

Quality Storytents

A Resource for Family, Early Childhood and Community Literacy Workers

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Acknowledgements

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Preface

In 1995, after the birth of my first child, I returned to literacy work. Up to that point, I had focused almost exclusively on adult literacy. With a child of my own, I began thinking and reading about literacy and young children. I was especially interested in family literacy. I became involved with the local Family Resource Centre, and volunteered to lead a “Storytime Drop-in” on Wednesday afternoons. In a large playroom, the children and I took books out of boxes and laid them out on a colourful play mat. Children played with or read the books. Parents read books to their children. I read books to my own child and to anyone else who cared to listen. That summer, I took a box of books and a blanket, and offered a storytime at the organization’s summer picnic.

Reading and book play increased shortly thereafter, when Wendell Dryden joined the Family Resource Centre as Children’s Program Coordinator. With a background in early childhood education, Wendell set out books every day as a matter of course. He also worked with interested parents, including myself, to transform a toy lending library into a book and toy library.

The next summer I again brought my books and blanket to the summer picnic. It was a hot day, and we frequently shifted the blanket, covered in books, to take advantage of the shade of nearby trees. I remember Wendell saying, “Wouldn’t it be great if we had a tent to give us some shade?” With that, the seeds for the Storytent program were planted.

We spent several years and many hours refining this program. The development of the program coincided with the development of several other family literacy pilot programs and projects in Saint John, many of which involved Wendell and I as staff or volunteers. Modeling ourselves on Western Canada's experience, we facilitated several short-term organizational partnerships, and organized a family literacy advisory committee. I continued to learn more about family and early childhood literacy, eventually becoming a certified Mother Goose Teacher and a Foundational Family Literacy Trainer. Wendell received Mother Goose training, as well, and also pursued training in adult learning.

During this time, one of our guiding concerns was how to get our programs to those families most isolated by poverty, low literacy skills, poor health and so on. This came, in part, from our awareness of the rural nature of much of New Brunswick (we had been offering family literacy promotion and workshops throughout southwestern New Brunswick, from Woodstock to St. Stephen to St. Martins). It also came from the realization that our centre-based projects seemed to exclude some families, whether through indirect costs, geography, culture or harder to define institutional barriers.

Then, at last, with the Summer 2003 Storytent program, a partnership between ourselves, a tenant's association and a public library, we felt like we had a satisfactory model of a truly inclusive, learner-centered, community based family literacy program. We are pleased to share that model through this document. We hope that there will be some practical suggestions interested people will be able to immediately use, as well as helpful information about the how and why of the Storytent.

We put the adjective “Quality” in front of Storytent to reflect the influence William Glasser’s Choice Theory has had on our work. Throughout the document there are many references to relationship building, something we believe is at the heart of storytent success. This will be immediately evident in Section II, *The Philosophy Behind Quality Storytent Methods*, which deals with some of the theory behind our practices. Here we show how we incorporate ideas from three broad approaches to education into our work. We also look at what it means to work successfully with families, with readers, and with non-readers in this kind of project.

Planning for a Storytent, Section III, covers the practicalities of tent selection, location, personnel, and so on. In Section IV, *How to Deliver a Storytent*, we look at the nuts and bolts of running a tent. We also look at some of the challenges and obstacles we encountered, and talk about how we overcame them, in Section V, *Special Challenges*.

A companion document was written to help libraries use the Storytent program to outreach their services. *Summer Reading Club: Outreach library service through a neighbourhood storytent program* can be accessed at www.nald.ca/clr/readclub/cover.htm, and describes the Storytent Summer Reading Club Outreach program (2003 – 2004), its researched successes, and tips on how to implement this type of program in communities. It also details how the methods and outcomes of the Storytent program are consistent with guidelines published in Great Britain, in 2002, by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals in *Start With The Child: Report of the CILIP Working Group on library provision for children and young people* (CILIP, 2002).

Other information about the Storytent program can be found in *Storytents: Children's Outreach Programs Prove Successful* in the Fall 2004 edition of the IBBY Newsletter; and C. A. Brown & W. J. Dryden (2004). Quality Storytents: Using Choice Theory to support reading through a community literacy project. *International Journal of Reality Therapy*, 24(1), 3 – 12.

As well, unpublished research reports prepared for the Saint John Free Public Library can be obtained by contacting:

Joann Hamilton-Barry, Library Director, or
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We would be interested in your feedback about the program or about this document. Please feel free to contact us at clnb@nb.sympatico.ca.

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I. Introduction

The Quality Storytent Program is a means of providing literacy access and support where these might not otherwise appear.

What Is A Storytent?

A storytent consists of:

- ◆ One or more canopies (10' x 10' recommended)
- ◆ Blankets (4 per tent) and ground sheets
- ◆ A variety of popular books for children and adults:
 - picture books
 - story books
 - comic books
 - chapter books
 - adult fiction and non-fiction
- ◆ Two to three adults

What goes on in a Storytent?

What happens at a Storytent depends on two things. One is the intentions or interests of the participants. The other is how long or how often people make use of it. However, the primary activity is reading:

- ◆ Adults read to children
- ◆ Adults read to themselves
- ◆ Children read to children
- ◆ Children read to adults
- ◆ Children read to themselves.



Other Storytent and Storytent-related activities include:

- Borrowing and returning books
- Storytelling
- Letter and/or story writing
- Drawing and colouring
- Clapping and singing games
- Skipping to songs and rhymes
- Playing cards, tic tac toe, or guessing games
- Using sidewalk chalk
- Conversation between adults
- Conversation between children
- Conversation between adults and children
- Relationship building.



How can you use a storytent?

A storytent can be offered at an event or as a program.

At an **event**, a storytent can stand on its own, or it can enhance a larger event such as a community fair, a festival, a school event, an organization's summer picnic, etc. (See *Appendix C* for more detail).

As a **program**, a storytent can be made available at the same place and time over a period of weeks and can enhance the literacy resources available to a community (See *Appendix D* for more detail).

Why run a storytent program?

A Storytent Program can have a positive impact on children, families and communities. In the Crescent Valley Neighbourhood, the 2003 and 2004 programs contained research components. This research used multiple methodologies, both qualitative and quantitative, including informal assessments of a number of children early and late in the summer. The evaluative research demonstrated that the program helps children:

- improve their reading skills
- increase the frequency of reading in their lives
- develop positive self-attitudes around reading
- build positive social relationships in a healthy, learning environment.

As well, the research indicated that most children who participated in the project socialized more positively with their siblings and peers (Brown & Dryden, 2005).

What Gives A Storytent *Quality*?

Many ingredients go into producing a Quality Storytent, including:

- ✓ competent and committed storytent workers
- ✓ a wide variety of very good books
- ✓ as few rules and little bureaucracy as possible
- ✓ an easy to access location
- ✓ community participation at multiple levels
- ✓ persistence in the face of challenges.

In return, a Quality Storytent Program offers a community literacy support program that is:

- ✓ economical
- ✓ flexible
- ✓ portable
- ✓ effective.



II. The Philosophy Behind Quality Storytent Methods

In Community Literacy work, *how* we offer a program is as least as important as which program we offer. Community Literacy resources, support and delivery systems need to take into account appropriate principles of learning. Where literacy work involves younger children, it must adhere to the best principles of early childhood education. Where initiatives involve parents or other adults, we need to adhere to the best principles of adult education. Where the programming involves families, appropriate principles of family enablement and empowerment are called for.

General Philosophies Of Learning

The methods used in the Storytent program are based on established principles found in these three areas:

- Humanistic, Learner-Centered education and management
(MacKeracher, 1996; Glasser, 1994; Holt, 1982; Knowles, 1980)

- Developmentally Appropriate Practices
(National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1990)

- Choice Theory and its application in Quality Education
(Glasser, 2000; Glasser, 1998b).

Humanism and Individual Human Potential

In brief, humanism is a philosophy that dates back to the mid-1300s. It holds that all human beings have a potential for goodness or full humanity. Whether or not they reach their potential depends on the choices each person makes as an individual (Atherton, 2003; Hiemstra, 1994). Early humanists believed that education, whether formal or informal, was the best way to help people make effective choices.

Modern humanists agree that humans are born with a desire to learn and to become, and that the human potential for development is inherently unlimited. Humanists expect learners to be most successful when they reach for goals they themselves see as important and attainable. Therefore, humanists give information and invite learning rather than try to coerce people into doing or learning (Purkey & Stanley, 1989).

However, *critical* humanists, believe that individual development depends on more than individual efforts. We believe there are social, physical, mental, and temporal constraints set on each person's potential. All learning is influenced by its context. People learn and grow best in the context of a community where their needs are met. They learn best where they feel secure and valued. This is rooted in the assumption that humans have a hierarchy of needs and wants, but also in the belief that learning is a social phenomenon, as humans are social creatures (Berk & Winsler, 1995; Street, 1995; Rogers, 1961; Maslow, 1970).

Developmentally Appropriate Practice & the Social Context of Learning

In the context of early childhood education, humanistic thinking appears under the banner of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP). This approach became widely known after an American organization, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), published a position paper highlighting the need to individualize curriculum and assessment, and to take into account the age, culture, interests, and physical and emotional development of each child (Bredekamp, 1987). This view of education is holistic. It says the whole person is involved in learning. DAP also promotes a play-based learning approach, similar to what Auerbach (2002) calls "embedded literacy"; that is, learning that takes place in the context of a task the learner engages in for non-educational reasons.

However, DAP goes beyond conventional play-based learning, and treats learning as a social event in which a child's relationships with adults and older children play a crucial role. The theory behind this approach comes from Vygotsky who described learning as "a form of social transaction with more competent peers and adults" (Iturrindo & Vega, nd). According to Vygotsky, "human learning presupposes a specific social nature as a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 88). Bredekamp *et al* (1992) express a similar idea: "We believe that from the time of birth, all children are ready to learn [though] what we do or don't do as individuals, educators, and collectively as society can impede a child's success in learning." (Bredekamp *et al*, 1992, p. 1). The challenge for anyone wishing to facilitate successful learning, therefore, is to provide for an appropriate environment, content and relationship.

Choice Theory and the Primacy of Relationship in Learning

William Glasser, introducing Choice Theory, writes "if we are not sick, poverty stricken, or suffering the ravages of old age, the major human problems we struggle with ... are caused by unsatisfying relationships" (Glasser, 1998a, p.ix). When he looks at the problem of academic failure, Glasser sees its root in the way teachers and students interact. He states that the "main reason so many students are doing badly" in schools is a "destructive, false belief" that kids ought to learn whatever we want them to learn, and that they should be punished for any refusal or failure. He calls this false belief, and the behaviour it creates, "schooling" (Glasser, 1998a, p.237).

According to Glasser, "schooling" is an example of something he sees everywhere in our society. He calls it "external control psychology" (Glasser, 1998a, p.5) or the "ancient I-know-what's-right-for-you tradition" (Glasser, 1998a, p.4). This is the same top-down, didactic, expert-driven model of human education that humanists deplore and groups like the NAEYC speak out against.

For Glasser, an external control approach is destructive because it damages human relationships and makes impossible the kind of "learning as social transaction" Vygotsky described. "Teaching is a hard job when students make an effort to learn," he writes. "When they make no effort, it is an impossible one" (Glasser, 1988, p.1). Glasser believes that teachers can encourage learners to make the effort by building a positive relationship with each student.

According to Choice Theory, learning is a by-product of need-satisfying relationships formed in an environment where freely chosen, authentic, useful activities are present and possible. Here the phrase "need-satisfying" has an exact meaning. Glasser believes in five basic human needs (survival, freedom, fun, power, love and belonging). He says these are genetic in origin, and he states that all human actions are attempts, of varying degrees of effectiveness, to satisfy these needs (Glasser, 1998a).

Choice Theory and Humanism share a view of humans as holistic, social creatures driven to satisfy longings; who, to paraphrase Rogers (1961), choose and then learn from the consequences. In common with DAP and Auerbach's (2002) notion of the power of embedded learning, Glasser insists that students will not gladly perform useless tasks, and certainly will not learn a great deal. Rather, students will apply themselves only when they believe that the work they do is useful and valuable. This belief is most easily fostered where learners co-construct the curriculum with a teacher, facilitator, manager or coach they like and trust.

Storytents As Family Literacy

The Quality Storytent program emerged from the context of "family literacy" programming.

"Family literacy" refers to the symbolic literacy or literacies developed and used in and by families (Taylor, 1983). The phrase includes a broad spectrum, and is essentially functionalist. Family literacy activities are purposeful, sometimes spontaneous, and typically ordinary. Shopping for groceries, talking about a television program or roadside sign, and sharing a family story are all part of family literacy.

"Family literacy" is distinct from "school literacy" in three major ways. First, it relates immediately to an individual family's culture. Second, it tends toward the ordinary or the everyday. Third, success in this kind of literacy appears as successful family communication and interaction, rather than in certification or promotion.

In and of itself, family literacy is an essentially private matter. It requires little social or political comment. It has no need of programs or interventions. However, in the past thirty years, family literacy has come into public view as a result of two expressed concerns. One concern has to do with how a family's lack of literacy skills can limit their economic, social and mental or physical well being. It is the dominant view that limited skills limit a family's choices and quality of life. The other concern has to do with the impact home life, especially in the early years, has in terms of how successful people are as students, workers and citizens. It is commonly perceived that children and adults suffer

when there is a mismatch between a family's "literacy" and the literacy valued in the school or workplace.

Both these concerns are valid. Although family literacy is difficult to categorize in terms of skill sets, skills do matter. The range of activities a family chooses to undertake will be bounded by the skill levels of its members, just as a family's activities can be limited by poor health or economic insecurity. Too, it is true that skills nurtured within the context of family are apt to be family- and socio-culturally specific. Family literacy is not necessarily incompatible with other literacies. Yet, mismatches can exist between the culture of learning and skill use in a household, and those called for in socially constructed institutions like public schools or the workplace.

Our society has reacted to these two concerns through resource creation, broad-based promotional campaigns, and small group or individual interventions. The goal of these activities has been to change how and what individuals and families learn to bring them more into line with the norms and expectations of educational testers and employers. So, for example, many family literacy programs and projects look for higher grades or fuller employment as logical, successful outcomes for learners.

Often, these interventions appear as external resources or "add-ons" to what families are already doing. An individual or family is encouraged to come out to an information session or ten-week program. Sometimes, more drastic measures are called for, and interventions attempt a more basic transformation of the culture of learning and skill use in individual homes. In both cases, under the slogans that "parents are a child's

first and most important teacher", and "it takes a village to raise a child", society has taken a greater interest in what and how parents are teaching their children (Kerka, 1991).

The Limits of Family Literacy Interventions

There has been resistance within families and among some professionals to the more blatantly invasive, sexist and classist of these interventions (Hutchison, 2000; Auerbach, 1995). There have also been objections raised to the use of deficit language and the perceptions on which it is based (Taylor, 1993).

A counter tendency has been to listen to learners, discover what they want for themselves, and then work to meet them where they are. Respect for the privacy of the family, and the authority and responsibility of parents, some people feel, requires us to create a menu of services from which families can draw as much or little support as they wish (Dunst, Trivette & Deal, 1988; Whitty, Nason and Hunt, nd).

As well, there is a growing awareness that family literacy initiatives need to recognize the holistic nature of literacy and family life. This does not mean that each literacy program or resource needs to aspire to be all things to all families. It does mean that any such program or resource needs to make reasonable allowance for the interrelated influences on families and their willingness or ability to access or employ this support (Louden, nd). To offer only one example, it is unprofitable to offer a literacy program or workshop to parents of young children without also offering childcare.

Finally, there are some who are looking anew at family literacy as a tool for the application of local and broader political action; not far from Paulo Friere's vision of literacy instruction as emancipation (Auerbach, 1992; Shannon, 2001; Whitty, Nason and Hunt, nd).

Categorizing Family Literacy Programs and Projects

The spectrum of different family literacy interventions can be categorized in many different ways. One helpful grouping is provided by Skage (1995):

Intergenerational Projects

These projects have specific program components that involve sustained parent-child literacy interaction.

Focus on Parent or Primary Caregiver

These projects provide parents with ways to support home literacy and to foster reading with children.

Parental Involvement

The focus is on children's literacy development, with adults enlisted to provide program support. Examples are Family Resource Programs, some school-based programs and home-based tutoring programs.

Family Literacy Activities for the General Public

Members of the general public, both adult and child, are invited to participate in literacy activities for enjoyment, with little or no direct literacy instruction provided.

Projects for Family Literacy Resources

Family Literacy Materials are created by project staff or volunteers and are distributed for in-home use. There is no on-going contact with recipient families to support the use of literacy resources in the home.

Family Literacy Professional Training and Resources

These are initiatives that provide training and resources to practitioners.

Resources for the General Public

These are public awareness activities that foster interest in developing literacy activities in the home, including national Family Literacy Day bookmarks or posters, television programs, and special interest articles and newspaper inserts such as Literacy Matters (Calamai, 1999).

Within this outline, Storytents are best described as *Family Literacy Activities for the General Public*. Storytents are voluntary social gatherings. No one comes, or sends their children, unless they want. Storytents provide books for, and reading to, children and families, two activities cited as important factors in supporting children's literacy development (Allington, 1997; Kropp, 1993; Trelease, 1989; Doake, 1988; Taylor & Strickland, 1986). No one is pressured to get a job, excel in school or even read more regularly as some kind of social payment for accessing this service. All that is asked of participants is that they not unreasonably inconvenience other participants. Beyond that, they are trusted to make of the program and of themselves whatever they think best. This, too, is a *humanistic* perspective.

Storytent Outcomes

In the Summer of 2003, the Crescent Valley Community Tenant's Association (CVCTA) and the Saint John Free Public Library joined in a project to improve the community's access to literacy and library services through providing a Storytent program. As well, we wanted to evaluate what impact this kind of program could have on families and their community.

The research results of this project were very positive:

- an increase in household reading frequency
- an increase in participation in the Summer Reading Club
- all children assessed maintained or showed a gain in reading level
- strengthened relationship between the community and the library.

“For those children who chose to make frequent or intensive use of the storytent, the program was instrumental in helping them acquire or improve their reading skills. Statements by children showing them to be surprised and delighted at their own emerging and growing skills appear[ed] often in staff notes, and parents corroborat[ed] this appearance of positive self-images in their children as a result of having had a reading success in a pleasant, safe environment” (Saint John Free Public Library, 2003, p. 4)

These positive outcomes were the result of relationships: relationships between children and books, between children and other children; between children and adults; between adults and other adults; and between the community and the library.

The 2004 Storytent program followed the previous summer's model, with the addition of a weekly, door - to - door Bookwagon component. Once again, the results were positive (Saint John Free Public Library, 2004):

- an increase in household reading frequency
- all children assessed maintained or showed a gain in reading level
- parents reported children's relationships were less aggressive and more positive
- an increase in adult borrowing
- an increase in family participation
- an increase in parents reporting reading to their children at home
- a strengthened relationship between the community and the library.

The 2005 Storytent and Bookwagon programs once again showed (Saint John Free Public Library, 2005):

- an increase in household reading frequency
- an increase or maintenance in reading levels of children
- More positive relationships between children
- Strengthened relationship between the library and the community
- An increased in adult borrowing
- An increase in family participation
- Year round access to books.

Children recorded reading over 14,000 books during these three summers. The families have told us that they value books and literacy - all they need is access. Offering the Storytent program provided this access.



Working With Readers And Non-Readers

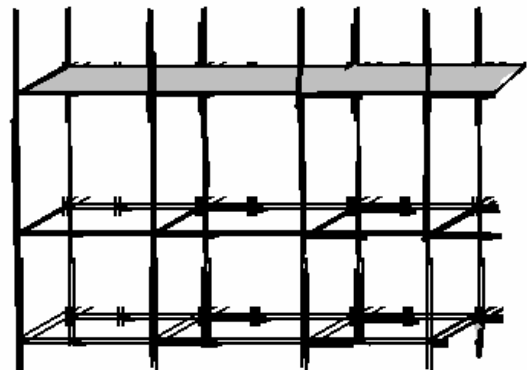
Building A Scaffold

In a storytent, we meet confident, eager readers. We will also meet

- readers who have limited skills,
- readers with low confidence,
- readers with little or no interest in the books around them,
- non-readers.

Any child who enters the tent voluntarily is telling us that they think the storytent holds something of value for them. If we start right away to create a positive relationship, we can discover what that *something* is.

Once we find out what each person wants from the storytent, we can begin to build a scaffold for them. A scaffold is something that lets someone reach higher or further than they can alone.



It Starts With Relationship

The quality of the relationships between workers and children is key to the success of the program. To build a positive relationship, we avoid what William Glasser (2002) calls disconnecting behaviours or "the seven deadly habits" (see sidebar). Instead, we use what he calls connecting behaviours, or the **seven connecting habits**:

- ✓ **listening**
- ✓ **supporting**
- ✓ **encouraging**
- ✓ **respecting**
- ✓ **trusting**
- ✓ **accepting**
- ✓ **always negotiating disagreements.**

seven deadly habits





- criticizing
- blaming
- complaining
- nagging
- threatening
- punishing
- bribing or rewarding to control.

Using these positive behaviours, we can provide a consistently friendly atmosphere, with no judging or correcting of people's choices. For the children and families involved this means that the storytent will be a safe space. There will be a minimum of interpersonal conflict or external pressure to perform. This is how we begin to "do or don't do" things as individuals or educators to create a social context able to support "success in learning" (Bredekamp *et al*, 1992, p. 1).

Reading

Storytent is a place where people read. It needs to be full of a range of wonderful books about all sorts of things. Children are free to pick any books they want to read or look through on their own. In the Storytent, children's reading is not criticized. We wait to be asked before supplying a word or correcting an error. Also, we would never make negative comments about a choice of book. However, we would tell a child about a book that we thought matched their interest and reading level. (This is assisted by the use of high-interest low-level books, and an understanding of reading levels.)

We help many children reach their storytent goal by:

-  reading aloud to children
-  listening to children read
-  shared reading
-  independent reading



Reading To

Reading to children can be an enjoyable way to pass time. It is also a good way to:

- ✓ help them expand their vocabulary
- ✓ help them become familiar with language structures and grammar
- ✓ help them learn more about books and printed text.

We agree that “reading to children... models both the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of reading.... Children... *need* to see the purpose in reading. If you believe you learn to read by reading, you must learn to *want* to read” (Depree & Iverson, 1994, p. 31).

In the tent, children choose which book they want to hear. However, we make sure the tent is filled with books workers and children find easy and enjoyable to read. Other ways workers read the same books many times over without boredom or impatience include:

- ◆ using dramatic or comic voices
- ◆ integrating the names of children
- ◆ integrating locations familiar to children
- ◆ transforming a prose text into a song or play.

We do not require children to sit still or silently while we read. This would be disconnecting and would hurt our relationship with the children. If children choose a book that is too long for one sitting, we negotiate: “I’ll read you one chapter of that today. Then you can borrow it, or we can save it and read another chapter next time.”

Shared Reading

Shared reading has been described as “a step between reading to children and independent reading by children [and therefore] the step where children learn to read by reading” (Depree & Iverson, 1994, p. 34). This method is particularly appropriate to storytents, “a non-competitive learning environment” where “risk taking, mistakes, and approximations are seen as a normal part of learning – not signs of failure” (Depree & Iverson, 1994, p. 34.)









In a typical scenario, a child might sit close to the adult and book. The adult reads the book aloud, at least twice, with the child joining in as he or she feels comfortable. With a book like Robert Munsch’s *Mortimer*, the child would probably begin by reading the short chant repeated every other page. With a pattern book like Bill Martin Jr.’s *Brown Bear Brown Bear*, the child might start by reading the line “What do you see” which appears with each new illustration. Or, with Sandra Boynton’s *Blue Hat Green Hat*, they might read “oops” each time it appears. With time and repetition, the child gathers more of the text, until they reach a point where they believe they can read the book on their own.

With older children, shared reading might follow a more structured scenario: “You read a page and I’ll read a page, okay? Who do you want to start, me or you?” This can allow a child to read a longer or more difficult book that, were he or she to attempt on his or her own, would end in frustration.

Shared reading allows a child to observe, up close, how an accomplished reader approaches a text. It also creates a context of closeness and cooperation in which the child can ask for help with a word or phrase without feeling as if they had somehow failed. In shared reading, accuracy counts for little. We would redirect a reader only if a misread frustrated the child's attempt to make sense of a story.

Guided Reading

In the storytent we also use an adaptation of guided reading, which involves promoting specific reading strategies (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996). We use leveled books that are in children's instructional ranges (not too hard, not too easy) and try, gently, to match up children and texts. As part of this method, we give children time to actively 'figure out' text. Sometimes, we also talk about the book with children. We might:

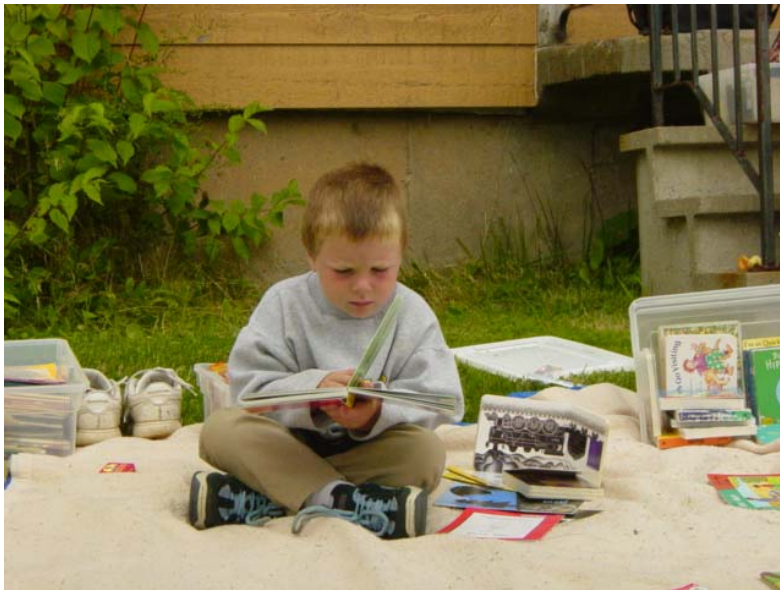
-  point out patterns in the text
-  point out regularities and irregularities in phonic principles
-  discuss things like the title, author, or method of illustration
-  link words to pictures
-  predict what might happen next
-  talk about how the story might have ended differently.

This is as close as we ever come to reading instruction. Because it is so easy to disconnect when we try to 'teach' someone, this is a time when we need to take extra care to listen to, support, encourage, respect, trust and accept each child.

Self-Assessing

In the Storytent program, children decide themselves if they want to learn to read, and when they have become readers. They decide for themselves if they are "good" readers. They decide for themselves if they are happy with a book, with the storytent, or with themselves.

In this sense there is no failure, no falling behind the crowd. We believe that this self-monitoring plays an important part in the positive shift in many children's perceptions of themselves as readers.



Eclectic Methods and Flexibility

Storytents work best when workers are alert to opportunities and show the kind of flexibility necessary for any successful learner-centered, whole language program

Guided reading, reading to, and shared reading often blend into one another in the storytent. Having multiple copies of crowd pleasers like Munsch favorites *Mortimer* or *Stephanie's Ponytail* allow children to join in or follow along when a worker reads to a group: this is an example of how "reading to" can become "shared reading". Being flexible also provides for moments of direct instruction, as when, one time, a child snuggled into some shared reading suddenly stopped 'reading' the pictures and demanded of the worker, "What are all these letters doing on the page?" For storytent workers, the overarching principle of all this interaction is the desire to build relationship and allow children's interest and curiosity to lead (Brown and Dryden, 2004).

In the storytent program, we make an effort to provide a consistent service - rain or shine - so that each child or family can have maximum access if they choose. We make an effort to provide a consistently friendly atmosphere, and a wide variety of consistently popular books. However, there is no pre-determined curriculum, no judging of people's needs or correcting of their choices, and certainly no "one size fits all" approach to learning.

Working Successfully With Families

Storytent is not just for kids: it is a family program. Helping the members of a family toward learning requires us to recognize the decision-making authority of parents, and to respond to the family as a whole. We believe families are most successful when they work toward goals they have identified for themselves in an environment that focuses on the positive and builds on strengths.

We use the same principles to build relationships with families and to scaffold their learning as we do with children. We respect the choices and authority of parents by informing them about the program and the details of time location, etc; by informing them when special guests or media are coming to the tent, so they can choose to be involved or not; and by asking permission to use photos of them and/or their children in our reports, power points and articles.

Also, when parents ask us for something specific, like information on parenting, helping their children read, talking to their children about sex or drugs, or for a book they are particularly interested in reading themselves, we do our best to meet their request in a timely, respectful and supportive manner.

III. How To Plan For A Storytent

There are many things to consider in planning a storytent. Since 1999, and especially during the summers of 2003 and 2004, community literacy workers in the storytent constantly evaluated their practices and made adjustments to find what worked best. The following sections represent a general set of successful practices that came from that self-reflection

Readers need to be aware that how we apply these practices changes from year to year, and sometimes from tent to tent. What is most important to us is whether or not children and families are finding the program useful, accessible and enjoyable.



Physical Considerations

The first thing to think about is location. Common green spaces have worked well for storytent events and programs. Successful storytents are located in a visible spot, at a distance from obvious dangers (traffic, machinery, animals, etc.). They also need to be located in a relatively quiet setting.

Crushed rock is better than pavement, sand is better than crushed rock, and grass is better than sand, for providing a platform for the tent.

Residential spaces have been more successful than commercial spaces.

Storytents may need to be sheltered from the wind. We would suggest trying out different locations to see



how much of the sub community your tent serves and to ensure you have the best location.

Once you have determined the location (or locations if necessary), consistency is important. Children and families will benefit from a tent offered at the same time in the same place. Another consideration is whether children can access it freely. Ideally, the tent would be within walking distance for children and families who want to attend. As well there would be no artificial barriers, like admission fees, or late fines on borrowed or lost books.

Tents

The ideal tent is a colourful canopy open on four sides. A 10' by 10' canopy can comfortably accommodate about ten children with two adults, although fewer people will fit if the weather is wet. The tent framework needs to be simple enough to set up in a short period of time, but sturdy enough to withstand summer weather. Tents that use guide wires are

impractical in many locations. We sometimes shorten the side poles of our tents on very windy days to prevent the tent from blowing over. We often peg the flaps close to the tent for added security.



Books

It is important to have a selection of good quality read-alouds and books that children of all ages can read independently. It is helpful to have access to a larger selection of books than you would actually use at the tent. This gives you variety and allows workers to choose books that meet the diverse interests of the families who may attend. Board books last longer than paperback; and some paperback last longer than some hard cover (and are less expensive). At a one-time, single Storytent event, approximately fifty books is comfortable. When running a program, approximately three hundred books are needed. It is more worthwhile to have fewer books that the workers and children enjoy reading, than more books that are less successful. Successful books and stories are those that entertain,

that help new readers, or that sometimes spark interest (for more information, see Appendix A).

Snack

An essential part of the Storytent programs, snack is consistent with a holistic approach to learning. It is difficult for children and families to get the most out of the program when they are hungry. Sometimes, children come to the tent specifically for snack, and then choose to stay for reading and related activities. Snack provides an opportunity for exposing children to fruits and vegetables they might not be familiar with. It also provides for social learning and building relationships. Snack is a part of the program every one can participate in regardless of their skill level or confidence. Providing a healthy snack lessens the likelihood that children will snack on candy or other high sugar and dye-content items that interfere with learning and behaviour.

We usually bring two kinds of organic fruits or vegetables, in order to avoid the negative effects poor quality food has on health and behaviour (Van de Weyer, 2005). Our shopping list includes apples, pears, bananas, watermelon, cantaloupe, dulce, and seasonal garden vegetables (green beans, peas in the pod). We used to offer citrus fruit (oranges, clementines or mineolas), but discovered that they too had a negative impact on behaviour: ten to fifteen minutes after a citrus snack, many children became too boisterous to remain in the tent. On hot days, we also ensure we have plenty of water on hand for everyone.

Peripherals

Literacy and language can be enhanced by a variety of activities. Chanting and singing, writing and numeracy are also part of the storytent. They help build relationships and give children opportunities to have fun learning and using literacy and language skills. To facilitate this, we often bring items such as:

- skipping ropes
- sidewalk chalk
- writing materials
- bubbles
- twine & beads
- play dough
- playing cards
- musical instruments.



Signage

It is important to let people know who you are and what you are doing. A large, simple banner or sandwich board can attract children and families. It also promotes the program in the larger community. Finally, signage provides a way to recognize sponsors and funders.



Community

A successful storytent program has committed partners, and the participation of the community the program is located in. Possible partners are:

- libraries
- community-based organizations
- literacy organizations
- family organizations
- local community groups
- foundations
- family literacy or literacy committees
- service clubs
- government.

Before our full-time summer project began, we built relationships through our work in a local Family Literacy Program. We also brought Storytent to several community events, volunteered for others, became associate members of the local tenants' association, and spent time listening to people who live in the community. Workers continue to build relationships with the children, their parents and neighbours.

Personnel

Having the right workers is crucial to a successful Storytent. Positive, solution-based staff can salvage a poor location, ineffective books or a leaky tent. However, even if everything is perfect, staff lacking the necessary attitudes and skills will have difficulty ensuring a quality program.

A love of reading and children is important, as are patience, attention to detail and the ability to capitalize on a moment or know when to leave something alone. Storytent workers will also need the ability to:

- ◆ tell stories
- ◆ read aloud at length
- ◆ listen effectively
- ◆ engage shy or reluctant children
- ◆ manage large groups of children
- ◆ scaffold children's play and learning
- ◆ match books with readers using interests and level
- ◆ support families
- ◆ set up and tear down the tents
- ◆ document effectively
- ◆ think critically about their own practice

As well, storytents call for one or more individuals able to:

- ◆ write proposals
- ◆ write reports
- ◆ manage a budget
- ◆ manage staff and volunteers
- ◆ work with media, sponsors and partners.

Of all the qualities staff need to possess, the most important is commitment. Past Storytent workers have all described the program as challenging:

It's a very exposed position – you're out there in the neighbourhood just two or three of you... exposed to the weather, the neighbours, whoever walks their dog through – different people and their different expectations. The job makes you draw on a lot of skills and a lot of knowledge.

Worker Survey Response, 2003

You need to constantly re-evaluate.... You have to be very okay with changing your plans and being adaptable. There's a physical aspect of this job, too, that I don't think any of us anticipated. It's physically taxing.

Worker Survey response, 2003

It is tiring to work this project. This project is physically and emotionally demanding. There is constant exposure to poor weather, to children and families in disheartening socio-economic situations....

Worker Survey Response, 2004

Workers need to be present and effective every day, in all kinds of weather. They need to adhere to the philosophy and use connecting behaviours, even when it's difficult. They also need to be able to self-reflect and work toward constant improvement. "Having the same workers come back each summer is ideal. This allows the workers to integrate the previous year's learnings. It also provides another important aspect of consistency" (Brown & Dryden, 2005, p. 37).

I was so glad the storytent came back this year. I was also glad it was the same people.

Parent Survey Response, 2004

Training

We believe, based on feedback from Storytent workers, that the most effective training model is an apprenticeship approach which combines information sessions and hands on training. Workers felt the initial information day was helpful, but all said they would not have known how to interact in the tent without actually doing it and having an opportunity to talk about it. Each day we took time to debrief, reflect and discuss. A one-hour staff meetings on Saturdays became a forum for larger discussions and a time to give information requested by workers. Recent staff comments echo those of previous staff members about the importance of workers having maximum freedom within a framework to figure some things out on their own and pursue their own questions in the search for quality. Additional training that may be useful is listed in *Appendix B*.

IV. How To Deliver A Quality Storytent

The Storytent program is an outdoor program. Delivering the program in all conditions is another feature of the continuity and commitment we feel children and families deserve.

Before setting out, workers need to consider where they are going and in what weather. Then, they need to decide how much material they can reasonably transport, unpack, use and repack. This will allow them to prioritize and create an appropriate mix of resources.

We have provided sample "Sunny Day" and "Rainy Day" set-up lists from our 2003 program, as well as some concrete tips. However, it will be through trial and error that individual programs will find the right balance.

Preparation: Set-Up

Tent set-up will look different depending on the location or the weather. On a typical sunny day, ground sheets and blankets are put down first, extending beyond the borders of the tent. Books are set out on the blankets. Tent frames are erected to one side, covered with canopies, and then set in place.

When you arrive at your Storytent location, you may be alone, or greeted by numerous children of various ages. If children are present, the relationship building begins right away.

When we arrived at one location for the first time, there were about six children playing on the grass. One child ran up and said “Hey! What are you guys doing?!”

We said, “Setting up a Storytent.”

He asked, “Can we help?”

We had not considered this until that moment, but the answer was obvious. We said, “Sure!”



Set-up takes more time and care when children help. However, this is one way children co-construct their own learning space, a key principle of Storytent philosophy. Children may not know how to help at first, and will need age-appropriate guidance from

workers. For example, younger children can be encouraged to hold or steady poles while workers connect them. Older children can be given verbal step by step instruction on which poles to connect and how to spread the canopy. Most children can assist with carrying blankets, books and snack boxes to the tent. If a child asks to help with a task that may not be appropriate for their age, workers can suggest other ways they can be helpful.

At a busy location with lots of children, one worker will often begin reading a crowd-pleaser as soon as the first blankets are down. Then, other workers finish unpacking and setting up. This strategy lessens conflict and helps set-up go more smoothly. Once set-up is finished, books are spread out and workers arrange themselves to make the most effective use of space.

Hot Days

On hot days, ground sheets might not be needed. Hot days are expansive days. Tents are set at their maximum height to cast a wide shade. Blankets are scattered wide so people can spread out.



On hot days, hats and suntan lotion, water and sunglasses will all come in handy. So will peripherals like skipping ropes and sidewalk chalk. Hot days are excellent watermelon days - bring handy-wipes or wet cloths in baggies for sticky hands. If possible, provide water for the children.

Hot days are sleepy days, and children may want to lounge against you and listen to long, rambling stories. In this part of the world, hot days are also thunder storm days: remember that under a metal framework is no place to stay during a lightening storm.

Sample Sunny Day Set-Up

A sunny/cloudy day Storytent has packed:

- ◆ 3 tents
- ◆ 2 boxes of books (board, paper, library, chapter, a good variety and lots of)
- ◆ 6 blankets
- ◆ 1 box fruit
- ◆ 1 box SRC stuff (and pens, etc)
- ◆ 1 box cups
- ◆ water (2 jugs)
- ◆ Sponsor sign
- ◆ Could also have twine, skipping ropes, & other peripherals.

Wet Days

On rainy days, the tents are set up first. If there is a wind blowing, they can be set at an angle, with their “backs” to the rain. Then, the blankets and ground sheet can lie well inside the borders of the tent. (In the figure on the right, the groundsheet has been used to create a wall and offer further shelter from the rain.)



Wet days, with blankets sheltered beneath the tent, mean less room for everyone. These days do not call for many peripherals like skipping ropes or sidewalk chalk. On such days, it is worthwhile bringing fewer books. Since books too will get wet, it is helpful to divide the full collection into morning and afternoon books, thereby ensuring a dry selection of titles for the whole day.

Blankets will get wet on foggy or rainy days, or even mornings with a heavy dew or frost. If more than one storytent session is to be delivered in a day, extra blankets will probably be needed. In any case, blankets will need to be dried at the end of the day. Groundsheets can also become too wet to reuse, and will require drying. On very wet days, canopies can become saturated, and may need to be replaced for a second storytent session.

Sample Rainy Day Set-Up

A rainy day Storytent has packed:

- ◆ 1 – 2 tents
- ◆ 1 – 2 tarps
- ◆ 1 box of books (board, some paper, none that will be sorely missed)
- ◆ 1 jug water
- ◆ 1 box cups
- ◆ 1 box Summer Reading Club materials
- ◆ 1 large box with 4 – 5 blankets
- ◆ 1 box fruit



Cool, Windy Days

Windy days make the worst storytent days simply because the canopies are so vulnerable to gusts of wind. We often raise the tent to only two-thirds of its height, something doubly important on windy days. We also use pegs or weights attached directly to the tent legs to keep the tent in place.

Some storytent days will feel surprisingly cool, especially to workers who have been out all morning, and whose clothing may be damp. Cool days are skipping, chanting, singing, hand clapping days.

A combination of wind and rain can close a Storytent down. If rain blows in, books and blankets will quickly become too wet to use. In some situations, workers can wait out a squall, delaying set up until the rain slackens. In others, it may be necessary to cancel a morning's Storytent in order to have dry books for the afternoon.

Most importantly, whatever the weather, workers need to be personally prepared. This means having adequate clothing, headgear and footwear. Having a change of clothing near at hand is helpful. It also means being physically and mentally prepared to do the job.

On Site

The First Twenty Minutes

Relationship building is the most important part of the Storytent program. Everything we do in the storytent, from set-up onwards, is done in a way that builds relationships. We work hard to employ connecting language and habits, and to avoid disconnecting behaviours (See page 26).

When children come into the tent, workers smile and greet them. We tell them what happens in the tent, offer to read a book, or offer several books for them to look at, and then respect their choices.

If children are shy or reluctant, we may read them books from a distance. Or, we may hand books outside the tent for them to look at.

During A Tent

The range of methods used in a Storytent to support children's reading include

- reading aloud to children
- listening to children read
- promoting specific reading strategies
- shared reading
- guided reading
- independent reading
- interactive writing
- independent writing

This list represents most elements of a balanced literacy program (Fountas & Pinnell, 1996), and is discussed in more detail in Section II.

Although children may show an increase in reading level, the Storytent program is not about instructed reading. Talking, laughing, playing, and sharing are all part of the content of the program. Sometimes children dictate stories to workers who write them down. Other times they write notes to each other, copy out text from books, or just doodle.



In the program, workers sometimes bring musical instruments for the children to play, and show them how to make twine bracelets and necklaces. Workers often skip, play cards or clapping games, or share bubbles or sidewalk chalk with the children. Each of these activities has a defensible ‘early literacy’ dimension (sequencing, symbolic representation, vocabulary enhancement, etc.), but for us they are also about quality relationships.



The children are allowed to help workers in the tents. Sometimes it is a child who writes up the attendance, or who passes around snack. For the children, also, the Storytent is about more than reading instruction. Some children use the program to meet common social needs. Some children use it as a source for reading materials. Some quite deliberately come to acquire or improve their reading skills. Most come for a variety of reasons, and reasons change as the summer goes on (Brown & Dryden, 2004).

Snack

Snack typically happens at the halfway point, but this is not necessary. Sometimes, a storytent runs more smoothly when snack is distributed earlier. Children often pass snack around to other children. We usually ask them to choose one or two things from the snack box - a 5 litre plastic box with a cover - depending on the number of children present. (For more on snack, see p.37).

Borrowing

We employ a liberal book borrowing policy as part of our concern for relationship. We ask that children borrow no more than three books at a time, though this is open for negotiation. We also ask children to delay choosing books to borrow until they are ready to leave. This reduces conflict and the appearance of hoarding. In order to preserve a sufficient volume of crowd-pleasers and other books we have found to be especially successful, we use a sticker system. Red stickered books are to stay in the tent: books stickered with any other colour can be borrowed.

When children borrow books, they are not nagged to bring them back. If a particular child seems to be 'collecting' books and shows no inclination to return them, we negotiate a new borrowing limit. No child is punished by being cut off from borrowing books. When, as happens occasionally, a borrowed book turns up in a yard sale, we buy it back without comment. In all of this, the commanding assumptions are that making books part of children's quality worlds is fundamental to supporting their literacy development, and that having readers in the tent is more important than having books.

One of the more rewarding outcomes from the book borrowing is learning that, after our departure, some children have spread their own blankets out on their lawn and carried on reading.

More information on book borrowing and using Storytents as part of a library outreach program is found in *Summer Reading Club: Outreach library service through a neighbourhood storytent program* available at www.nald.ca/clr/readclub/cover.htm.

The Last Twenty Minutes

Children are given a "5 minute warning" when the end of a Storytent session is approaching. This gives everyone time to finish stories and choose books. Then, set-up happens in reverse.

Once again, children are encouraged to play a role in the running of their program by helping out. Tents are carried away from the blankets and deconstructed (this is best left to the adults, as injury can occur when the frame is tugged apart). Books and peripherals are packed away in boxes. Garbage is picked up from around the site. Blankets and ground sheets are folded. Signage is taken down. The wagon is packed. Everyone says goodbye.

In rainy weather, books are packed and blankets folded before the tents are taken apart. In this way, the canopies can provide shelter for people and materials until the last possible moment.

Whatever the weather, workers will need to re-sort, and maybe hang for drying, Storytent materials at the end of the day. The snack box may need to be washed out. Re-packing various kinds of books (picture, chapter, etc.) in their own boxes provides workers with an opportunity to see which titles need replacing or replenishing.



V. Special Challenges

Negotiating Conflict

While they are in the tent, children are shown how their behaviour influences whether or not others can read or hear books. They also learn how speaking disparagingly of each other and each other's families is counter-productive to building relationships and makes the Storytent unsafe. Assisting children self-evaluate requires constant negotiation.

Often, children in conflict look to staff for justice or vindication. In these circumstances, staff begin the negotiation by asking about roles (Child: "She took my book!" Worker: "What are you asking me to do?").

Sometimes negotiations fail. Too often, there is no "connecting place" and too little time for individual children and staff to talk through these challenges (Glasser, 2000 p.160). At this point, children are asked to leave the tent and 'try again tomorrow'. This gives staff an opportunity to discuss and reflect on what happened and make plans for preventing or dealing more effectively with the challenge next day. Where a strong relationship is present, children return the next day. Over time, children and the general community come to perceive the storytent as a warm, safe place to be.

Limits

In the storytent, we need to be flexible enough and knowledgeable enough to keep the goals of the program in the forefront. It is important to remember that we do not limit a child because we think we know what is *good* or *right* for them. To the contrary, we place limits on individual choice only because we have a perception of what is effective for the group as a whole.

Children in the storytent will choose if and when they want to learn to read: this is a self-chosen or learner-centered curriculum. Too, children will announce - usually with some feeling - at what point they have become readers: this is self-assessment. Both are entirely acceptable within the framework of the program. On the other hand, children who wish to learn to ride a bike will be gently informed that, laudable though the goal may be, this kind of learning cannot happen inside the storytent while others are trying to read or listen to books. In other words, within the framework of the program there sometimes needs to be negotiation about the "curriculum". Again, a child may wish to learn about books and reading through a developmentally appropriate process which involves a lot of book-play or activities which stress a book's binding and integrity. This, too, is entirely acceptable right up to the point where the child chooses for his or her play a particularly expensive or hard to replace book. At that point, workers will need to negotiate the book choice with the child to ensure that quality books are on hand for all.

A similar thing will happen with families. When asked, workers can share with caregivers their perceptions of how children learn best, and like-minded print resources can be included among the adult books available for borrowing. However, parents and caregivers may make different choices about how best to nurture their child, and this is entirely acceptable. These choices become the concern of Storytent workers only if and when they threaten the learning experience of the group as a whole. This is what it means to provide a safe, non-judgmental environment.

A Program Without Walls

The fact that the program runs outdoors can provide a significant challenge. Apart from the weather, the program is vulnerable to things like lawn mowers, construction, animals, and ball playing. Unexpected visitors may show up with unsuitable snacks or wanting to volunteer; media may wander by wanting to take photos. We take the view that workers need to be diplomatic but firm in all these circumstances.

Parents need to be informed if there are media or guests coming to the program; and media need to be informed that workers obtain parent's permission before allowing interviews or photographs with children. Explaining the program's snack policy and offering other ways volunteers can help is one suggestion to deal with unexpected arrivals of food. Construction or lawn maintenance may force a temporary relocation of the storytent. The goal is to preserve the program's environment while remaining welcomed guests in the community.



Conclusion

What we hope to have provided in this document are guidelines on how to start and run a Quality Storytent program in your neighbourhood. Your program will probably look different from what is described here, and we think that is okay. We developed this program in response to the community we were serving, and community responsiveness is a principle we recommend. Many of our successes came about because of our freedom to re-create the program through reflection and talking with the community. We now know we have a program that works in our context and we invite you to try it in your community.

As part of our reflection and research, we are very interested in hearing about your experiences doing this kind of work. If you have any questions or are willing to share your own reflections, please feel free to contact us.

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Appendix A: Finding The Right Books



Having the right books is an important factor in success. It is helpful to have access to a larger selection of books than you would actually use at the tent.

Books that help new readers

Books that help new readers are “...one and two line caption books that contain stories about subjects familiar to most children; strong pictorial support provided by illustration that match text exactly; and predictable language patterns” (Depree & Inverson, 1994, p. 24). Examples of books with matching text and illustrations would be *Big and Little* by Samantha Berger and *Blue Hat Green Hat* by Sandra Boynton. An example of a predictable pattern book is *Brown Bear Brown Bear, What do you See?* by Bill Martin Jr. There are many other texts useful in supporting emergent literacy, including wordless books, like the *Carl* series by Alexandria Day (*Carl Goes to Daycare*; *Carl's Birthday*, etc.), or high interest/low level books like *Machines at Work* by Byron Barton or *The Big Goof* by Grass Roots Press.

Crowd Pleasers

Crowd pleasers are books that obviously hold the attention and interest of groups of children of different ages. In our tent, *Mortimer and Stephanie's Ponytail* by Robert Munsch (and most other Munsch titles), and chanting and singing books, like *Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed*, *Miss Mary Mack*, and *Lady with the Alligator Purse*, work well. Children will often request that a crowd pleaser be read again (right away, later, or consistently). They often sing or read along and visibly enjoy the book.

Books that Spark Interest

These are mostly non-fiction. Movie Storybooks, books about sharks, insects, space, superheroes (Captain Underpants), and celebrities (Mary Kate and Ashley) are interesting. These books attract children and families to the tent, and are especially useful for drawing in reluctant readers.

Authors Worth Noting

We make an effort to find or purchase books that the children said they were interested in, and books that were popular read-alouds. Popular authors include:

Robert Munsch

Sheree Fitch

Donald Crews

Paulette Bourgeois

Barbara Reid

Phoebe Gilman

Dav Pilkey

Marc Brown

Frank Asch

Ezra Jack Keats

Byron Barton

Dr. Suess

Bill Martin Jr.

Eric Carle

Sandra Boynton

David Shannon

Don Freeman

Samantha Berger

Infants

Infant reading doesn't have that much to do with the actual words on the page; it has more to do with playing and talking, singing and laughing observing and exploring, tickling and having fun together (Kropp, 1993, p. 50). Infants look at books with bursts of intense concentration. The best books for infants have big simple shapes which babies will scrutinize for a few minutes. Board books are best during this book-eating and playing stage. Since babies see in shades of gray, the best books for the first 6 – 8 weeks are black and white or books with high contrast illustrations.

For Toddlers

Sometimes between 18 and 30 months a baby's language skills develop dramatically. At this stage infant reading becomes much closer to ordinary reading. Current research says that a child is busy at this point creating stories in her own mind – to understand herself, the spot of sunlight on the floor, her teddy bear. This is the time when books become much more than shapes and sounds for her; they begin to convey both language and story. The key for this change lies in favourite books. Let children select their favourites from a large number of books. Then read those favourites together with a child again and again. (Kropp, 1993, p. 51).

Preschoolers

“For ages two – six, picture books have illustrations on every page and very little text. Picture books are meant to be read aloud and the pictures pored over” (Hearne, 1981, p.

16). Effective picture book for preschoolers:

- Has illustrations that are rich enough and detailed enough that you can find extra material to talk about.
- Is appropriate for the child’s current age and for the next year or two.
- Has a sentence or two per page, with illustrations being as important as the text.
- Has predictable text, through rhyme, rhythm or logic, to make it easy for a child to ‘read’ for herself.
- Engages both the child and the adult reader
- Is for and about children
- Is made well enough to withstand tough use

Beginning Readers

Books that have short commonplace words that children can recognize at a glance are effective for these readers, and have:

- Certain predictability in the text
- Regular rhythm
- Repeated sentence structure or
- Repeated set of lines

- Humorous, animals, real life of kids, poetry and rhyme, TV tie-ins

Independent Readers

For independent readers, effective books will have short episodic chapters, scattered illustrations, and simple vocabulary, slightly enlarged type, an open friendly format, and a plot and cast of characters without too many complications. They can be read aloud to youngsters or alone by the child as reading skills start to develop (Hearne, 1981, p. 16)

Appendix B: Training Grid

Hands On TRAINING	Developmentally Appropriate Practice	Whole Language	Critical Thinking	Community Development	Storytelling	Population Health	Humanistic Learning Principles
Parent-Child Mother Goose Program	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Foundational Family Literacy Training	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Choice Theory - Basic Week			✓				✓
AUTHORS OF PRINT RESOURCES	Developmentally Appropriate Practice	Whole Language	Critical Thinking	Community Development	Storytelling	Population Health	Humanistic Learning Principles
Carl Dunst			✓	✓		✓	
Frank Smith		✓					✓
William Glasser			✓			✓	✓
Denny Taylor	✓	✓	✓				✓
*NAEYC	✓						✓
Celia Barker Lotteridge					✓		

*National Association for the Education of Young Children

Appendix C: The Quality Storytent as an Event

The Storytent started out as an event project. We considered it family literacy promotion with the goal of raising the profile of the importance (and relative ease) of reading to and with children. In an event tent, there is no book borrowing. However, the same philosophy behind method of delivery and relationship building does apply.

Location

Sometimes we looked for an already established event and asked if they wanted to have a Storytent added; sometimes we were asked to bring our Storytent to an event; and sometimes the Storytent was the event. Usually, the storytent was set up outside, but we did try a mall, a gym and inside a large room on a rainy day. The following is a list of ‘events’ that we brought the storytent to:

- Family organizations’ summer picnics
- Literacy and family literacy festivals
- Community Fairs
- Loyalist Days Heritage Festival
- Business Grand Openings
- Festival by the Sea (Children’s Big Tent)
- Home & School end of year celebrations
- Canada Day Celebrations
- Marathon by the Sea
- New River Beach Days
- Storyfest

This list is not exhaustive. With a little work and creativity, a Storytent could be part of almost any urban or rural event where children and families will be present.

Materials

- One or two canopies
- Two – three adults
- Approximately 50 – 60 excellent read-alouds, including a small selection of board books and chapter books for younger and older children.

Signage

We recommend a sandwich board or other small sign.



Appendix D: The Quality Storytent as a Program

Following is a sample proposal for the Storytent as a Program:

Project Outline

Goals

- Provide a venue for the Summer Reading Club
- Provide a locally accessible reading program for children and families

Objectives

- Provide reading opportunities through Quality Storytents, twice per week for nine weeks, in five different locations in the neighbourhood.
- Evaluate the level and nature of neighbourhood participation.
- Administer Summer Reading Club Outreach.
- Promote Library services

Outcomes may include but are not limited to:

- Increased reading levels, and frequency of reading.
- More community participation in the Summer Reading Club.
- Increased knowledge of Library Services.
- Reinforcement of positive attitudes toward self and reading.
- More positive social interaction
- Strengthened connection between the neighbourhood and the library.

Project Narrative

The Storytent project will run for *## weeks, from Month, Day to Month, Day, Year*. Training would be on-going, with three hours per week designated. The program consists of a reading tent, offered ten times per week (morning and afternoon) over five separate locations.

A Storytent consists of one or more canopies, blankets and ground sheets, a variety of popular books including picture, story and chapter books, and two to three adult workers. One role of the workers is to talk and sing with, listen to, and read to and with children as requested by the children themselves. Another role is to build and maintain relationships and a positive social and learning environment. An array of literacy activities happen at a Storytent, including: reading aloud to children; listening to children read; shared reading; independent reading; independent writing; and talking. Children and adults are also provided with a healthy snack.

Two book giveaways will be used to help provide a bridge between the storytent and reading at home. Other enhancements might include: skipping, sidewalk chalk, word games, etc.

The **methods** used to support learning will be based on the established principles of an humanistic, learner-centered philosophy of delivery and management (Glasser, 1994; Knowles, 1988); early childhood education (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1990) and Quality Education (Glasser, 2000; Glasser, 1998), hence the name Quality Storytents.

The evaluation will consist of interviews with parents, children and program partners, Summer Reading Club statistics, and compiled staff comments and observations.

Sample Budget

Community Literacy Coordinator (35 hrs @ 13.00 @ 9 wks)	\$4095.00
Community Literacy Worker x 3 (35 hrs @ 13.00 @ 9 wks)	\$12285.00
MERC (11%)	\$1801.80
Sub total	\$18181.80
Nutritious Snack (fruit & veggies) (2.00 @ 60 children @ 9 wks)	\$ 1080.00
Children's Books (80 @ \$10.00 ea to give away; 80 @ \$10.00 ea for tent resources)	\$1600.00
Tents (2)	\$ 100.00
Blankets (5)	\$ 100.00
Space	<u>\$ 800.00</u>
Total	\$21861.80