



Issues, Events & Ideas



Early Childhood Education Council  of The Alberta Teachers' Association

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President's Message

Greetings on behalf of the Early Childhood Education Council (ECEC). Since September, we have all made incredible strides with the children we serve every day, and across Alberta, we can share a communal, yet humble sigh of relief for our accomplishments as we set our sights on June. We have passed the earlier hurdles of getting to know our students and their parents, and creating unique learning landscapes in each classroom. We have nurtured and developed growth, and have had our patience tested on more than one occasion, especially when enduring long weeks of indoor recess. These reflections are from some of the many conversations I had the honour of having with many of you at this past November's ECEC conference. We had another incredible turnout this year in both attendees and speakers, but most important, we had positive feedback from those in attendance who collaborated, shared and connected with other amazing K-3 teachers! We must thank the ECEC conference committee for all their work in organizing an excellent conference! Our heartfelt thanks go out to you!

We are the voice and advocates for the students in our care. By now you should have received a small packet from our council reminding you to voice your opinions as we approach the provincial election. It is up to each of us to show support for initiatives that will enhance student success in public education! We must move forward and be advocates for our profession. Don't be afraid to ask questions and make your voices heard. Send e-mails and postcards, and have conversations about education. Our concerns about class sizes and funding for special needs students and full-day kindergarten must be addressed again, especially with the varying political party views regarding education. Speak up for your profession and the children in your care.

Remember to vote in the upcoming provincial election so your voice is heard. The percentage of votes is so important; the government must know that we are involved.

As this year continues, watch on Facebook (Early Childhood Education Council ATA), our website (www.ecec-ata.com/), Instagram ([ecec_ata](https://www.instagram.com/ecec_ata)) and Twitter ([@ECEC_ATA](https://twitter.com/ECEC_ATA)) for the regional happenings around the province.

The 2020 conference committee is already booking and making great decisions for our professional learning April 23-25, 2020, in Banff, Alberta. We look forward to seeing you all there.

Danielle Kowalchuk

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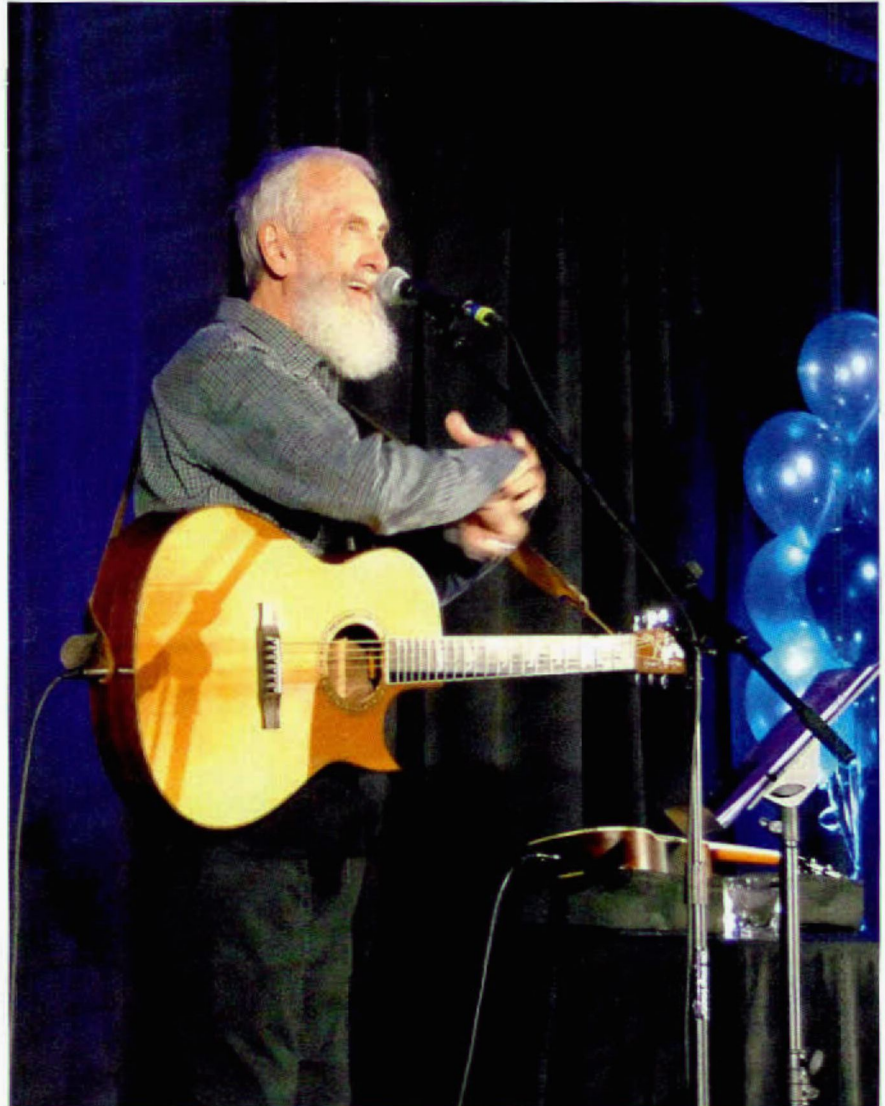


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ECEC Conference 2018

Thursday Keynote: Fred Penner

Fred Penner shared the same energy and passion in his keynote that he had as a children's performer in our childhood. The important message he weaved into his keynote was that children need a sense of connection and that music does this for many. As he pointed out, we remember songs as we grow, and they evoke emotions in us that build memories. Speaking to the impact and the profound importance we teachers have in the lives of children, Fred's interactive start to the conference built the structure and vision of the message that children learn by watching, and being involved and engaged in their work. We create the memories that they take forward and use as the foundation to their learning later in life.

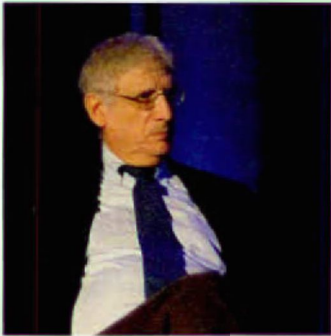


Thursday Night Social

Following Fred Penner's opening keynote, delegates were invited to interact and collaborate through various make-and-take items. This time to meet others, create a keepsake and discuss important education matters included so many wonderful moments. Delegates could create a terrarium, fused glass artwork, watercolour painting or a rustic sign as their take home. Stations to advocate for public education through the Alberta Teachers' Association's (ATA) I Believe in Public

Education Campaign were also encouraged and sent out through social media. Fred Penner also stayed throughout the evening to sign books and interact with teachers. Giveaways from Wintergreen, our gold sponsor, also created some amazing moments for both new and experienced teachers. As an added bonus, the food creativity added to the spectacle of the evening with nacho and donut bars. The atmosphere was energetic and allowed for great conversation and networking.

Friday Keynote: Stuart Shanker



It was such an honour to have Canadian Stuart Shanker as our keynote on Friday. He spoke to a very relevant and highly discussed topic for educators, that of self-regulation. In starting his

discussion, he touched on the paradigm shift that has taken place in society in that we have swung from one side of supporting students to the other. Shanker stated that children must acquire self-control to succeed, and they need the tools to do this. When speaking about small children in particular, it is not about shaming or punishing them for their actions, we need to support them in ways that builds an understanding of their needs so that we can support it. We educators need to get to the root of what might be causing the dysregulation and work to teach students how to build strategies to aid in their regulation. The shift that Shanker spoke of is the move from the idea of self-control (where actions have direct consequences and punishments) and toward one of self-regulation (where students learn to manage their own emotions).

The students' levels of anxiety and pressure show up in their reactions to such situations as learning mathematics. A study done at Western University in London, Ontario, showed that students presented with mathematics problems often go into fight-or-flight response, which does not allow them to successfully navigate the problem and find solutions.

Shanker commented that unfortunately someone is always to blame; in education, it is the teachers. Early childhood educators have the opportunity to lay the foundation for these skills. When infants experience low stress, they learn to function and deal with stress at a reasonable rate. As many of us know, he said, we all need a certain level of stress to function, but too much

stress is damaging. According to Shanker, cracks form in the body if stress is too high. By burning energy daily, a buildup of glucose in the body creates stress. Scientifically a stimulus that is burning energy is considered a stress. There is no such thing as a stress-free environment. If you had no stress, you would be listless.

Think about how to work toward building self-regulation. Touch, for instance, is an incredible mechanism for dealing with stress that turns off the limbic alarm in our bodies. In addition, connecting with others, socializing and building relationships are invaluable to our level of stress. We teachers need to be aware of the following: calm begets calm. If the adult in the room is not calm and regulated, then the students will not be either. You cannot develop mindful education if you don't know what calmness feels like yourself. Our role as educators then is to model that in our classrooms as well as help parents and caregivers to understand the importance of creating calm.

Self-regulation refers to how we deal with stress. We can choose to deal with stress in maladaptive ways that numb our feelings, such as internalizing or overeating. Or we can choose to learn more mindful ways, such as meditation and self-awareness. Our goal is that we try to shift students into a mindful mode of self-regulation and social-emotional growth. Speaking from a biological lens, Shanker discussed how the interbrain does not stop as you age. Instead, it broadens to include the educators and the students' social world in a classroom. It never stops all the way until death. Educators must also understand that at no point in a lifespan can we not change a person from maladaptive behaviours to mindful ones. With this knowledge, teachers need to work with students to recognize the difference between stress, anxiety and misbehaviour, and remain calm in these moments to build these skills for them to cope and adapt. How do we work to take care of the students, their family and our own health as a whole? If we have not aided in the process, the student will focus on the state. Teaching them mindful practice will be the focus that they know and embody as they grow.



Collaborating in Diane Kashin's session.

Friday Breakout Session: Diane Kashin

Buttons

To have the opportunity to spend an entire day with Diane Kashin was a treat in itself. The passion she spoke about was bringing to life the value and learning of the simple button. Our explorations involved feeling, history, texture and love of loose parts. The beginning of the day was about exploring and connecting to what buttons evoked in us. We looked at buttons, selected our favourites and worked in groups to use them in new ways. Through the day, we were guided through a deeply rich inquiry process: working without talking, creating works of art, drawing and documenting our process and asking questions like what, so what and now what? This process forced us to think about the learning journey that students could be taken on to show their learning and engage with each other in ways that were new to them. Each group's creation told a story, evoked a feeling and allowed each participant to dive deeper and ask more questions. This enlightening and rejuvenating day was like no other. I was truly blessed to be part of this process and am excited to elicit this within my students.

Saturday Keynote: Phil McRae

Achieving a Fine Balance in a Digitally Saturated World

Having Phil McRae a part of our conference again truly was another pinnacle of learning. Each time he has joined us, he instilled a passion and love for the work that we educators do every day. He focused on how the digital world affects students and how overwhelming this instant world is that we live in. The idea of any time, place or pace is all over our lives and sends the messages that we need to react quickly and that boundaries are nonexistent. Trying to create things like limits in a limitless world is near impossible.

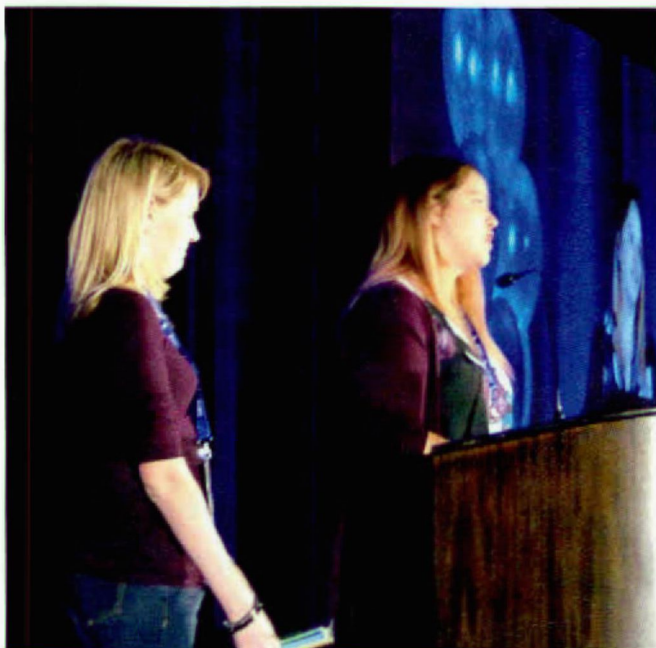
The idea of choice even creates an overwhelming level of anxiety and decision making that challenges the ability of children and adults alike. Our world has become filled with things like over 1,000 plus combinations of Baskin Robbins flavours and 86,000 Starbucks choices. These choices are also very social in that we follow others like friends or celebrities as they instantly post about products they have used. We also have a sense of urgency in purchasing the product and that we need to make perfect choices and that if we don't we



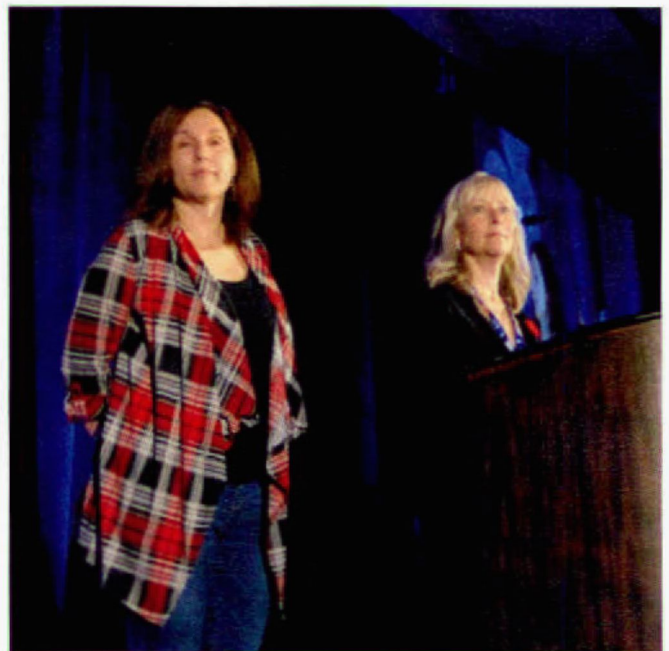
have lost something. As McRae mentions there is this level of growing inequality in all of these decisions, those that have buy more and those that don't are lesser than. The hierarchy is wide and difficult if not impossible to reach. It also plays to a level of oppression in that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

So, McRae says, with all of this knowledge, how do you achieve a fine balance in a digital world? Children cannot physiologically multitask, yet society is pushing them more and more to do so. This level of fast-paced choice is having an incredibly significant impact on our children and therefore the

students that enter our classrooms. Being aware of these areas of need is of extreme importance to our work as educators as we work against this digital age and compete with the entertainment value that it represents. We therefore need to find ways to use it to our advantage and to build skills into our classrooms that allow for digital input in ways that build capacity knowledge and work toward using it to better our worlds. It is not going away. It will only increase. Therefore, it is up to us to find positive ways to implement and carry the same educational values that we believe within this context.



Welcome from conference chairs Jennifer Forsyth (left) and Christina Leung (right).



Danielle Kowalchuk (left) and Joy de Nance (right) kicking off the conference.



Breakout session



ECEC Awards 2018

The Advocate for Young Children Award—Larry Prochner

I had the pleasure of working with Larry Prochner at the University of Alberta. Prochner, along with Anna Kirova, created a master's degree cohort for early childhood educators—the first of its kind in Canada.

Prochner said, "I see my connection with advocacy for children being via educators—the adult learners—based on the idea that adults make a powerful difference in children's lives. My work has been focused on understanding the qualities of teacher education that builds a strong teacher professional identity in which teachers see themselves as agents of change and are reflective, lifelong learners committed to lead learning and enhance children's development."

Sherry Woitte, a U of A colleague said, "Particularly important is the work and research that Prochner has done on historical contexts of early childhood programs. This work has laid the foundation for early childhood educators to understand where our philosophies and directions have come from."

His current research looks at teacher education historically with research partners in five countries (Brazil, England, Austria, Russia and USA). Entitled *Re-Imagining Teaching*, the project focuses on how teachers working in experimental preschools in the early 20th century engaged with what were then new teaching ideas, for example, the ideas of Froebel, Dewey and Freud.

Previous international projects studied teacher education and early childhood practice in diverse settings in the present to explore relationships between Indigenous ways of thinking and western ideas. The research took place over 15 years and

included participants in Canada, Namibia, Colombia, India and South Africa.

His recent work as a teacher educator has included developing an online certificate in early childhood education with his colleague Anna Kirova to ensure access to professional development for educators working in early childhood contexts across Alberta and writing a textbook on teaching young children with Anna Kirova and Christine Massing, including illustrations in graphic novel style.

He has served as the editor of the *Early Childhood Education* journal, is vice-president of the International Froebel Society, served as director of the Child Study Centre at the U of A and served as chair of the department of elementary education. Prochner is a professor of early childhood education and chair of the department of Educational Policy Studies. I cannot think of a better person to receive the Advocate for Young Children Award.

Joy de Nance



Larry Prochner, Advocate for Young Children Award winner (right). Presenter Joy de Nance (left).

The ECEC Distinguished Service Award— Donna Lawson



Donna Lawson, Distinguished Service Award winner (left). Presenter Karin Rivard (right).

It is with great respect and appreciation that I introduce Donna Lawson as the recipient of the ECEC Distinguished Service Award. As a committee member of the Calgary Regional, Donna has served as regional president and participated in various roles on numerous ECEC conference committees. Meghan Clarke, a close colleague of Donna's, said that "Donna is a lifelong learner. At this point of a teaching career, most people would coast along and pull out the tried and true materials and activities that worked in the past. Not Donna. Every year Donna's program morphs and changes to meet the needs of her students. On summer vacation when most teachers are relaxing and unwinding, Donna can be found networking with people to learn about blogging, resources within the community or reading programs to support at-risk students."

Donna shows leadership in the field of early childhood education by enhancing not only her students' learning but also that of many

beginning and seasoned teachers in the Calgary area and throughout the province.

Many of you may not recognize Donna's name but know her as the visual journal lady. She has shared her expertise and contagious enthusiasm of learning through presentations, workshops and professional development opportunities. She is passionate about teaching and anyone who has met her can feel her profound dedication to the field.

Donna understands the importance of instilling a connection to the community in which her students live. Donna's students learn inside and outside of the classroom. Donna understands that children are capable of creating change in our world (even at age six and seven) if given the platform to do so. Donna's children engage in unbelievable learning experiences connected to the real world. This past school year, Donna collaborated with the Calgary Stampede to develop a personalized program for her Grade 1 class to take part in stampede school. During this time, the children spent a week on the stampede grounds learning about Indigenous traditions and watching the Calgary Flames practise! The planning and work that went into this experience occurred after the bell rang each day at 3 PM. This did not deter Donna for a minute! She knew that this experience would make lifelong memories for her students, and that was all that mattered!

Donna has a level of commitment and compassion for each student that comes through the doorway of her classroom. Each child is supported and made to believe how capable and cared for he or she is in her classroom. When children come to school hungry and in need of life's basics, Donna rallies the staff to donate money toward Safeway gift cards. She has shown up on students' doorsteps with a truckload of groceries and gas coupons for families in need. She has also helped connect families to services and programs within the city to support them long term.

Donna has had the support of her family along the way. Many school projects show the commitment to her students by way of her husband Steve's carpentry shop.

Many times, members of the academic community or administrators and supervisors receive awards, but the excellence of regular classroom teachers must also be recognized.

Donna has a quiet, calm and thoughtful demeanor and leads by example. Her regional Christmas parties are legendary: she is queen of special touches!

Donna has been and continues to be an inspiration, a role model and a mentor since I have known her. Please join me in congratulating Donna on receiving the ECEC Distinguished Service Award.

*Karin Rivard, Meghan Clark, Joy de Nance
and Katarina Rivard*

The ECEC Award— Jennifer Bridle



Jennifer Bridle, ECEC Award winner (left). Presenter April Brown (right).

Hello and welcome to all the delegates, special guests and presenters who travelled here to Edmonton from around the province and surrounding areas. I would also like to welcome Jennifer Bridle's husband Stu and her two lovely daughters Samantha and Rebecca who travelled from Calgary to watch their mom

receive the ECEC Award.

I could not be more honoured to present my dear friend Jennifer with this award. The ECEC Award is given to an individual or group of Early Childhood Education Council member(s) who exemplifies outstanding teaching, leadership or service to the field of teaching and early childhood. Jennifer is this individual! When I think of early childhood, Jennifer Bridle comes to mind.

She has been a part of this council since 1994 where she first started as president-elect and then president of the University of Calgary regional while she completed her undergraduate degree. After graduating, her commitment to the council extended into the Calgary regional where she would eventually agree to be president-elect and then president at the regional level. She must not have had much to do because she then agreed to chair a conference. The 2001 conference was a showstopper! It was my first and not my last. Little did Jennifer know she would then take on the role of provincial president. After her term of provincial president, Jennifer took on the responsibility of provincial secretary, a position she still holds today. Jennifer is our go-to person when we need history on what we have talked about or debated about over the years at the executive level. With experience and 24 years of service comes many responsibilities. Maybe provincial historian will be the next role you take on.

If you have ever had the pleasure of working with Jennifer, you will know what I am speaking about when I say Jennifer commits to things. Her level of commitment to her students, the teaching profession, this organization and her family is outstanding. I remember when Samantha was a baby and we had an executive meeting, Jen strolled in with Samantha in the baby carriage, sat down and began taking minutes as if it was second nature. I know it is what you do when you love what you do.

Jennifer loves teaching kindergarten! I know this because she taught Grade's 1/2 and then taught in a preschool program. She would always share her desire to return to teaching

the little ones in kindergarten. Her passion and heart has always been with her kinders. I believe this is where Jennifer has done some of her best teaching.

Jennifer gives 100 per cent of herself to everything she does with her family, her students, her career and this council. Her students, past and present, are fortunate to have her as their teacher. This council is lucky to have her expertise, her commitment and her dedication to early childhood teachers. Her family is lucky to have a loving and caring

mother. Jennifer is a wonderful role model to her children, other teachers and this council by giving of herself to help others. I have learned a great deal from her during our 15-year friendship. She is honest, sincere and passionate about all things early childhood related and would do anything for you if asked.

It is my pleasure to present my dear friend Jennifer Bridle with the ECEC Award on behalf of the Early Childhood Education Council. Please help me in congratulating Jennifer.

April Brown

The Theory of Loose Parts

The theory of loose parts first proposed by architect Simon Nicholson in the 1970s has begun to influence child-play experts and the people who design play spaces for children in a big way. Nicholson believed that the loose parts in our environment will empower our creativity.

In play, loose parts are materials that can be moved, carried, combined, redesigned, lined up, taken apart and put back together in multiple ways. They are materials with no specific set of directions that can be used alone or combined with other materials.

Loose parts can be natural or synthetic. In a preschool outdoor environment, we can provide an array of loose parts for use in play, such as stones, stumps, sand, gravel, fabric, twigs, wood, pallets, balls, buckets, baskets, crates, boxes, logs, stones, flowers, rope, tires, balls, shells and seed pods.

Having loose parts available in a play space allows children to use these materials as they choose. Often children would rather play with materials that they can use and adapt to as they please rather than expensive pieces of play equipment.

Encouraging children to use resources as they choose can provide a wider range of opportunities than one that is purely adult led. Children playing with loose parts are using more creativity and imagination and developing more skill and competence than they would

playing with most modern plastic toys.

It may take a very open mind on our part (there is often a lot of cleaning up involved as materials end up in places you would never expect them to be), but when children cross play materials and areas in creative ways, it is our responsibility to support and encourage their work and ideas.

Loose parts should have no defined use and play workers must support the children when they decide to change the shape or use of them.

Loose parts should be accessible physically and stored where they can be reached by children without having to ask the play workers. The children should know that they could use them whenever and however they wish.

Loose parts should be regularly replenished, changed and added to.

Loose parts theory is about remembering that the best play comes from things that allow children to play in many different ways and on many different levels. Environments that include loose parts are infinitely more stimulating and engaging than static ones. The play environment needs to promote and support imaginative play through the provision of loose parts in a way that doesn't direct play and play opportunities but allows children to develop their own ideas and explore their world.

Christina Leung

North East Regional

Teachers Can Dance

Having already completed a professional development activity in math, our committee decided to host a day dedicated to improving literacy and art skills. On September 22, 2018, 13 of us met with two early childhood experts Lana Lane and Janice Dunn at the Two Hills Mennonite School to spend the day laughing, learning and creating lesson plans.

Early that morning, literacy expert Lana Lane arrived armed with her industrial strength cart filled with activities to help teachers hone their skills. We started our day with a review of the difference between phonemes and phonetics. Then we played games that can be used to introduce rhyming, syllable segmenting and phoneme manipulation. The morning concluded with us working in pairs to generate a list of rich vocabulary words from the book *Giraffes Can't Dance*, by Gilles Andreae.

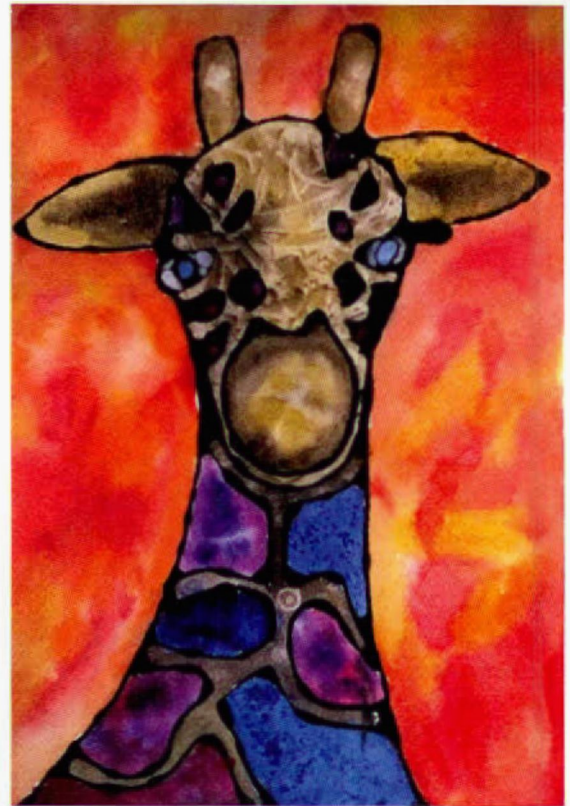
In the afternoon, we changed our focus from literacy to art. Janice Dunn came equipped with watercolour paints, construction paper, wax crayons and all the materials we would need to create a sculpture. We not only had fun creating but also learned first-hand that we all can dance, or in this case, paint to our own beat.

On this day, we learned valuable skills for teaching children the foundational skills required to develop into strong readers and that everyone has different strengths if they learn to listen to their own beat.

As an extension to the day, the teachers from Two Hills School brought the idea back to their school, and on October 12 the K-6 students celebrated Autism Awareness Month by reading the story *Giraffes Can't Dance* and having each student create their own Gerald.

We are already looking forward to planning another day like this, so the teachers in the North East Regional can continue to grow. If you have any suggestions for potential PD in the northeast, be sure to e-mail them to dcofox@telus.net.

Carrie Fox



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The Alberta Teachers' Association

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