

2019

# Shaking the Movers: Early Childhood

Early Learning at MacEwan



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## Foreword by The Honourable Landon Pearson O.C.

All children, even the smallest ones, have rights. And by ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) every country in the world, with one notable exception, has agreed. But what does this actually mean for ordinary people and especially for little children? It is not hard for anyone to grasp that children have the right to be protected, even when we fail to do so. And most of us also understand that children have rights to health care and education even if we are not always willing to pay. But the participation rights of children cause many of us to



scratch our heads. What can children possibly have to say to us? After all, we know what is best for them. But do we? How often do we actually ask and really listen to what they have to say?

The basic concept that undergirds the CRC is that children are persons with the same rights as all other members of the human family with some special ones owing to their age and vulnerability. But if all of us have rights then all of us have responsibilities as well. This is why human rights are fundamentally about relationships, about how to create a culture of mutual respect and compassion and how to learn from one another, something we often forget when considering little children. In spite of CRC Article 12, which guarantees to children the right to be heard, how many of us who listen to them are actually prepared to learn something new from them? After all, it is we who should be teaching them, not them us!

Perhaps it is only poets and other creative artists are truly open to the fact that there is something truly significant in the way that little children envision our world. In his Ode, “On

Intimations of Immorality from Recollections of Early Childhood” the English Romantic poet, William Wordsworth, marvels at the small child’s capacity to see “splendour in the grass” and “glory in the flower” and then laments about the fading of that vision over time into the “light of common day.” Wordsworth was not writing about the loss of innocence, he was writing about a different way of seeing and of being in a world and the fact that most of us forget what it was like to be a child. This is why it is so important to connect with little children who can remind us and, often at the same time, teach us something new. “Shaking the Movers” tries to make that possible.

With respect to Article 2 of the CRC, the Article that ascribes rights to all children “without discrimination of any kind”, it is particularly important to hear from small children. Learning to distinguish among things and people is a normal process. After all, it is the only way in which children can make sense of the world around them. That round object they are holding is either an apple or a ball but should they eat it or throw it? So it is natural for children to discriminate. But it is not natural for them to hate one group of people or another. That they have to be taught.

Observing very young children it is clear that they have a fundamental feeling for fairness as well as a sense of personal agency. What they really need from others older than themselves is to be shown through pictures, games, stories and personal example how to translate these emotions into action in a respectful manner. This is what the young helpers at the Shaking the Movers events that are the subject of this report, succeeded in doing. So please pay attention to what the little children themselves are sharing with us.

The Hon. Landon Pearson, O.C.

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# What child do you see?

We've begun  
To consider new meaning  
New ways of being  
Not throwing out the old  
But welcoming the new  
And anticipating its hold  
Deep at the root of this exploration  
Is an inspiration  
The child!

What child?  
Is it the child that we **think** we know?  
Precious, innocent, anxious to have their say  
Full of uninhibited energy  
Needing us to show the way.

Or is it the child who we **may not yet** know?  
Competent, capable, ready to participate  
Eager with genuine curiosity  
Using multiple languages to communicate

Do we know **this** child?  
Philosopher, participant, contributor in democracy  
Willing to take responsibility  
A caring member of our community.

We've begun  
To see a different child  
Our image has been reconciled  
Not forgetting the child we knew  
But accepting new potential  
And broadening our view  
Illuminated by a re-conception  
We have an enlightened impression  
What child?  
**The child as citizen.**

By Margaret Mykietyshyn © June 2015

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# Section One

## Introduction

Early Learning at MacEwan (ELM), Edmonton, Alberta, is a child care program providing care and education for 40 families and 47 children with 12 educators across three playrooms. The centre offers quality, supportive and inclusive child care for children ages 18 months through six years. ELM accepts all children and families for nurturing a diverse community of mighty learners.

Families come to ELM from within the University community of students, staff and faculty, and from the broader community outside of MacEwan. The lived curriculum builds on the latest theories and practices of early childhood education and attends to the confidence and security that help develop a strong sense of identity. ELM, originally MacEwan's Early Childhood Development Program's demonstration site, began in 1972 and has always played a leadership role, modelling exceptional practice in the Alberta early learning community. Currently, ELM provides educational research and teaching support to the university's Early Learning and Child Care diploma program (soon to become the Bachelor of Early Childhood Curriculum Studies degree program). As a lab school, ELM collaborates with several universities through allied faculties including Speech and Language Pathology, Psychology, Social Work, Massage Therapy, Physical Education, Library Technology, and many more. As a centre of applied research and education, ELM played a critical role as a development site for *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework*. *Flight* (2014) recognizes children as citizens and early learning classrooms as places where children and families can participate and be heard. This is a notion we've been exploring at MacEwan over the last two decades, since we became inspired by the infant and preschool programs of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and more intensely with the inception of our own early learning and child care framework.

## Shaking the Movers: Early Learning at MacEwan, Edmonton, AB

In Fall 2019, in collaboration with Early Learning and Child Care program faculty and with support from The Muttart Foundation and The Landon Pearson Resource Centre for the Study of Childhood and Children's Rights, ELM responded to the invitation to host a Shaking the Mover's Early Childhood Event and began this journey of exploring children's rights with the children and families from ELM. The goals of the Shaking the Movers model are three-fold: to gain awareness of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, to explore the connections between civil and political rights and the practical contexts of young people's lives, and to develop an understanding of associations between children and youth – their rights, and social change. When we were invited to participate, we were excited but had lots of questions about what this meant for us at MacEwan and how we might adapt the model for our specific context.



Thinking about children's rights as outlined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) helped to frame our beginning understandings. We chose to explore the right to participation: all children have the right to express their views about things that affect them and to participate in communities, programs and services. Children's right to participate is directly acknowledged in *Flight's* (2014) guiding principles and values. It states:

"In early childhood communities, we value the opportunity to participate---actively and authentically---in the daily decisions of life and living. **Democratic citizenship** means that children and their families have opportunities to participate, to make choices, to express ideas, and to act upon their daily experiences by asking questions and expressing their opinions in matters they relate to" (p. 20).

This guiding principle and the *Flight* Framework in general, reminds us that children are already mighty learners and citizens in the here and now. We believe that children are already rights-holders and the notion of children's rights is already embedded and valued in our daily practice. Still, at a conceptual level we wondered, how we might explore the idea of rights with this age group of children in an authentic way? How could we capture expression of their rights in everyday experiences?

Taking these questions to the educators, they confirmed that children already use many languages and literacies to explore and represent their ideas, thoughts, questions and emerging theories. It is through material interactions with objects like clay, blocks, art mediums, and play that the educators gain insight into the very ideas that capture children's attention, interest and shape their daily curriculum. With this foundational understanding and many questions, we collectively wondered: How will children express their rights through these modes of expression? What might we learn about the children's identities through the expressive materials they choose to explore?

Our many questions led us to explore a long-term investigation on children's rights to identity and self-expression. The right to identity is significant for young children and many of the articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child include the notion of identity, both implicitly and explicitly, in the details of each right (articles 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 29, 30). The right to identity matters as it begins with family and highlights the importance of family social and cultural practices that continue to take shape across a lifetime. The right to self-expression has meaning for young children in that it reminds us that even the youngest children have a way of communicating their ideas and knowledge. As educators, we believe it is our responsibility to listen to and honour what is being communicated by the children. When children experience positive relationships and belonging they can build a strong sense of security and identity, which in turn shapes how they view themselves and others in the here and now of their lives (VCAA, 2011).

Collectively, preparing to listen we were provoked to reflect on our daily experiences and interactions with children, and to examine daily curriculum decisions with the hope of inspiring new ways of thinking. If we were to explore children's rights and really learn from the children, we too needed to think critically about our role as educators and faculty alongside children and families. We needed time to focus and prepare ourselves for inquiry and co-learning.

It is our responsibility to listen and honour what is being communicated by the children.

## Focusing Together on Children's Rights

Each of the three playrooms received the book, *Seen & Heard: Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education*, by Ellen Hall and Jennifer Rudkin (2011). In preparation for a professional learning day in early fall, educators were asked to read chapter one, *Tuning Adult Ears to the Voices of Young Children* (p. 7-19), which speaks to the exploration of rights with and from children at Boulder Journey School, Boulder, Colorado. Similar to the educators at Boulder Journey School, we too wondered how we might collectively promote young children's understanding of their rights. For us, an opportunity to dialogue about the role of educator's daily decision making seemed important. Our professional learning day began with reflections on our shared reading. Some ideas that came forward were about balancing different perspectives such as protection and participation rights, and individual liberties and communal responsibilities. The notion of listening to children with all our senses and hearing them through their many languages of expression and ways of communicating resonated as being significant. Reminded that children are not 'given' rights, but rather they are born with inherent rights as human beings, made us pay attention to the notion that what we do, as educators, matters.

After considering these valuable insights, Dr. Tricia Lirette provided a brief overview about Shaking the Movers and timelines for the project were determined. The educators in playroom teams were asked to record their thoughts in response to 4 questions: Why is the right to identity important? What challenges do children face in accessing their right to identity? How is the right to identity and self-expression currently evident in your practice, room environment, and relationships? How could you further support the right to identity and self-expression?

The following are some of the responses from educators in relation to these questions. The full transcription of these reflections is included as appendix A of this report.

### Why is the right to identity important?

- Is about values, beliefs, culture, background, etc.
- Being able to be who you are/proud/seen/heard/valued/safe
- Others recognizing your identity
- Confidence to navigate life/changes
- It carries on with them for their life
- Creates ripple effect/butterfly effect
- Intergenerational, not only who we are, but our roots and where we came from – “culture”
- It's who they are!
- Gives us a voice, sense of worth and belonging
- Respect towards others unique individuality

### What challenges do children face in accessing their right to identity?

- Need to conform to societal norms
- Health, economics, culture, bias, stereotypes, politics, etc.
- Other filters of children (image of the child)
- How others around you see limitations vs. possibilities
- Fears (“bubble wrapping” children)
- Media (scary stories on news)
- Lack of awareness that children are born with rights
- Societal views on how children should act/be
- Gender biases and ALL biases such as age, culture, family, community
- Toy companies/media /targeted clothing

### How is the right to identity and self-expression currently evident in your practice, room environment, and relationships?

- Treat everyone as an individual
- Acknowledgement of emotions – being an active listener with children
- Open-ended materials
- Picture books to support different family dynamics
- Planning around all children (individual or groups)
- Involved in “planning” and “lists”
- Exposure to differences and similarities
- Honouring and valuing children's ideas and choices
- Communicating in multiple ways – voice, visuals, routines, materials (multimodal)
- Facilitating children communicating with others about feelings, etc

### How could you further support the right to identity and self-expression?

- Listening with all your senses
- Removing preconceived notions (lens, filters)
- Awareness that we all have rights and supporting those negotiations
- Respecting not everyone has to be ‘friends’ but ensuring exclusion isn't taking place
- Connecting with families to gather more information
- Thinking about how we will be observing and interpreting children' identity through play
- Research around material, more exposure, intentional use
- Flexibility in planning and time
- Being patient -children are capable (e.g. putting shoes on)
- Not taking everything at face value (deeper meaning making)

Having the time to think and talk about our current practices and what might continue to evolve, the educators were introduced to the metaphor of a ladder for reflecting on child-adult decision making (adapted from Hart, 1994, cited in Hall & Rudkin, 2011, p. 49). In the coming weeks, educators were asked to pay attention to their own daily decisions and use the image of the ladder to reflect on how and when power dynamics are inherent within these everyday moments. Given journals, the educators documented the moments where they shared decision making with children and other times when they made decisions for children.

On October 4th, at the following professional learning day led by ELM's senior manager, Jennifer Sibbald, and two ELCC faculty mentors, Lee Makovichuk and Margaret Mykietyshyn, educators were asked to take time to review their journal and share highlights of daily moments when decision making was happening in their practice. The following questions framed the discussion.

### Educator Reflections

What does this say to you? What new insights does this reflection reveal about yourself and your practice with children in relation to shared decision making?

Educators reported on the many influences that impact their everyday decision making with and for children. Their documentation and reflection made visible new insights such as:

- how logistics like schedules, policies, time, and status quo are the basis for making decisions and in these cases, they noted that decisions are often made for children.
- knowledge and relationships with children often determines how much children had a say in a situation as they tried to support children's learning about healthy boundaries for themselves and others.
- the context of each situation had an impact, as well as, whether decisions impacted the individual child or more than one child or the whole room.
- negotiating equity, fairness, and equality were part of educators' thinking when they were deciding on how to balance many factors.
- situations that required multiple and immediate decisions to be made throughout the day were most confronting.
- some educators recognized that their practice of shared decision making with children was much lower on the 'ladder' (less involvement of children) than they initially thought it would be.

Take Away - Reflecting on child-adult decision making



8. Child-led decision-making shared with educators.  
"Child-adult partnership"

7. Child-directed, child-centered decision-making.

6. Educator-led decision-making shared with children.

5. Educator-led decision-making informed by children's voice.

4. Educator-led decision-making with children assigned to respond.

3. Educators tokenize children in their decision-making.

2. Educators use children to decorate their decision-making.

1. Educators manipulate children in decision-making.

Adapted from The Ladder of Student Involvement in School (Hart, 1994), cited in Hall & Rudkin (2011).  
*Seen & heard: Children's rights' in early childhood education.* (p. 49).

The rich discussion led to emerging awarenesses about how the perceived limitations and expectations noted above, often created the scenario of “viewing the day as things that need to be done, instead of, things to be experienced”. These kinds of conversations call educators to take risks in the spirit of learning and are always about gaining new understandings that guide the practice of individuals.

As educator practice is always contextual, considering children’s experience of their daily decisions moved the conversation even further. Educators reflected on the following question which brought forth even deeper reflection about the importance of their everyday work.

If you have identified an example of when a child had a strong voice in decision making how do you think the child experienced that moment?

Educators brought examples forward of times when they thought children had a strong voice in decision making. In these moments they perceived that children felt like they mattered, they had a purpose, they were valued, and ultimately, they felt proud. Lee and Margaret introduced the notion of finding moments with children to ensure that they feel they are seen – taking a minute to wonder, “How is this child experiencing this moment with me? ...being seen by me? ...for what is here and now? Follow up notes indicated this as a powerful reflection piece for many of the educators. Educators saw this as a reminder that this was about supporting children’s developing sense of identity, and what they do each and everyday matters, which led to the final reflection question.

Assuming we acknowledge an image of the child, as a strong capable and resourceful mighty learner and citizen, how do we become sensitized to how children are expressing their identity?

The responses to this question reinforced that educators understand children’s choices about what they participated in and decisions about how they played as a reflection of that child’s identity. Offering opportunities to test theories, ideas and thoughts and to express themselves through many different play experiences and interactions was a way for children to reveal their identities. Jennifer observed that exploring rights and identity with children was far less complicated when educators truly listened to the hundred languages of children[1]. Listening to children through all their languages of expression and including them in decision making, communicates to children that they are noticed and valued. Ultimately, a pedagogical relationship is one where children know they are seen and heard.

During the remainder of the professional learning day and with these new insights and awarenesses in mind, the educators spent time in their room teams to begin to design and plan experiences that would support children in exploring their rights to identity and self-expression. They would draw on these ideas and resources over the next few months.

[1] Inspired by the 100 languages of children as expressed by L. Malaguzzi, we borrow the term, to recognize the many ways children explore and express their ideas, thoughts, feelings and knowledge.



# Section Two

## Exploring Children's Right to Identity and Self-Expression

The ELM educators use a model of co-inquiry for curriculum planning. The model cycles around three interrelated processes, observation and documentation, reflection and interpretation, and planning and taking action (Flight, 2014). In preparation for this play-based, holistic planning cycle, educators begin by brainstorming the many possibilities for engaging children's playfulness and creativity and offer provocations that invite children's exploration and expressions. Building on children's participations, educators observe, and make meaning of what children do and the cycle of planning continues.

Children's ongoing explorations with materials provoked educators to draw on many materials and experiences to invite children to express their thoughts and ideas through a variety of art media and loose parts. In addition to acknowledging children's interests and ideas through play possibilities, the educators continued to be aware of how they were honouring children's participation in daily decisions and interactions. Each room carried this out in ways that made sense for the children and families in their room.

### The Chickadee Room (ages 3-5)

The playroom environment became a focus for the children and educators of the Chickadee room. In early fall, it quickly became clear that the existing design and layout of the space did not represent the newly formed group of children and educators. A room renovation that began as a seemingly simple idea, was transformed through dozens of conversations, focus groups, play experiences, mapping projects, and planning sessions between children and educators. Soon, the ideas were put into action. Educators agreed that it was important that children be present and involved in each stage of the project. Children were the directors, with educators working as supporting actors, embracing their suggestions and bringing the children's thoughts and ideas to life. Many of the space's children designed were places for building respectful and responsive relationships with people in their early childhood community including places to invent with materials, somewhere to jump, spaces to gather, be creative, and places for playing alone and playing together.



Children preparing the space for changes.



Children moving furniture to new space.

### The Hummingbird Room (ages 2-6)



The shadow of Wren taking a picture of her name written in plasticine.



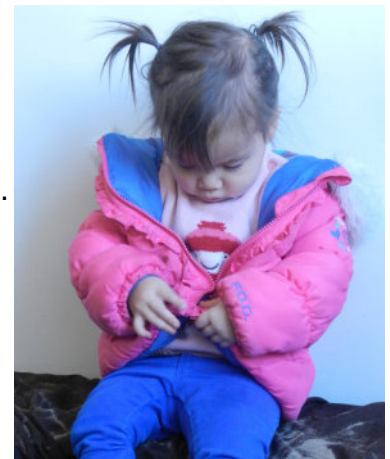
Zachary searching for 'his' letter.

In the Hummingbird Room, the children and educators began an exploration of names. Together they wondered, what does a child's name mean to them? Is identity shaped through a name? A project of letters and names unfolded as the group of children began to explore their identities through a range of multimodal literacies such as unit blocks, clay, magnets and even pretzels. Noticing letters being created by the children using the array of materials, educators also began hearing the children claim "their letter" – a W was being used to represent Wren and so on.

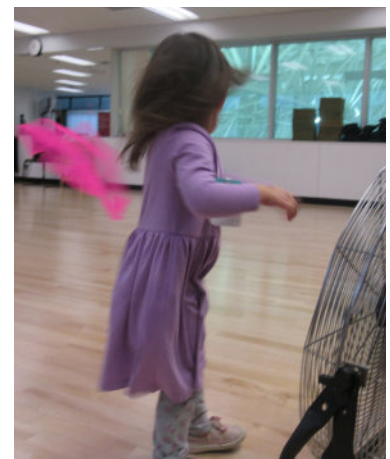
Children began to make connections between the letters they saw in books, print, and signs to themselves and to each other, recognizing letters that belong to them and to other children. As the project continued children pursued important questions such as, 'How did I get my name?', 'What meaning does my name have?' and, 'Am I named after someone?' Educators, families and children began a process of co-learning, co-researching and co-imagining possibilities to investigate the connection between children's right to identity and the value of one's own name which provoked a further question: What's in a name?

### The Partridge Room (ages 18 months - 3)

The educators in the Partridge Room embarked on a journey of learning with and alongside children and families to understand their identities and what that meant for their coming together as a community. Striving to create a space that reflects each child, educators listened carefully to the hundred voices children use, watching for expressions that might suggest that the environment – time, space, materials and participation – required further attention. Through an exploration of materials, children showed the educators their personal interpretations of self by expressing different ways to engage with the same selection of materials. Educators interpreted the unique ways that each child engaged with a given material as them expressing something about themselves – something about their identity. Through materials, children actively and openly expressed a need for more time. For one child that meant, time to persist in zipping up their sweater all by themselves, for another child, that meant time to wash their own hands, and still for another child that meant time to express themselves using colourful scarves and music. We all require time, and the children showed educators not only when, but what they wanted time for. *Flight* reminds us that "In early childhood communities, we value the opportunity to participate - actively and authentically – in the daily decisions of life and living." (2014, p. 20). It was in these decisions that educators gained insights into how children expressed their rights for how they viewed themselves.



Danica zipping up her own jacket.



Theia dances with a colourful scarf through the air using a fan.



## Rights Based Preschool Picture Books

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The Muttart Foundation donated a selection of children's books from the list that Ryerson had compiled (see Appendix B). Highlighting themes of children's rights, identities, and self-expression, the educators eagerly shared them with children and families. The books prompted new ideas, conversations and encouraged children to talk about the rights they hold to be true. Provoked by the story sharing, the educators offered the children responsive environments in which to explore substantive ideas about names, race, taking care of other humans and the earth, and listened carefully to children's thoughts, feelings and questions. These children's books created a shared language for children, families and educators to express their rights in many ways. Like Ameila who questioned, "I only have my rights one day a year?" in a thought-provoking conversation after reading *My Little Book of Big Freedoms* by Chris Riddell. Or the moment when the children of the Hummingbird room discussed the right to a first and last name by joyfully sharing their full names after reading, *I Have the Right to Be a Child* by Alain Serres.

As the children and educators explored these notions in the playrooms, we began hearing children make sense of what this means for them. For example, Tia asked, "If I have rights, does that mean my baby brother does too?"

## Planning for National Child Day at MacEwan - The March



Every year, November 20th, commemorates National Child Day, a day to celebrate children as active participants in their own lives and communities, as active citizens who can and should meaningfully contribute to decisions that affect them. ELM has always celebrated National Child Day, however, in correlation with the STM project we were provoked to stretch ourselves. Since September,

our focus has been on children's insights of their rights to identity and self-expression and we felt a responsibility to advocate for these rights in a deeper way in our broader community. A march can be described as "an event in which a large number of people walk through a public place to express their support for something" (Cambridge Dictionary). We thought about the impact 47 children marching through the university campus advocating for their rights alongside parents, siblings, educators, students and faculty members, might have on our broader community. Often when groups of children and educators walk through the university we are met with impatient glances questioning why young children are present in a space geared towards adults as we move slower than busy students traveling from one class to the next or we hear the never ending "aww they are so cute" remarks. We wanted our presence on campus to be noticed. We wanted others to see that we belong on campus and we have the right to play, learn, participate, influence changes and be heard. Children, families, students and educators had been participating in many conversations and explorations of the children's insights of their rights leading up to National Child Day, and these conversations intensified as plans for the march were underway. In preparation, educators engaged the children to think about the rights they value. With support from educators, the children set out to create signs (see Appendix C) that they would carry as they marched through the university campus. Each child's sign was unique to them, describing their understanding of the rights they hold such as, "I have the right to run, jump, fly and play" and "I have the right to eat cookies and drink juice at Grammy's house". On the day of the march, a buzz of excitement filled the centre. Each child proudly held their sign, and many dressed in blue or wore a blue ribbon. Parents and siblings joined us, others met us along the way, children confidently filled the space that is generally held for adults with such ease, sharing their message that they too belong and have the right to be seen and heard.

## MacEwan ELCC Student Contributions

Each year as part of ECDV 260 Family and Community Issues, a second-year course, ELCC students learn about National Child Day (NCD) and the UN Convention for the Rights of the Child. The date often corresponds with a time students are in their practicum settings, where they participate with their host agencies and plan experiences for children and families to bring awareness and honour the day. Some ELCC students create a display and host an information booth at the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement NCD conference to promote and inform others about the UNCRC. The ELCC students who are placed at ELM for field placement, participate with the educators to communicate with families about National Child Day and provide experiences for children to explore their rights. This year, those students were asked to consider children's rights as they planned for play across their 4-week practicum. Students also created pedagogical documentation of children in play and reflected on how those moments revealed children's rights to identity and self-expression.

Using *Flight* to support their observations and interpretations, the ELCC students recognized significant moments where they listened to and acknowledged children's expressions of their rights. A few examples follow:

When Tia participated in an experience of creating a booklet, as she collected and made decisions about which pictures and materials she would choose to add to her book, she articulated the basis for her choices through a personal narrative. Heewon, an ELCC student, interpreted this as a moment when Tia was pursuing her interests, passions and strengths and noted how Tia might be gaining a sense of self and experiencing growth in self-confidence as she participated in the experience. Heewon recorded Tia's claim to her identity as 'a brave girl'.

Carmen, an ELCC student, noted the power of storybooks in her observations of Luki and Honzik, twins, who explored the book, *Bear's Book of Feelings*, together. After reading the story Luki and Honzik pursued ideas extending from the story by asking other children and Carmen about their emotions. Through their listening, encouraging, and caring attitude toward the other children and herself, Carmen interpreted them developing a sense of people beyond themselves. She wondered if they may have also been developing a positive sense of self through their curiosity and questioning attitudes relating to themselves and others.



Another ELCC student, Yemina observed as Alexandra explored a large circular object, placing it over her body and eventually getting stuck in it. Alexandra turned down an offer of help from her friend, Tia, but persisted and found her way out of the circle. Eventually the item became her steering wheel as she shared a personal story about driving to McDonalds. In this creation of a social space and shared narrative, Yemina interpreted the play as a moment in which Alexandra was co-constructing her identity and developing her sense of self by taking possession of her world and showing confidence in her ability to express her feelings.

Habibo, an ELCC student, communicated an awareness she had about a child's shift in perspective. In Thea's exploration of painting her body, different than her usual representation of self on paper as one member of her family, Habibo noted, "Today was different – it was all about herself. I remember wondering if she was beginning to develop a recognition of herself." Later when another child joined in the sensory body paint play, Habibo recognized how the two were sharing space and working together and perhaps, co-constructing their identities by creating a social space and shared narrative.

ELCC student Kristen, documented how Zachary used trial and error to explore a camera. She saw he was exhibiting the disposition of playfulness in the way he used the camera and interpreted this moment of play as him developing a positive sense of identity when he viewed the pictures of himself with joyful recognition of his mirror image.

During her time at ELM, Kavya, an ELCC student, observed Jessie as she used a roller dipped in yellow paint, and keenly observed the movement of the roller and the flow of paint on a large white paper. Kavya noted that Jessie responded to additional trays of paint being offered by choosing to lift a tray of blue paint and pouring the paint on the paper. Kavya wondered if Jessie might be strategizing the pursuit of her own passions and looking for opportunities to express her feelings.

Using their observations as a basis for planning and documentation the ELCC students continued to offer play experiences that built on their interpretations of the children's interests and for exploring their rights to identity and self-expression.

## ELM Educators Documenting Children's Experiences

Throughout the course of the STM project educators observed children in play. These observations are the basis of educator reflection and interpretation, as they take time to thoughtfully consider children's perspectives and expressions of identities. Here are some examples of those documented moments with children and educators.

With a piece of paper, marker and a mirror, Mackenzie, an ELM educator, observed a group of children and wondered if they might be provoked to draw a self-portrait and use the mirror to notice their features. Bridget selected a piece of paper and marker and began to draw. She then showed it to Alister. "That's me," she informed him before drawing a new figure. "And who is that?" Alister asked her. "That's Maeve." Bridget continued to draw Maeve – her baby sister. "Why is she wearing polkadot clothes?" Alister asked. "I don't know. To keep her warm," Bridget replied. During the same experience Raphael, intently peered into the mirror, selected a marker and began to draw two round circles followed by a large circle around them. Mackenzie wondered if Raphael was drawing a self-portrait to represent who he is. To Mackenzie's delight, Raphael then looked up at her and said, "I'm drawing me!".

Seemingly, letters and names continued to be a focus of exploration for the children. Na'il excitedly shared with Trina, an ELM educator, that he spelled his name with wooden letters. Upon a closer look Na'il realized something, "Look, I had a Z upside down instead of an N. I couldn't figure out why my name didn't look right," before swapping the letters out. Adam explored manipulating wooden pieces to form letters. Soon his letters became words, and then names. His curiosity led him to investigate other ways to create letters and spell words through a variety of multimodal literacies including clay, and even pretzels during snack time.

Erica, Libby, Linnea and Michelle, educators in the Partridge Room, noticed and named the many ways the youngest children at ELM actively care for the environment, materials, living things and one another. For example, they noticed Marley and Danica tend to a baby doll, feeding, bathing and clothing it, while they carried it with them wherever they went. They noted how Charlie ensures his brother Henry has enough cereal in his bowl and requests more when he sees Henry's bowl is empty. They also see Dante, who every morning made a point to say hello to the fish before entering the playroom.

Each of these moments reminded educators that "in early childhood communities that value equity, each member has the opportunity to participate and have one's perspectives heard and respected" (Flight, p. 20, 2014).

# Section Three

## Sharing about Rights Through a Family Event

ELM recognizes the potential of children, families, educators, faculty and students as co-earners, co-researchers and co-imagers of possibility. With the project continuing in the playrooms, we acknowledged the need to share our experiences with families. We formed a committee that included Jennifer, Joan, Kristy, Lee, Margaret and Tricia to plan an event involving families. We wanted to share our STM journey and also engage families in conversation and provoke them to think about children's rights in ways they may not have before. Wanting to hear from parents, the committee decided the first part of the evening would be attended by parents with child care provided at ELM, followed with an evening for families. We thoughtfully organized the agenda for the event and intentionally considered time, space, materials, and participation for all attendees.

### Preparation for the Family Event

Our Shaking the Movers event was held in a large multi-purpose room in the University close to ELM. The space was enhanced with pedagogical documentation boards created by ELM educators and ELCC students. The displayed documentation focused on experiences from the project making connections to *Flight* and the UNCRC and included personal learning stories written for each child, highlighting a time when they expressed their right to identity. The ELCC practicum students took leadership in the preparation of a photo booth which included props for dressing up. The collection of the children's books we had explored throughout the project were displayed for families to look through and read together. Educators created spaces for children to play including a gross motor area to run, jump, crawl and wiggle, while another space was set up for children to be creative using plasticine and modelling tools. Tables with centre pieces of loose parts and materials provided another opportunity for children and families to play together.

### Family Event

The evening got underway with a welcome, introductions and land acknowledgement. Tricia shared the background of STM events, stating that they began in 2007 at the Landon Pearson Resource Centre and along with CRAN (Children's Rights Academic Network) they continue this initiative across Canada. Highlighting the "lofty and important goals" of the STM model, Tricia explained ELM's involvement, "When we were invited to participate, we were excited but had lots of questions about what it meant for us at MacEwan, and how we would have to adapt the model for our specific context. For us, the notion of children's rights is already embedded and valued, so we put our heads together and came up with a plan for a long-term investigation of children's rights".

## Information about the UNCRC

We wanted to engage families in a rich conversation of children's rights. Knowing that each person in attendance had a different understanding of children's rights, we began with *The Right to a Childhood*, a video from UNICEF Canada. This video makes visible children's rights through the voices of children, and introduces ideas that we would highlight throughout the evening event. Tricia provided a very brief overview of the UNCRC and how it influences our work in ELM. The UNCRC outlines 45 rights that all children under the age of 18 are entitled to. It is the most comprehensive treaty in support of children. She noted that these rights provide us with a solid road map of what is needed to raise healthy and happy children and youth. Tricia continued explaining that, for us, this makes a strong connection to the image of the child as a mighty learner and citizen in the here and now. We believe that children are already rights-holders. Unfortunately, in Canada today, although we like to congratulate ourselves on being a great place to live, many Canadian children still do not experience their full array of rights. That is why it is still important to remind ourselves that we have an obligation to ensure that all children's rights are protected.

## Sharing the Children's Experiences throughout the Fall

With the intention to share with families the questions, thoughts, and wonderings that emerged as a result of this project, Jennifer described ELM's journey that took place until that point. She described where we began and the moments that lead us to the evening STM event. Each playroom engaged in many different experiences in relation to the rights to identity and self-expression, these moments were observed, reflected and documented by educators for children and families. Displayed around the room, families were invited to read the stories and reflect on moments of their children participating in expressions of their rights.

## Video of National Child Day March

**"Every child has a right"  
- Leila (3 years old)**

Tricia and Jennifer took the opportunity to share with families a video of their children actively participating in moments of self-expression and their right to identity during the National Child Day march. The video begins with a quote by Landon Pearson stating that "All children, even the smallest ones, have rights" before cutting to three-year-old Leila proudly sharing with the audience that "every child has a right". The video highlights many children telling us the rights that they value such as "the right to be different" declared by Honzik and Luki -identical twins; "the right to a name" stated by Niamh; "the right to run" announced by Adam, as the video pans to a group of toddlers joyfully running towards the camera. The video captures images of children creating their signs for the National Child Day march and leads into children, families, educators, students and faculty marching through the university. Throughout the video the families saw their children participating as advocates for their rights to be seen and heard. The video ends with the empowering statement, "together with children we can advocate for meaningful change".

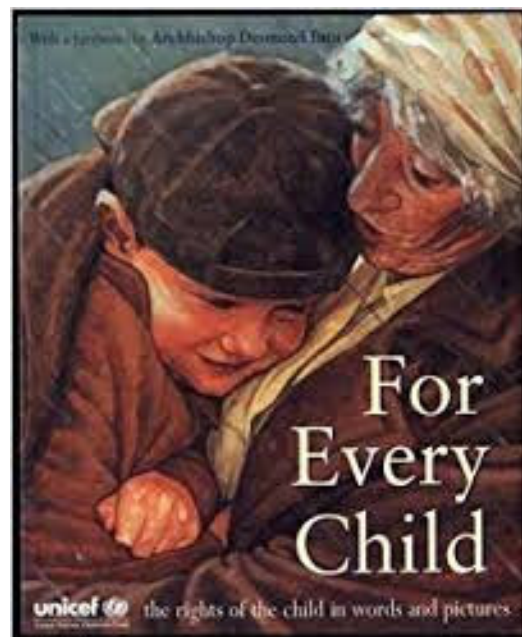
## Right to Identity and Self-Expression

Further explanation about the decision to focus the long-term investigation on children's right to identity and self-expression for the purpose of Shaking the Movers was presented by Tricia. The right to identity is addressed by seven of the articles in the convention. This speaks to how important it is and how much it relates to children's wellbeing, sense of belonging, and feelings of inclusion, acceptance and security in everyday environments. Even young children can have multiple and complex identities. *Flight* (2014) reminds us "Children's identities are shaped throughout their lifelong negotiations within personal, social and cultural landscapes" (p. 93). We know that young children are actively constructing and negotiating their identities through relationships with others in the context of their families. The role of friendships, peers other role models and play are also critically important. For young children multiple opportunities to explore questions like: Who Am I? Where do I fit in? How do others see me and relate to me? are at the core of their identity formation. We know that a strong and secure sense of identity, shapes how we view ourselves and others. Opportunities for self-expression help to build that strong image of self as a learner and contributor, so children can develop confidence and feel comfortable in the here and now of their lives. It is up to adults to provide an environment where children can be themselves, experience a sense of belonging and feel safe, cared for and respected; a place where they can explore their passions, interests and build on their strengths; a place where they can practice supporting, encouraging and listening to others.

## Reading of a Children's Picture Book

One way ELM educators explore rights with children is through preschool picture books. Mirroring that idea, we chose to share with family participants a UNICEF published book, *For Every Child*, which highlights 14 important rights in child friendly language.

A forward by Nelson Mandela reminds us "... we can make a difference if we are vigilant to create a new kind of society, where compassion, more caring, more sharing, where human rights, where children's rights are respected and protected. Politicians ultimately offer what the people want. Let us tell them we want peace and prosperity for everyone." As the book ends with a plea to inform everyone that these are the rights of every child, we engaged the families to share with us how they would advocate for children's rights.





To further explore the idea of children's rights we asked ELM families to answer the question: What can we do to promote children's rights in our community? Using a digital platform, mentimeter.com, the responses were gathered in real time and instantly displayed for all participants. With powerful messages appearing on the screen, we noticed participants writing multiple responses for the ways in which they will advocate the rights of every child. The following is a sample of the family responses collected. For the full collection see Appendix D.



## Food, Photos and Play

This family event was created for children and families to share their identities. The planning committee wanted to create a space that invited participants to be comfortable, to connect with others, and to be themselves. As children and families arrived sounds of laughter and conversation filled the air. Children freely played in the areas set up for them by educators. Families dressed up using the photo booth props as ELCC students took their photos, printed and placed them in child-decorated frames as a memento of the occasion. Parents shared in conversation with other parents and educators. The video of the children's explorations and march that played earlier looped on the screen so those who missed it could watch. Families, educators, students, faculty and guests joined in a shared meal together generously donated by The Muttart Foundation. Families mingled, reading the pedagogical documentation of the children's experiences. Coming together in this way, supported and deepened everyone's understanding of the importance of advocating for all children and their rights.



## Family Responses

After the event we surveyed families. Below is a sample of their responses to the family event.

Great information about children's rights - would like to hear more about the history of child's day and rights. The video was amazing and great to see. It would be great to see them play out their rights too vs voicing them only.

"I am so impressed with how many people came to support and as well how well put together it was. I am so proud to be a part of the ELM community and thank you so much for inviting me to participate."

"Thank you! I can honestly say I haven't thought much about children rights until ELM took on this project. Our kids have lots of valuable, insightful, things to say - and it was a reminder to listen. Cheers."

# Section Four

## Our Journey with Children's Rights Continues...

We can't yet begin to count the ways that this project has impacted our community, but it provided rich moments of learning for many. We noticed and nurtured the joyful ways that children express who they are, claim their rights and communicate them to others who will listen thoughtfully and intently. Below we discuss several important actions going forward including:

1. Defining roles and continuities for supporting a multi-layered project
2. Continuing professional learning around children's rights
3. Time for examination and reflection on practices
4. Further engagement with families
5. Reaching out, taking action: Our story continues

Our STM event truly was a collective community action that rippled out from the children, to their families, to educators and to the broader MacEwan community. Looking forward we wonder about how we can reach an even wider segment of our community beyond MacEwan? Who else needs to hear and see children living their rights?

### **1. Defining roles, responsibilities and continuities for supporting a multi-layered project**

We have many questions and wonderings about ways to move forward as we continue these conversations with children, families, students, and the community. As we think about further possibilities, we reflect on what we might change knowing what we know now. The whole project evolved semi-organically with multiple collaborative partners and multiple visions brought together. We wonder about taking time to define roles and responsibilities for moving a project such as STM forward, and for meaningful involvement of children, families, educators, ELCC students, faculty and community partners. Might defining our roles help us to be more clear about project plans and goals to coordinate such a multi-layered project? We wonder if definition and clarity for group members would invite meaningful engagement of all participants and also help us to consider what to document throughout the process to share with others.

### **2. Continuing professional learning around children's rights**

Upon reflection, many involved in the STM project commented on the value of shared professional learning opportunities. Time and resources that supported this project centered on the book, *Seen & Heard: Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education* by

Hall and Rudkin (2011), as the educators and ELCC faculty collaborated, dialogued and made meaning of their understandings of what it means to enact children's rights in daily practices alongside children. Professional learning is more than taking in a one-off workshop of ideas; it is about listening, asking questions, debating, challenging, and making meaning of new ideas in relation to daily practices, as well as taking risks in the spirit of learning. Educators do not do this work alone. It takes a community that embraces what it means to be a learner through nurturing trusting relationships and a supportive context to explore new ideas. We wonder what resources might support our continued exploration of children's rights? How might we slow down and pay close attention to a language for recognizing children as rights holders? What additional voices can we engage to think further and deeper about what it means to uphold a rights-based lens for young children's curriculum and care?

### **3. Time for examination and reflection on practices**

Children's rights have always been at the core of ELM's philosophy, yet through this process, we recognized moments of disconnect between our thoughts and practice. Although this was difficult to admit to ourselves, it was necessary in elevating our professional practice with children and families. Reflective practices have always held strong value for ELM educators, ELCC students and faculty. Time to collaboratively reflect on, understand and integrate notions, thoughts and ideas have propelled our work forward for many years. Now at the forefront of our practice, we strive to put these notions of children's rights to identity, self-expression and decision-making into action. And still, we feel as though we are just beginning. Throughout our STM journey we engaged in reflective practices to support our work with children and families and this continues now months after the event. During a follow-up ELM team meeting, educators discussed *what next?* to which Joan suggested that we view the STM event as a beginning rather than an end. We thoughtfully considered her statement and unanimously agreed that we have only come to the end of our chapter one, of many. During this project we have gained new insights about engaging young children in explorations about their rights. We have begun to intentionally think about what children's rights mean to our daily practices and although we have yet to fully conceptualize our next steps, we are certain that our story will continue.

### **4. Further engagement with families**

As the responses by parents above indicate, many appreciated the opportunity to engage alongside the ELM educators, ELCC faculty and students at the STM culminating event. Alongside young children, family members are important 'movers'. It is important for children to experience their rights at home and at childcare. Though our event was successful in beginning to raise awareness of children's rights, we would want to find ways to engage families earlier and throughout the project. During the parent portion of



our STM event we intended to have time to engage parents in conversations. We wanted to ask families the following questions: How does your child express their identity? In what ways does your child express themselves? Why is the right to identity and self-expression important for your child? Looking back, we regret that limited time meant we unfortunately had to cut short what we hoped would be rich, meaningful dialogue between students, families, educators and faculty. Although this project challenged all those involved to pause and take notice that we have many lessons to learn from children, we continue to wonder:

- How we might involve families in more intentional ways at multiple points in the journey?
- Would families have benefited from ongoing discussions of children's rights for the same reasons educators found so much value in having ongoing conversations during the project?"
- What would it look like to host an ongoing series of children's rights conversations with families rather than one large event?

## **5. Reaching out, taking action: Our story continues**

We have been inspired by this STM event, and cannot be silent bystanders. Shaking the Movers conceives children as 'the shakers' and those around them as potential 'movers.' We embrace and take up this call to action, as 'movers', and hope to reach out into our community even further. We begin by asking, who else needs to hear and see children living their rights?

Bi-annually, we host a symposium that highlights the complex work of the ELM educators making meaning of children's rich curriculum making. In past symposiums, we have engaged as many as 80 participants who work with young children in many local and regional programs. Past symposium topics have focused on children as mighty learners, and children's rights is central to this work. As we begin planning in September for the next symposium, we are inspired by the work that has already begun to explore children's rights, to continue with intentional and meaningful inquiry. As we continue to delve into the exploration of rights alongside children, families, students, faculty and community, we are reminded of the words of Mackenzie, an ELM educator, "this journey is deep and leads to more questions, thoughts, insights about what we think we know and how to move forward". As stated in *Seen and Heard: Children's Rights in Early Childhood Education*, "If children trust adults, they ask questions. If adults trust children, we ponder their questions with seriousness. In doing so, together we open the door to meaningful change" (Hall and Rudkin, 2011, p.48).



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# Appendices

Appendix A: Making Sense of Children's Rights: Educator Responses on Professional Learning Day

Appendix B: Preschool Picture Books

Appendix C: I Have the Right Poster for National Child Day

Appendix D: Additional Family Responses to Mentimeter

Appendix E: Selected Learning Stories Highlighting Children's Right to Identity and Self-Expression

Appendix F: Selected Images of the Family Event

# Making Sense of Children's Rights: Educator responses on Professional Learning Day:

## Why is the right to identity important?

- May define who we are in the world
- Connects people together - creating a sense of belonging
- How you see yourself is important to you
- Is about values, beliefs, culture, background, etc.
- Helps guide decisions about where our lives might go
- Creates happiness/emotion connected to having a sense of identity
- Sense of health – knowing who you are and being able to express that
- Being able to be who you are / proud / seen / heard / valued / safe
- Others recognizing your identity
- Allow change
- Confidence to navigate life/changes
- It carries on with them for their life
- Creates ripple effect/butterfly effect
- It can grow and change
- Freedom to be yourself – be your authentic self, follow your dreams and passions
- Connected to both mental health and physical health
- Have the confidence to express themselves
- Can create safe spaces for others
- Intergenerational, not only who we are, but our roots and where we came from – “culture”
- It's who they are!
- How they express themselves
- To see/value differences
- Make connections/relationships with each other
- Fundamental to life/living
- Gives us a voice, sense of worth and belonging
- It's dynamic, develops, it's a choice (e.g. What does our name mean)
- Gives a common ground for everyone
- Understanding of others needs
- Respect towards others unique individuality
- When a solid foundation exists, challenges can be overcome – resilience
- It can create connectedness, value, self-worth, self esteem

## What challenges do children face in accessing their right to identity?

- Lack of awareness (beyond the child)
- Narrowed opportunities for children
- Need to conform to societal norms
- Health, economics, culture, bias, stereotypes, politics, etc.
- Other filters of children (image of the child)
- How others around you see limitations vs. possibilities
- Fears (“bubble wrapping” children)
- Media (scary stories on news)
- Family separation, adoption, foster care
- Bi-cultural, where do I fit in?
- Societal views, views of parents/families
- Gender roles
- Intergenerational trauma
- Systems/schools, lack of access to materials and environments
- Lack of awareness that children are born with rights
- Toy companies/media /targeted clothing
- Children having to take on adult roles
- Mental health
- Stigmas around mental health, gender roles, etc.
- Lack of supports and lack of knowledge about supports that exist
- Societal views on how children should act/be
- Gender biases and ALL biases such as age, culture, family, community
- Lack of information/perspectives
- Different cultural views
- Access to resources (water, food, play, materials)
- Freedom (different amounts)
- Education
- Attitudes
- Labels

## How is the right to identity and self-expression currently evident in your practice, room environment, relationships?

- Open-ended materials
- Choice of what to wear
- Treat everyone as an individual
- Acknowledgement of emotions – being an active listener with children
- Various areas of the room available
- Sense of belonging (picture wall)
- Picture books to support different family dynamics
- Reviewing new family information sheets (having materials ready)
- Planning around all children (individual or groups)
- Interests, questions
- Respectful of preferences (e.g. material choices)
- Respectful of transitions and needs
- Involved in “planning” and “lists”
- Reflective practice
- Acknowledgement of team members successes
- Choices in diapering/toileting
- Choices in all areas/routines
- Providing materials to explore
- Creating a safe space
- Welcoming children and families
- Building relationships with children, families
- Connecting children through experiences and play
- Exposure to differences and similarities
- Children have a choice and a voice
- Children have ideas
- Honouring and valuing children’s ideas and choices
- Having conversations with children, making plans
- Flexibility in planning
- Negotiations
- when to play, when to eat, etc.
- Respecting children’s work
- Opportunities
- Spaces designed to suit children’s needs
- Seclusion, inclusion
- Speaking to children on their level
- Communicating in multiple ways – voice, visuals, routines,
- materials (multimodal)
- Facilitating children communicating with others about feelings, etc.
- Educators image of the child
- Give children choices
- Respect their time     Getting readyEatingPlayingDiapering & Toileting
- Getting ready
- Eating
- Playing
- Diapering & Toileting
- Letting them know what is happening next
- Offer different ways for them to express themselves
- Sign language – visuals
- Dance – music
- Offer different experiences / plan for their interests
- Reflective of how children are reflected in the room
- Encourage family relationships
- Personalize spaces (lockers, areas in the room, etc.)
- Respectful in how we communicate with children
- Aware of their differences/preferences
- Observing how children communicate with us when they are non-verbal
- We are always reflecting on our practices and making changes
- Connecting with families about their child and building relationships
- Nurturing and responsive relationships
- Flexible with routines

## How could you further support the right to identity and self-expression?

- Listening with all your senses
- Being patient -children are capable (e.g. putting shoes on)
- Not taking everything at face value (deeper meaning making)
- Regular reflections of materials, environment
- Opportunities of self-expression
- Slowing down!
- Model patience
- Planning – observations of interests
- Removing preconceived notions (lens, filters)
- Flexibility in planning and time
- Removing personal static, being present
- Awareness that we all have rights and supporting those negotiations
- Respecting not everyone has to be 'friends' but ensuring exclusion isn't taking place
- Finding middle ground where families, children's and educators rights and needs are being met
- Research around material, more exposure, intentional use
- Listening to children – seeing children in multiple ways
- Connecting with families to gather more information
- Listening with all senses – active listening
- Gather more knowledge/research and having conversations about it
- Get families involved in these conversations
- Planning with their interest and to go further
- Be aware of how they are going to change over the year
- Planning for children's abilities (ages)
- Incorporate this language in our everyday interactions
- Helping children identify their reactions to their emotions and let them know it's okay to express themselves
- Thinking about how we will be observing and interpreting children's identity through play



# Preschool Picture Books

Ryerson  
University

School of  
Early Childhood Studies  
Faculty of Community Services



Carleton  
UNIVERSITY

Canada's Capital University



The Muttart Foundation

## Shaking the Movers

### Workshop on Children's Right to Non-Discrimination

#### Family Session

#### Children's Rights and Social Justice Children's Book List

#### Books for Children from Birth to 5-years-old

A Family is a Family is a Family - by Sarah O'Leary, illustrated by Qin Leng

A is for Activist - by Innosanto Nagara

And Tango Makes Three - by Justin Richardson & Peter Parnell, illustrated by Henry Cole

Counting on Community - by Innosanto Nagara

Have You Filled a Bucket Today? - by Carol McCloud, illustrated by David Messing

Here We Are: Notes For Living On Planet Earth - by Oliver Jeffers

I Have the Right to be a Child - by Alain Serres, illustrated by Aurelia Fronty

My Heart Fills with Happiness - by Monique Gray Smith, illustrated by Julie Flett

Odd Dog Out - by Rob Biddulph

The Invisible String - by Patrice Karst, illustrated by Geoff Stevenson

There's a Bear on My Chair - by Ross Collins

The Day the Crayons Quit - by Drew Daywalt, illustrated by Oliver Jeffers

The Day You Begin - by Jacqueline Woodson, illustrated by Rafael Lopez

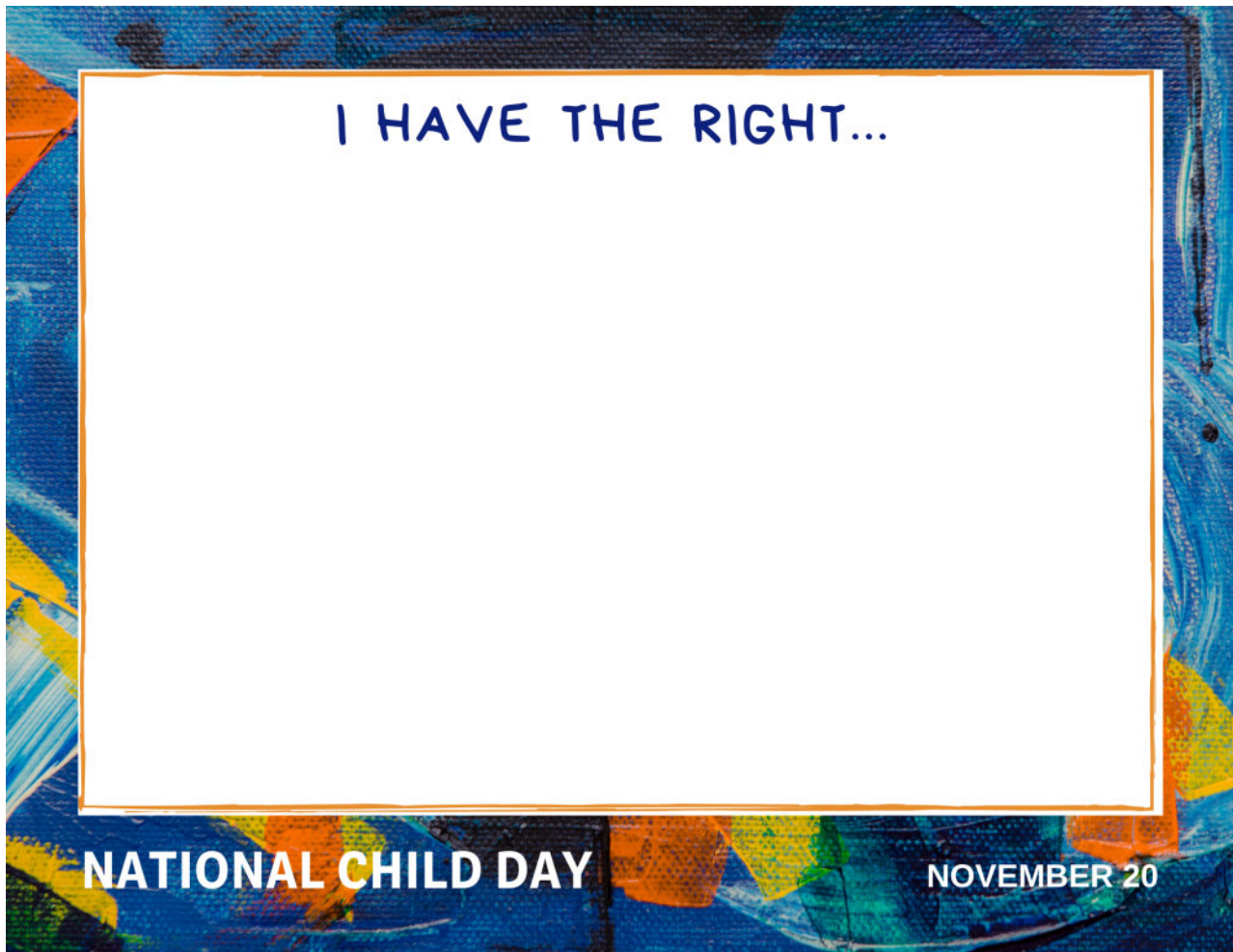
✓ The Name Jar - by Yangsook Choi

Welcome - by Barroux

When We Were Alone - by David A. Robertson, illustrated by Julie Flett

Whoever You Are - by Mem Fox

## I Have the Right Poster for National Child Day



# Additional Family Responses to Mentimeter

## What can we do to promote children's rights in our community?



Listen to children

Educate them

Lead by example, open discussions.

Encourage open communication

Make space for children in the community

Take time to notice and listen to children.

Listen to children

Listen to what they have to say

Help children share their stories Listen to children Educate them about their rights and responsibilities

Listen! Children have so much to say. And the commentary is authentic

Advocate for change

Help children express their ideas

Play

Tell my colleagues about children's rights

Continue to allow them to have a voice and to support that voice. Always believe and support them; make them known they are valuable, they are loved, they are special, they are just as important as others

Share what we know with others.

Share what you know. Demonstrate what children's rights look like

Include them get together, invite them to the dinner table with the adults; be together, adults and kids

Take their words seriously and think about them.

Ensure more spaces are family friendly so society remains familiar with young children and welcomes them as citizens already.

Advocate in behalf of children using the lense of rights.

Listen to children, talk to them, let them talk to others

Enjoy what children offer us.

Involve them in decisions that are made about them

Playground billboards

Really listen to their words

Respect children's opinions

Talk about rights with all caregivers.

Ensure decision makers see children as Rights holders and that legislation reflects that.

 grow with them!

Support organizations that fight for the rights of children and families

Accept what children tell us.

Care for all the children in our community. Value all children

Show respect to our children and teach them respect to others.

Children's rights are inherent and fundamental to our field. Having conversations and conferences like these

Know the rights of children

Share, listen, act upon, move forward

Advocate for and with children

We advocate and support their own autonomy if they aren't comfortable with a situation or request.

Play with children.

 children

Work with educators and communities in the field. The more of us who are aware the bigger the change in perspectives.

Be present with them

Elect more women to positions of power

Take the time with our own families helping them understand the rights of children

Start a movement

Get involved



# Selected Learning Stories Highlighting Children's Right to Identity and Self-Expression

**Bridget Draws Maeve**



Bridget, as we have been exploring the rights of children and the right to identity, I wondered what you would do with a piece of paper, a marker and a mirror. As I set this provocation, I wondered if you might draw a self-portrait and use the mirror to notice your features or if you might draw other things that interest you.

When we sat down at the table, you took time to look at yourself in the mirror. As you were looking at yourself, I asked you what you noticed about your reflection. "It just looks like me," you said and then you started to draw. You drew a figure and showed it to Alistair. "That's me," you informed him. You started to draw a new figure. "And who is that?" Alistair asked you. "That's Maeve." You continued to draw Maeve. After you finished you flipped your paper over and started to draw some more. Alistair leaned over to look at your paper. "Who are you drawing now?" He asked. "I'm drawing Maeve again," you replied. You added more details to Maeve. "Why is she wearing polkadot clothes?" Alistair asked. "I don't know. To keep her warm," you said. Near the top of your page you began to draw a large circle and you shared, "this is the sun. Maeve likes the bright sun. I think she is happy outside."

## Story Insights and Wonderings

In your drawing, you drew yourself and Maeve. I wonder how part of your identity is shaped by the fact that you are a big sister. I hear you talk of your family often and what it means for you to be a big sister such as helping take care of Maeve and sometimes having a bad sleep if Maeve is crying. As I

reflect, I think about your right to a family and how we value families in early childhood practices (UNCRC, 1989). Right reminds me, "The child's sense of belonging to family and community is strengthened through respectful and reciprocal relationships, where educators recognize the value of the family connections and contributions in understanding how each child makes meaning of the world" (Right, 2014, p. 24).

I think about how this experience influenced your developing sense of self and belonging as you made connections between your home and family and the center. Bridget, I recognize your disposition of caring as you shared stories about your sister and you drew things on your paper that you thought Maeve liked such as the sun. Did this experience help you feel closer and more connected to Maeve? As you drew Maeve, I wonder about how you may have been exploring and expressing your understanding of Maeve's identity.

I wonder about what other ways we can foster opportunities for you to make connections between home and centre. Thinking about connections, I am reminded that you often bring a stuffed animal from home each day. Is this another way you are creating connections between home and center? I think about fostering Maeve's connect to you and to ELM. Would you be interested in bringing home artifacts from your day at ELM for Maeve?

Written by: Mackenzie

## **Hmm, Something Isn't Right?**

Na'il on this day, you were exploring the letters in the sand provocation. You and your Hummingbird peers were digging for letters and telling each other what letter they found. After sometime I heard you call, "Trina, come here I did my name." I scurried over to the table and you told me every letter in your name. I could feel your excitement and the pride you were feeling, so I asked if I could get my camera to capture this moment. You replied, "Ya sure." We captured the moment, you smiled and went on with your play. About 5 minutes later I hear, "Trina, come here, I had the letter Z upside down instead of a letter N. Can you do my picture again?" I came over and you said with a giggle, "Look I had the Z upside down instead of an 'N' I couldn't figure out why my name didn't look 'right.'" I replied, "Good observation, I had not noticed that when I took the first picture." I gave you a smile and went to retrieve my camera to take another picture with your name "right".



## Story Insights and Wonderings



Na'il, the way you took ownership and pride of your name through this provocation brought up many wonderings for me. I think about you changing the Z to an N. Was this about having your name spelled properly or was it about your name being represented properly. What made you realize that the letter Z was upside down? Why did changing the letter Z to an N make your name "right"? What made you want to recapture this moment after you made the change? The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 7 and 8 states that every child has a right to a name and a right to identity. Do you remember the book *The Name Jar* written by Yangsook Choi. It has a line that makes me think of this experience, it reads, "... I realized I liked my name best, so I chose it again." Unlike Unhei you were not wanting to change your name, but you were persistent in representing your name with the "right" letters.

Written by: Trina



## Selected Images of the Family Event

