

Cooking Up Some Authenticity

By Sarah Loat

Knowing the Community's Diverse Ingredients

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

Searching for Literacy Ingredients

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

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

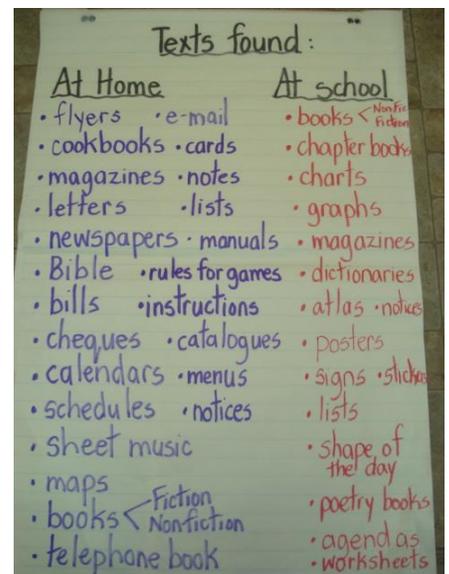
Literacy Flavors within the Children's Homes

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

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

Engaging the Children in Exploring Their Home Literacies

Before I sent the questionnaire home, I familiarized the students with the notion of texts types and the fact that they have many of them in their homes. I brought a variety



of materials that were both non-fiction and fiction into the classroom. For the purpose of the lesson, I asked the children to sort the materials into fiction and non-fiction and decide where we might find these types of materials, at home or at school.

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

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

Combining our Shared Literacy Ingredients

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

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

Mixing the Flavors of Home and School Literacies

I found that most families use reading and writing for daily routines as well as to help their children with schoolwork and/or to complete some work-related activity. The photographs that the six students took further supported the information gathered

in the questionnaires. From the photographs it was evident that many of the families used a second language at home, and that English reading materials were sparse. If school is the only place where many of our students are speaking, reading and writing English, this may be the reason why they are struggling in the areas of reading and writing. There are such large Indo-Canadian and Asian communities in our city that it is possible for a family to function with little or no English ever being spoken in the home.

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

A Menu for Authenticity in the Resource Room

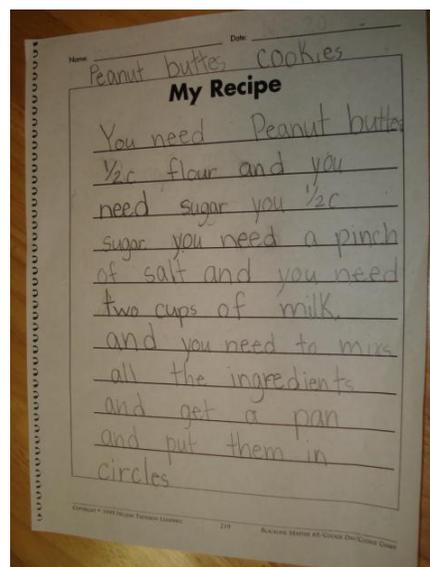
First Course: Linking to a Shared Text

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

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

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

The following day, I asked the four children in my group to write out a recipe for me to assess their knowledge of a recipe in general. The recipe could be any type of cookie that they liked. All the children had their ingredients written down in some way. Ruby, who volunteered to bring the recipe the day before, had the ingredients written in a list with actual amounts next to each item. For example, she had "2 cup (sic) of flour". Another girl, who said she liked to read cookbooks, had written her recipe in sentences each beginning with, "You need..." For example, she

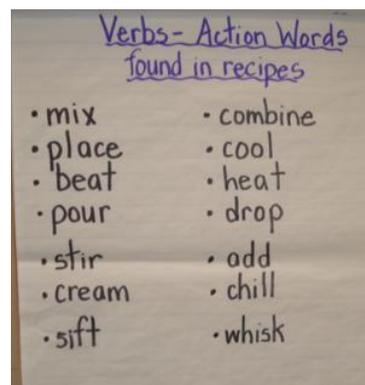


wrote, "You need sugar". The other two children had a few ingredients listed and then the instructions written afterwards. For example, one student wrote, "2 eggs. Crack the eggs. Put them in a bowl and add baking soda. Mix them up". I noted that this student was using verbs in her sentences; however none of the others had.

Third Course: Examining the Parts of a Recipe to Learn Procedural Texts/Embedded Skills Lesson

My third lesson focused on having the children look at recipes in various cookbooks and notice what verbs, or action words, were common to all of them. When the children came into the resource room, I had a number of cookbooks on the table. We began by discussing that recipes were a special type of text, which I called a "procedural text" or "how-to" text. I explained that a procedural text tells someone how to do something.

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



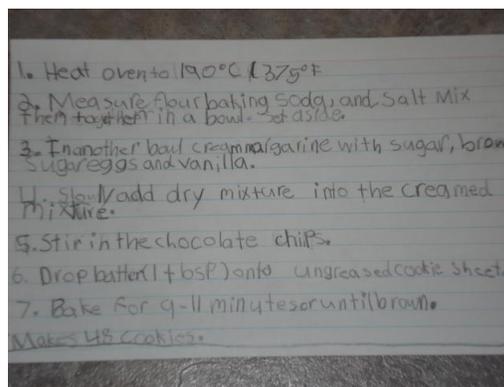
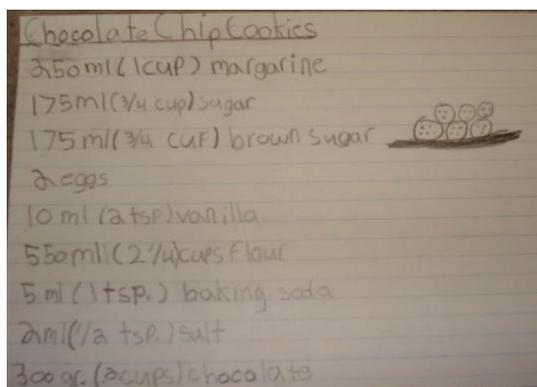
Before I ended this lesson, I asked them to look at the recipe that Ruby had brought from home. We then starred any of the verbs that were on her recipe and added any new verbs to our list. Our list of verbs included: mix, add, drop, bake, combine, stir, cream, chill, sift, cool, pour, and beat.

Fourth Course: Linking to Texts from the Children's Homes

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

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

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



Fifth Course: Making Cookies

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

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

Sixth Course: Considering What Was Learned

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

Shopping List

- flour
- baking soda
- chocolate chips
- salt
- white sugar
- brown sugar
- margarine
- vanilla

What We Learned About Recipes

(Procedural Text)

- There are numbers to tell you how much you need
- There is a list of items you need
- The ingredients need to be added in a certain order
- The instructions need to be followed in a certain order

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

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

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

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

Seventh Course: Writing Their Own Recipe

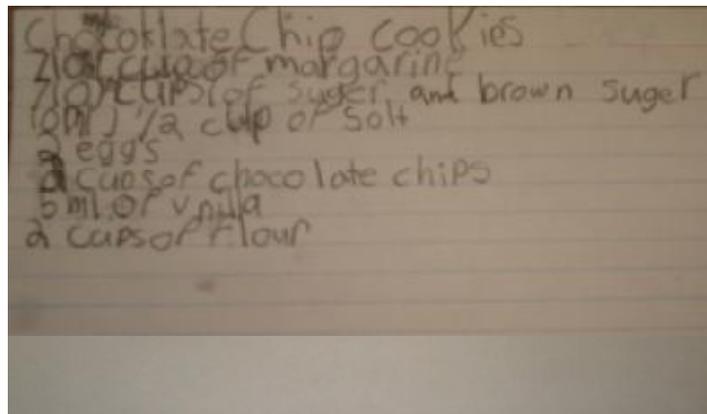
The next day I asked the students in my resource room to write out a cookie recipe of their choice because I was curious to see what features of a procedural text had remained with them. I then compared this second recipe to their initial recipe sample. I was pleased to see there was definite improvement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

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

It was clear that their recipe vocabulary, not only the verbs, had grown through this authentic literacy event.

The next day, the children gave me a card. It said, "Thank you for letting (sic)

us bake cookies." I was surprised that the experience had meant so much to them. In addition, one boy from the larger class ran up to me as I entered the classroom. He exclaimed that he had made the recipe at home with his mother. He said the cookies were delicious.



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

Reflecting upon this authentic literacy event, I was impressed with how much the children enjoyed making the cookies and how proud they were of their accomplishment. The children were familiar with recipes as a text and understood their function in the real world; however, actually following a recipe themselves

would have been difficult without an understanding of the various verbs used in the recipe genre. Instead of merely teaching the children what these verbs meant through discussion, the act of cooking brought each verb to life. The children found it easy to understand that the term *verb* meant an “action” after carrying out those actions themselves while following the recipe.

In addition to learning a procedural vocabulary for cooking, the children’s reading comprehension was also enhanced by their baking experience. The teacher’s guidebook for the story *Cookie Day* suggested the writing of a recipe as a follow-up to the story. Ruby seemed to anticipate this activity when she offered to bring in a recipe from her home. These children are in the resource room because they struggle to make meaning from written text. Without the actual writing of the recipe, the children would not have understood the procedural text; however, without understanding the verbs in the recipe, they would not have understood what they needed to do to produce cookies.

My group’s success with the text of a recipe led me to envision continuing their authentic literacy experience with additional procedural texts from their home environment. Since it was near Christmas time, I planned to bake Christmas cookies and make a holiday greeting card. A second baking event would reinforce the vocabulary already encountered in our first recipe writing. The card making would add verbs, such as *fold, cut, stamp, trace, paste, print, sprinkle (glitter), decorate, and address* to their speaking, reading, and writing vocabulary. Many children receive board games for Christmas, and the playing of these requires knowledge of a specific vocabulary, such as *roll, pass, count, move, forward, backward, draw, skip, etc.* After learning the vocabulary of gamesmanship, the children could make their own game boards and share them with grade one classes for rainy days. The opportunities to introduce successive procedural texts and create additional authentic literacy events in my resource room seemed endless. So did the opportunities for connecting home and school literacies.