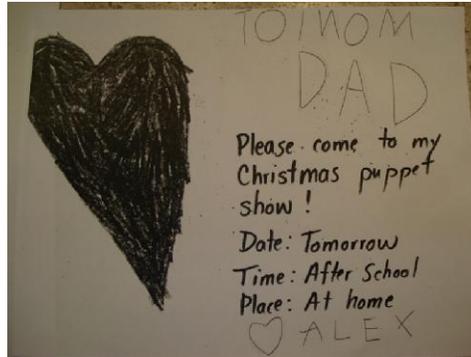


RSVP: An Invitation

By Andrea Beatty



As I walk
Kindergarten
children busy at
props for our play
Tomorrow is our

house on our thematic topic, farming. The children are excited for their parents, grandparents and family friends will come to see their work and watch our play that we have been practicing the last few weeks. Invitations were hand-made by the children and sent home the previous week and we had the list of people coming for our writing audience. The idea for this activity came from my investigation of the literacy practices in the children's homes and community.

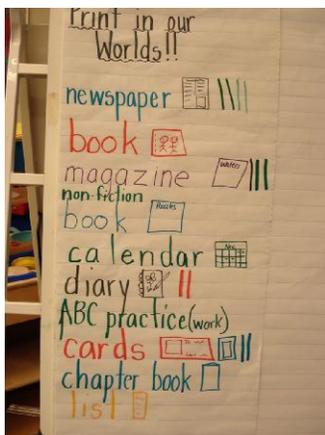
around my
classroom, I observe
work making hats and
The Little Red Hen.
little play and open

Background Information

My school is situated in a suburb of Metropolitan Vancouver. The suburb is predominantly a detached residential area and the majority of the residents are upper-middle class families and retirees. There is a downtown area in the suburb, which consists of a mall, several businesses and apartment buildings. However, the community in which the school is located is about twenty minutes west of the main downtown area in a quiet neighbourhood of detached houses. It is surrounded by a creek and small forest and is near a variety of recreational facilities, such as a local ski mountain, which is a twenty minutes drive up the mountain, and a small public beach. Across the street from the school are a grocery store and a locally owned and operated garage. A small outdoor mall and high school is located about ten minutes away. The outdoor mall provides a variety of amenities to the community, such as a grocery store, produce store, Starbucks, dry-cleaning, dental services, video store, art gallery, and pasta restaurant.

The school is in a small public primary school, consisting of three classrooms from Kindergarten to grade three with a population of fifty-five students. There is also an attached, but privately-run preschool located within the building. Overall, the parent population is highly involved in various activities throughout the school from fundraising to volunteering in the classrooms.

My Kindergarten class has 19 children, ages four and five. The dominant language spoken in the classroom and in their homes is English, although there are three other languages spoken at home: Indonesian, German, and Cantonese. The majority of the students in the classroom are from upper middle-class families. There



are a range of abilities within the classroom, including one child with autism and another with a mild language delay.

Community Literacy Practices

In order to learn more about the students, to support their literacy learning and to design authentic literacy instruction, I needed to acquire information about the home literacy practices. I sent home a notice to all the parents, asking them to record what kinds of written text they used in their homes, how frequently they used each text and for what purpose (entertainment, daily tasks, work etc.). I also asked the parents in my classroom to record what language they speak at home. The survey was optional. I provided a paper to record their information

and I also invited them to take pictures as well. (See Letters Home Appendix)

The results of the survey indicated that there were a variety of texts within the student's homes and that a few texts were more widely used than others. Those most commonly mentioned were: grocery lists, to do lists, story books, newspapers, calendar, email, documents, bills, school forms, magazines, recipes, cookbooks, internet, letters and cards (invitations were included in this grouping).

I also wanted to get a sense of what kind of print was in the community and the uses of print in that environment as well. I wanted to experience what my students were observing outside of their homes. I visited the corner store and local garage across the street from the school and the small outdoor mall, about a ten minute drive away. I walked around the stores and services and took notes on the kinds of written text I observed. I also situated myself in a place where I could observe and record how people were interacting with the print in their environment.

In the mall, I saw a variety of signs (OPEN, Hot deals, Business hours, prices), sandwich boards (Subway specials, Safeway Now Hiring), menu boards (Starbucks, Safeway Deli, Pastameli's) and a community bulletin board. The paper on the board advertised mostly health and fitness programs (boot camp, ballroom dance, Squash Club, Weight Loss Challenge) as well as instrument lessons (Cello and Piano Lessons), along with a Family Daycare, Cleaning Service and an advertisement for Miss Teen Canada Pageant.

Most of the print observed at the mall was used to advertise various prices, to indicate if the store was open, as well as what time their business was open. While observing people at the mall, I noticed that people were reading signs to know the price of items and to decide what to order to eat (Starbucks and Pastameli's menu boards). The Community Bulletin Board was interesting to me as well because of the amount of advertisements for fitness and health programs. I believe the advertisements posted reflect the interests and needs of the community a great deal. I also took all of my observations and conclusions into consideration when reflecting about how we use print in our daily lives and how I could structure my classroom accordingly.

In addition to the survey and community walk-about, I asked the children as part of our "special helper" sharing time, to bring in "*something people read or write*

in your home.” Each child is the special helper for one day and on that day they were invited to bring to school and talk about this specific sharing item. We recorded the item on a list and I drew a picture of that item (taking a picture would be more effective. It could be put together as a class book to read in the classroom and take turns taking home). After talking about the item, the other students in the classroom were invited to comment and ask questions about it. I introduced this activity to them by bringing in a newspaper and my pocket agenda/ calendar from my home. This was a great idea! This elicited a discussion around what kinds of print was in their homes. The children were very excited in anticipation for their special helper day and were already beginning to think about what kinds of things people read and write in their home.

Authentic Literacy Lesson

Why invitations?

I chose an invitation for this lesson for a variety of reasons. The students had already been exposed to this text several times so far that year. In its exposure, it had a real purpose for a real situation. Birthday invitations had already circulated my classroom a few times, a Halloween party invitation was delivered as well and invitations were listed on the home literacy surveys.

More importantly, the need for an invitation arose in our classroom in a natural way. Introducing the students to the purpose of invitations began with a theme on farms that we had been studying. The children had learned about what kinds of farms there are in Canada and what products we receive from them. We culminated our unit with a field trip to a local farm and connected our learning to children’s literature. During the reading of *The Little Red Hen*, some students suggested that they wanted to do a play. I therefore suggested to the class that we could share our work on the farm with our parents and perform a Little Red Hen play. The response was unanimous in favour of inviting our parents into our class to watch our play, and so the context was set.

Class Activities

Why do we need an invitation?

Finishing our work on the farm unit, we set a date for when we wanted our parents to come in. As a class, we looked at our class calendar to decide on a day to *invite* our parents into our class. I used the chart stand to record our decisions on the date, the time and the place and I recorded this print in the correct format of an invitation.

As I wrote and elicited ideas from the class, I talked about how and why we write the date and time and why we need to include the place (ie. so people know where to go). I then asked the children, “How will the parents find out about when and where our play will be?” I had various responses, such as put it in a notice (which was a good idea and I did include it in our next newsletter), or put it on the door (our class door has become our parent notice board). A few suggested an invitation. I emphasized the fact that we wanted every parent to feel like they were personally invited, and that an invitation was personal and would make sure everyone knew they were invited. I concluded my lesson with the question, “Does anyone know what an invitation looks like?” Some responses were “It has stamps on

it” and it says “Happy Birthday.” (I used the responses as a pre-assessment tool) I concluded that lesson by letting the class know that I would bring in a real invitation to share.

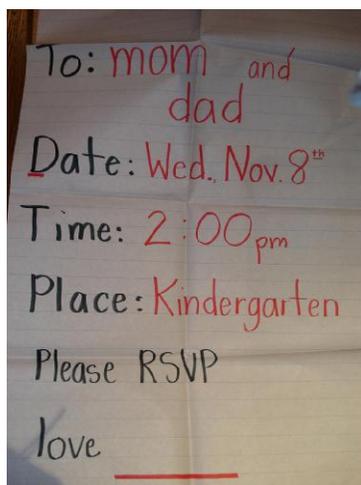
Do you have invitations at home?

The following day I showed the class a few invitations that I had collected from home (a wedding invitation and an invitation to a one-year-old’s birthday party). When discussing the purpose of the invitations, I emphasized the purpose. The invitation let me know that I was invited to an event and that the print inside the cards told me when and where the event took place. I also asked the class “what is the difference between a card and an invitation?” This was a very important discussion for some, because they had assumed that they were the same. I made the distinction clear, that an invitation was for an event to which you are asking them to come; a card is sent to bring greetings, congratulations or get well to other people. My final instruction for this day was to ask the children if they could look at home over the next few days and bring to school invitations that they had at home.

What does an invitation look like?

As the children brought in their invitations, they described what the invitation was for, who it was for and when the event took place. Most of the invitations brought in were intended for birthday parties, however we had one invitation for a show and one for a Halloween party. I collected all the invitations for a follow-up activity.

I wanted the children to have a hands-on look at all the invitations (by this time, I had collected a few more from colleagues), so the following day I spread them all out around the classroom and let the children walk around, pick up and look closely at them. I gave all the students some guidance and direction during the exploration. They returned to our meeting area after their exploration time to share two things that they saw on the invitations.



names were located. Some students recognized that there was a time on the invitations, and some students discovered there was a phone number on the invitations (next to the initials RSVP). Moreover, we came to the

As the children came back to the meeting area, they shared what they found with a partner. After all had returned, we had a discussion about the features of invitations. Some were able to tell me that names were on the invitation, and I probed for them to tell, or show me, where on the invitation, the

High Frequency Word Assessment

Name: _____

Date: _____

“Point to the word...”

- To
- Love
- Mom
- Dad
- And

“Can you read the word...?”

- To
- Love
- Mom
- Dad
- And

“Can you write the word...?”

- To
- Love
- Mom
- Dad
- And

conclusion that an invitation needed to have a picture on the front, some text explaining what it was for, who it is addressed to at the top, the time, place and whereabouts of the event, RSVP information, and who it was from at the bottom. Next, I used the chart stand to record what our invitation to our open house and play needed to have.

Including High Frequency Words

As part of this activity, I was also interested in using an authentic text, such as the invitation, to develop a lesson that would introduce a specific literacy skill. As a Kindergarten teacher, I understood that most often the first word children learn to read and write is their name. We had spent the first few months of the year practicing to read and write their name with various activities. I also recognize that children were somewhat familiar with the words *mom* and *dad*. These were all words that had meaning and use in their lives. I wanted to begin to develop a small bank of high frequency words that were somewhat familiar to them and that they were going to use for real purposes. I added the words *to*, *and* and *love* to the list of words that I was going to introduce to them.

Before I designed my activities around the high-frequency words, I was assessed the children for who was able to read and write the words already. As part of my initial alphabet and concepts of print assessment that I administer to all the children, I added a section on these high frequency words. The results suggested that developing some activities around mastering these words would be beneficial to most of the children.

I began the lesson with the chart stand where n which I had previously recorded the words in the context of an invitation. We played an eye spy game with Wikki sticks (sticks made with a sticky material that blend and stick to various materials. Plasticine works well too). The game is played with the teacher calling out the word and choosing one student to come up to the chart stand to place the Wikki stick around the word. The reason behind doing this was to take a closer look at each of the words by looking at what letters were in the word, observing whether it was a long or short word and practicing to segment and blend the sounds in the words (m-o-m= mom).

To ensure that all the students had some practical experience with learning the new high-frequency words (*mom*, *dad*, *love*, *to* and their name), I organized a few centres around the classroom that gave them practice recognizing, reading and spelling them. Some of the centres included a rainbow letter centre where students to traced each word 3 times with smelly felts, a stamp centre where students could use the alphabet stamps to stamp out the high frequency words (each word was stamped on a flashcard and their name was stamped on the envelope, so they could take the envelope home to use), a white board centre and a Wikki Stick centre (you could also use pipe-cleaners, play dough or plasticine), where they could shape the sticks into the words.

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Making the Invitations

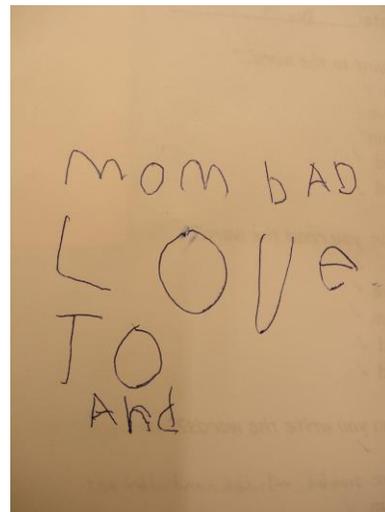
The following day we were ready to make our invitations. I cut out card-shape paper from manila tag and prepared some of the text for the students to glue in: *You are invited to our Farm Open House and Little Red Hen Play, along with information on the date, time and place and RSVP.* I reviewed with the students what needed to be included in an invitation and we looked at

the chart stand with all the information and read it together. I showed them their manila card and talked about where the picture and text needed to be. Along with drawing a picture about the farm and Little Red Hen, students needed to write who it was addressed to (To mom and dad) at the top and record the word love and their name at the bottom, on their own. At the end of the day, the children passed their hand-made invitations to their parents with excitement.

Follow-up and Assessment

I wanted to assess the impact of the activity on both whether they could read and write the words *mom, dad, and, to, love* and their name and whether they understood the purpose and format of an invitation. I spent a few minutes with each child, assessing whether they knew how to write and read the words. The tasks were the same as for the pre-assessment. The results were positive for both assessments.

To evaluate whether the children had really understood the purpose of an invitation and whether they remembered that the format of invitations, I began with asking the question to the class: “What is an invitation?” I then asked, “What do you see on an invitation?” After a discussion about the contents and purpose of invitations, I let the class know that they were going to make their own invitation to take home. I asked the class what kinds of events could you make an invitation for? I gave a few examples, like inviting someone over to play or a relative over to their house for dinner. I recorded all of their ideas on the chart stand. Next, they were instructed to make a choice about what they would like to make an invitation for. I told them that they needed to write who it was addressed to and who it was from. I would help them, by scribing, write their message inside. Each child received a piece of coloured paper folded in half to create their invitation. As they were working on their invitations, I circulated and began scribing their ideas on their invitation. I prompted their ideas with such questions as “where is this going to happen?” and “when is this going to happen?”



Reflections

My students were thrilled to give their hand-made invitation to their parents and were excited about creating their own invitation as well. They discovered that they were “real readers and writers.” By connecting their personal world to literacy activities that were intended for real readers with real purpose, students were able to explore the roles that literacy plays in their lives.