachers, we wanted to provide the students with an opportunity of thinking outside the box, and represent their learning in a collaborative and creative way.

We unfolded the story of creation over several days and represented each day by making objects with plasticine.

We allowed their creativity to guide them as they made physical objects to represent things like light, darkness, water, sky, etc. Each student in all three grade one classes made a representation for each day.

They were encouraged to think of the techniques they learned in art when experimenting with sculpting to guide their creations.

All they were given was a small piece of plasticine, about 1 cm cubed, freedom to use their creativity, and guiding questions such as:

- Although we can't see it, think about darkness and night time. If it had a shape, what would it look like?
- Close your eyes and think about the way water moves. How can we represent that in an object?

In the end, we had this beautiful collaborative representation of the Story of Creation.

*"The true strength in our classroom lies in the collaboration of learners, not in the knowledge of one expert."*

*-Krissy Venosdale*



## Literacy and Letter Sense

-Carrie Knight, Kindergarten, Ivor Dent School

I don't think I have seen the term letter sense used to describe a child's understanding of letters, but as I reflected on the children's ability to make letters with pretzel sticks, the term seemed accurate to describe the varying degrees of understanding I witnessed. When I googled the term letter sense, there were no links that popped up using that term. We talk about letter recognition, letter formation, letter sounds, and letter names, but really these ideas combined are letter sense, and letter sense is just one component of literacy, similar to the way number sense is just one component of numeracy. How do children develop letter sense? The same way they develop number sense – through playing (with letters), making real life connections (to letters), building (letters) and putting (letters) together in meaningful ways to help them make sense of their world. Developing letter sense is a very complex skill, so as educators we try to break it down into manageable parts so children can progress from reciting the alphabet to using their letter sense to solve reading and writing challenges. However, if we focus on one part of letter sense in isolation, the child may not make the connections necessary to master complete letter sense. By combining letter names and sounds with letter formation and recognition skills the child can make meaningful connections.

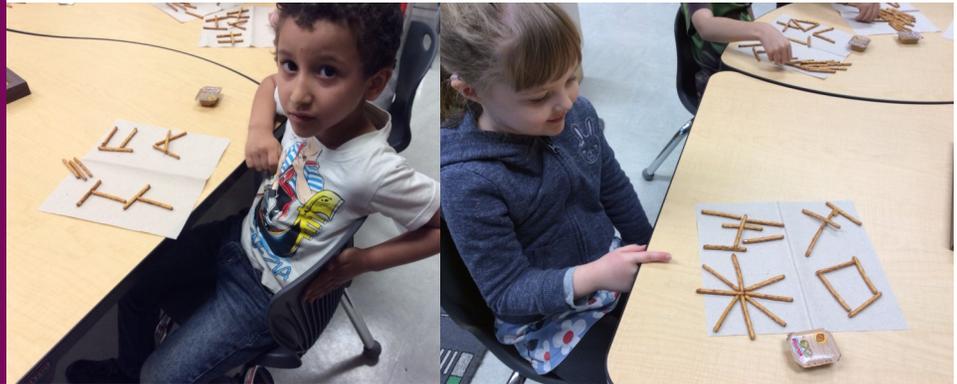
As the children played with their pretzel sticks during snack time (yes, we even play with our food in Kindergarten), I challenged them to use the sticks to make letters. In our classroom, alphabet cards made using twigs are displayed for the children to use as a reference. Some children made the connection that the pretzels were just like the twigs and began checking the letter cards to see which letters had no curves. One child started with letter A and then wanted to make the letter B. This child was reciting the alphabet to determine which letter to make next rather than thinking about the formation of letters. Several children said a word that begins with the letter they made. For example, one boy made the letter T and said, "T is my brother's name," (meaning his brother's name starts with the letter T). Then he made the "tapping sound" /t-t-t-t/. It was fascinating to observe the chil-

*"Literacy is the most basic  
currency of the knowledge  
economy."*

-Barack Obama



Children demonstrate their letter sense through a self directed activity that was fun and engaging. Every child could use the pretzels to make something meaningful. The child that made snowflakes rather than letters is the same child who makes scribble marks to represent words. She is just beginning to make sense of letters and was not yet ready to form letters of the alphabet with pretzels. The ABCs are still just a song she is learning to sing, but soon she will be ready to form letters, too.



## Eric Carle Art

-Melanie Lee, Grade 1/2, Seba Beach School

Here are some pictures of my most favourite spring art project. This project takes several classes to complete. First, use two different colours of acrylic paint at a time. You squirt both paints on your page and then use a paint scraper to scrape and mix the two colours together, pulling the paint to the edges of the paper. These papers need to dry before you can use them.

Using Eric Carle's story books as inspiration, you can have children choose their favourite page to recreate, or they can create their own. The possibilities are endless!





## A Mapping Project

*-Jennifer Baeta, Grade One, Christ the King School*

The students were given voice and choice and decided which type of map they would represent: a map of the school or the community.

Their criteria was :

- Include five main areas of the school or buildings in the community
- Make a representation for each of those five places
- Create hallways or streets for which you will program a robot to navigate through your map

The students who wanted to create a map of the school were accompanied by our Makerspace teacher, and explored the hallways from our classroom to the office. They drew and redrew maps of the front part of our school to ensure they had all of the areas covered.

The students who represented our community were in the classroom looking at a street view of our community on Google Maps. We had recently gone for a walk in our neighbourhood, so the students noticed a lot of things they saw on the maps. Again, the students drew and redrew until they got their map to correctly represent the streets of our neighbourhood.

The students struggled to understand how to represent an area from top-view. After a lot of revisiting, planning, drawing, talking, exploring, and learning, each group was successful in creating their map.

After checking for all of their criteria, another struggle we encountered was programming a robot to go through the maps. The only criteria for that portion of the project was that the robot would not go off the map. All of the students were successful after a lot of trial and error and experimenting with coding.

*“All you need is the plan,  
the road map, and the  
courage to press on to  
your destination.”*

*-Earl Nightingale*





## Outdoor Play

*-Christina Leung, Kindergarten, Dr. Donald Massey School*

*“Look deep into nature  
and then you will under-  
stand everything better.”*

*-Albert Einstein*

Before ever coming to school, children take risks to exert control over their world. This can be seen by behaviours such as crawling from one chair to another while under a table, or bumping and sliding down a set of stairs before learning to walk during early toddlerhood. These early risk-taking behaviours are precursors to the kinds of risk-taking play that will take place outdoors. The early risk-taking play children experience at home provides them with the foundation for larger, more expansive opportunities to learn about the world and test personal boundaries as they take their play outdoors.

The outdoor environment begs children to learn, explore, and make discoveries through risk-taking play. The provocations abundant in outdoor environments will naturally elicit this kind of play. Children learn early in life that there are spaces in the outdoors that provide greater forgiveness if they were to test themselves beyond their personal abilities and by the time they come to school, they have already discovered that sand, dirt, and grassy fields are far more forgiving than concrete or tile floors. As children gain increased understanding of the cause and effect implications learned while playing alone or with others, they increase their capacity to assess their own personal limitations and will make choices consistent with their personal comfort and physical capabilities.

Playgrounds, fields, and other natural areas offer unlimited opportunities for children to safely take risks when playing. Introducing children to larger elements in outdoor play spaces has the same impact on imagination, problem solving, and language as when we add new and novel elements to small play spaces. Introducing natural objects such as logs, stumps, or straw bales into play spaces offers opportunities for creative enhancements to the play environment. The same thing can also be accomplished by introducing man-made objects into natural spaces. Adding several milk crates, boxes, benches, or tires into a field space or playground will greatly change how children interact and challenge themselves through play.



Ravines, ponds, and nature trails – A variety of topographies encourages various body movements and promotes problem solving such as going around or through puddles, using natural objects to hold onto while ascending or descending steep hills, lifting objects and moving around, under, and over objects in the environment.

Outdoor free play areas – These areas are different from playgrounds in that they feature more open-ended play motivators such as long and short logs, steel rails, concrete curbs, low fences or rails for hanging or walking on, retaining walls, tree stumps, stepping stones, low climbing trees, shrubs or tall grass areas with pathways cut between them, and large boulders. This play space changes with the seasons and is often just as invitational for exploration and discovery during winter when snow fills the space or when puddles appear in the spring.

Snowy fields – Snow, by its nature, is ever-changing and the winter season invites opportunity for exploration and discovery. Snow creates opportunity for large-motor play experiences that include: games like Fox and Geese or Follow the Leader where children take turns making snow trails; inquiry challenges such as building long or high snow walls; traditional fun play such as making snow angels or designing shapes or letters in the snow and then outlining them with coloured water from a squirt bottle.

Digging ground – A “digging ground” is a large sandbox, fenced or roped off dirt field, or a snow field used for digging and designing imaginary landscapes. Many of the tools used in the classroom during sand play will work in a digging ground. Play in the digging ground extends the micro explorations of the sand table to macro explorations involving the whole body. Using large muscles is greatly enhanced when child-sized shovels, hoes, and rakes are introduced to the play environment. Other equipment that will enhance play in this type of space include sticks, rocks, rubber mallets, string, marking ribbon, logs or pieces of lumber in various dimensions, and containers in a variety of sizes.



*“The best classroom and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky.”*

*-Margaret McMillan*

*“Teaching children about the natural world should be treated as one of the most important events in their lives.”*

*-Thomas Berry*

## **Making an Outdoor Play Kit**

*-Melanie Lee, Grade 1/2, Seba Beach School*

There is no bad weather, but rather just bad clothing choices. This saying is so true, especially during our cold winter months. How often do we have our students huddled around us asking when it’s time to go inside?

Last week, I attended an afternoon PD session called “Outdoor Play in the Early Years – Connections for Learning, Well-Being and Nature” hosted by Christina Pickles. Christina outlines four benefits of outdoor play: 1) physical literacy and overall health, 2) connection to community and place, 3) connection to nature, and 4) curiosity and learning. My favourite part of the session was when we all got to go outside and play. Christina brought out an Outdoor Play Kit with us. I thought that this was an ingenious idea, and one worth sharing.

### How to Build an Outdoor Play Kit

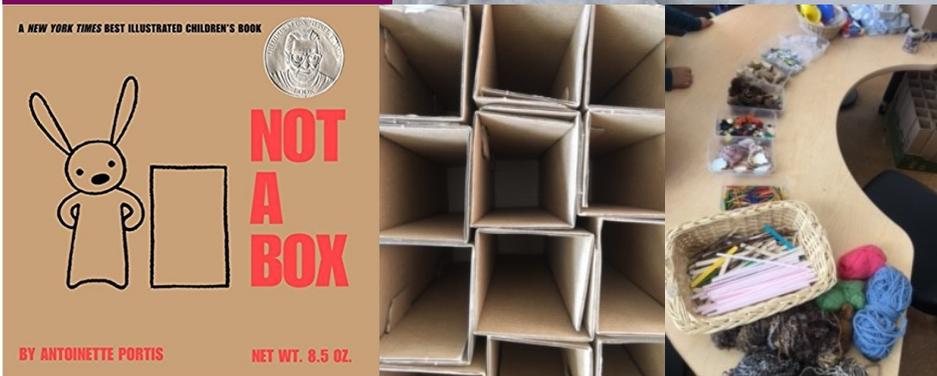
You will need:

- A backpack or reusable bag – something that could get wet and dirty and is also easy to clean.
- A plastic tablecloth – can be used as a gathering focus point for found materials.
- Strips of fabric – can be used to play warm up games like fox tag (encourages students to run around and stay warm) or for blindfolds, etc.
- Egg cartons – to collect your nature treasures. Fantastic for little hands.
- Roll of good duct tape – to make duct tape bracelets or nature badges. Give students a strip of tape that they use with the sticky side out. They can be worn as a bracelet around their wrist or as a badge on their coat. When they find something they want to bring back to the group, they stick it onto their bracelet or badge.
- Paint swatches – cut up and put in a resealable bag. Have students find something in the environment that matches the paint swatch.
- Balls of yarn – the more colourful the better.



Can be used to decorate tree trunks or make shelter/play areas between trees.

- Twine cut into lengths of about 1 metre – wrapped in balls in a resealable plastic bag. Two great ideas were given for this. One was to imagine you are an insect of some kind, such as an ant. You would lay out the twine in a straight line and build an insect walk using loose parts found in nature that could then be retold to a friend. The second idea was to have children use the twine as a boundary for them to build a playground or habitat from found loose parts from nature.



## It's Not a Box

-Jennifer Baeta, Grade One, Christ the King School

We read the book *Not a Box* together as a class, and the room filled with excitement as the students guess what each box in the book could be!

The students were provided with an opportunity to explore different materials and play with their imagination of what they could manipulate and create.

They began with a simple cardboard box. A moment of brainstorming on their own allowed them to play with the many ideas they could make their box into. Then they were invited to explore the various materials and choose five items that they would like to include in their creation. After gathering five pieces of raw material, they were given a blank sheet of paper to illustrate their ideas and create a blueprint of their box.

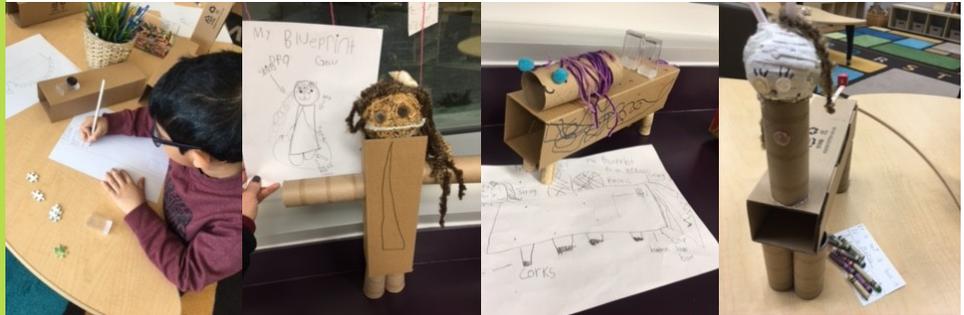
“Imagination will often carry us to worlds that never were. But without it we go nowhere.”

-Carl Sagan

Their criteria was:

- They needed to include a box in their drawing
- Label the materials they include
- Their picture needed to be a close representation of what they build

Once they had a blueprint of their ideas, they were invited to collect more materials as needed. This process allowed them to gather ideas, create a plan, and have a purpose for the materials they gathered after setting their ideas on paper.



## Loose Parts Photos

-Wendy Feschuk, Kindergarten, Blueberry School



Van Gogh

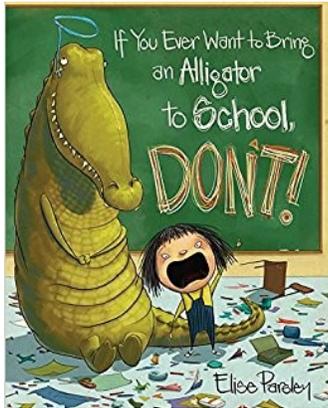
Starry Night

My Friends

Lois Ehlert

Leaf Man and Snowballs

## Book Reviews



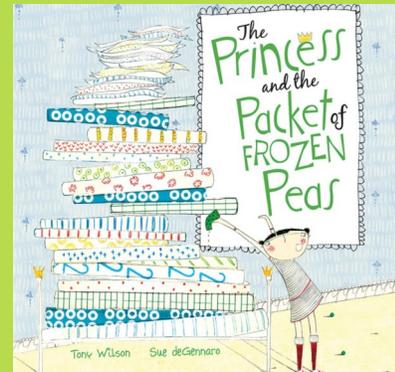
### *If You Ever Want to Bring an Alligator to School, Don't!*

*-Elise Parsley*

This is a great book to read aloud to introduce Show and Share to your class. Just imagine all the things that could go wrong if you brought an alligator to school. My children enjoyed making those exact predictions before we read the book. They were not disappointed. The illustrations are captivating and full of expression as Magnolia tells about all the trouble her alligator caused at school. So if you don't want to miss recess, or end up at the principal's office, don't bring an alligator to school. Choose a rock or a stick instead.

After reading this book, our class decided to make a Show and Share schedule so we can take turns bringing something special to share with our classmates. We made a list of rules together to set guidelines for our Show and Share. Our number one rule is, Don't Bring an Alligator to School!

-Carrie Knight, Kindergarten, Ivor Dent School

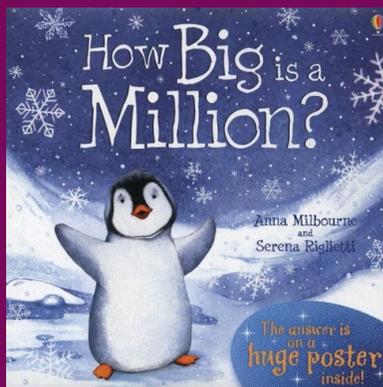


### *The Princess and the Packet of Frozen Peas*

*-Tony Wilson and Sue deGennaro*

This story is a modern twist on the classic tale "The Princess and the Pea." The Prince wants to get married. He gets advice from his brother about the best way to find a "real" princess. The Prince soon realizes that he actually isn't looking for a "real" Princess, but rather a Princess who likes hockey, camping, and has a nice smile. This must-read is one of my favourite fractured fairy tales.

-Melanie Lee, Grade 1/2, Seba Beach School



### *How Big is a Million*

*-Anna Milbourne and Serena Riglietti*

Have you ever wondered how big something is? Join Pipkin, a very small penguin, as he sets off on a quest to discover how big a million actually is. With its simplicity, beautiful illustrations, and sweet characters, the story appeals to young readers. The powerful story invites young children to question, wonder, hypothesize, explore, and seek out answers. It's about numbers, counting, and how much of something there is. Piquing a child's curiosity and imagination, it can serve as a stepping stone for further inquiry and exploration of numbers and math.

-Markiana Cyncar-Hryschuk, Learning Coach, St. Richard School

EDMONTON  
REGIONAL EARLY  
CHILDHOOD  
EDUCATION  
COUNCIL PRESENTS



## NATURE PLAY, FOREST SCHOOL AND LOOSE PARTS

APRIL 28, 2018

**Please join Keri Devlin and Donna Brown while they share their love of Nature Play, Forest School and Loose Parts with us. Please ensure you are dressed so that you can be outside.**

We will be having our Annual General Meeting after the workshop at 12:00pm. Are you interested in becoming our new Newsletter Editor? We are looking for one.

*Robert MacAdams School  
2099 Blackmud Creek Drive SW  
Edmonton, AB*

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*Registration starts at  
8:30 am*

*The half-day session  
will run from 9:00 -  
11:45am.*

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*Coffee and Snacks  
will be provided*

Spaces are limited so register  
early!

\$20 for ECEC Members

\$15 for Students

\$35 for Non-Members

To register for this event, please use the link below  
<https://event-wizard.com/ECEC.Spring2018/0/register/>

# App Reviews

## *Writing Wizard*



*Apple, Android, \$6.99*

Writing Wizard offers students an engaging way to practise printing letters, words, and numbers with emphasis on correct letter formation. Each letter (or word or number) has five levels of difficulty, and a little mini game between each level. My favourite feature of Writing Wizard is the ability to add your own word list. How motivating for students to practise their name or their friends' names on your classroom tablet!

-Jenn Forsyth, Kindergarten,  
Brookwood School

## *Eggy 100*



*Apple, Android, Free*

Eggy 100 is a great way to practise sight words. Each level features one sight word that the child needs to watch for on the eggs that fly across the screen. Touching eggs with the right word earns points toward completing the level; choosing the wrong word or object ends in a mess! Eggy 100 is the free version, with 100 sight words. Eggy 250, a paid version, includes 150 additional words.

-Jenn Forsyth, Kindergarten,  
Brookwood School

## *ABC Ninja*



*Apple \$0.99*

ABC Ninja is a favourite app in our classroom. Students play by listening for the letter to be said aloud, and then slicing the corresponding letter on the screen. The game also allows for letter sounds to be used in addition to, or instead of, letter names. ABC Ninja is highly customizable, offering three levels of difficulty, different lengths of levels (from one minute to ten minutes long), and the ability to turn on or off certain letters or sounds. Similar apps include 123 Ninja, Phonics Ninja, and Sight Word Ninja.

-Jenn Forsyth, Kindergarten,  
Brookwood School

## *Edmonton Regional Early Childhood Education Council Executive*

**President:** Melanie Lee, Grade 1/2, Seba Beach School

**Past President:** Michelle Bezubiak, Grade 1, Bishop David Motiuk School

**Secretary:** Jennifer Baeta, Grade 1, Christ the King School

**Treasurer:** Carrie Knight, Kindergarten, Ivor Dent School

**ECEC 2018 Conference Co-Chairs:** Christina Leung, Kindergarten, Dr. Donald Massey School;  
Jenn Forsyth, Kindergarten, Brookwood School

**Provincial Executive Council Liaison to ECEC:** Markiana Cyncar-Hryschuk, Learning Coach, St. Richard School

**Newsletter Editor:** Jenn Forsyth, Kindergarten, Brookwood School

Want to compile the ERECEC newsletter? We're in search of a new editor. Email [ececedmonton@gmail.com](mailto:ececedmonton@gmail.com) for more information.