

Live and Learn

The Newsletter of the PEI Literacy Alliance



Winter 2014

Photo courtesy of johnsylvester.com

New Book Fridge at the Co-op in North Rustico!



Brenda Doiron was interested to set up a book fridge for kids in her community. We gave her some of our gently used books from our stock, she gathered donations and has a successful going concern at the Co-op in North Rustico.

What's inside

December bursary winners ■ Family Literacy and Essential Skills ■ Tips for Parents

■ Secret Santa ■

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Published by the PEI Literacy Alliance.

Edited, written and designed by Catherine O'Bryan, and Amanda Beazley.

We would like to hear from you if you have:

- learners' stories
- creative writing by learners
- articles or news about teaching adults
- upcoming events
- new resources for adult education

Please send your material to:

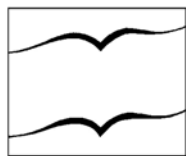
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SECRET SANTA

It was the season of giving, and Keigan Bowness was certainly in the spirit.

Keigan, a grade 5 student at Stratford Elementary, visited our office with a generous donation of books for our Book Bank in Charlottetown.

When Keigan's mother, Deanna, called me about making a donation I was expecting a grocery bag of books. I was pleasantly surprised to see them arrive with a banana box that was overflowing.

Keigan helped me spread his books out on the table --that's when I noticed that there were some great titles, especially for boys, and that they had been really well cared for. Clearly, this kid loves books.

I figured it must have been hard to give up his collection, so I asked him what made him decide to do it.

Keigan told me that he and his mom had read an article about the Book Bank that was published in *The Guardian*. His mom asked him what he thought it would be like if his family couldn't afford to buy books. Keigan thought about how much he loves to read and decided that if he could help out a fellow reader, he would.

I was impressed by Keigan's sincerity and generosity, I'm sure the kids at the Book Bank will be too. Hat's off to you Keigan, thanks for being a super Secret Santa!

I find the lack of literacy skills among young people today quite disturbing. My son, who is soon going to high school, uses the word "of" in sentences instead of "have" and "they're" instead of "their". He seems to be taught few of the basic language skills at school. Is he expected to pick these up? I do not mean to sound old-fashioned, but I firmly believe that grammar, spelling and punctuation should be taught properly.

The acquisition and application of language skills underpin success in all areas of the curriculum. Educational styles tend to move in cycles: there have been periods when it was fashionable to focus on key language skills, and others when they have diminished in perceived importance. The rigor of teaching these skills also varies from school to school even today, depending on the type of curriculum and the pedagogy that runs alongside. The range of approaches is wide but whatever the school's strategy, these basic language skills are important - they need to be taught explicitly. I firmly believe that grammar, spelling and punctuation should be taught properly

This is not to say that the teaching of grammar and punctuation has to be dull. Perhaps this was the case in days gone by of endless drills and boring dictation. Research shows that when these skills are taught in context, making relevant links to the learning in class, they can be more meaningful for children, making it more likely that they retain the key concepts. For example, teaching reading comprehension skills through researching areas of interest or teaching drafting and editing skills through creative writing is already taking place.

This tends to be much more interesting for students than a grammar lesson that is unrelated to anything. Teaching in context takes careful planning by the teacher to make sure that basic language skills are covered in an organized way. Some research goes as far as to say that pupils transfer very few de-contextualised skills to their other work. A student may get full marks on a spelling test yet spell poorly in free-writing exercises. In some schools there has been a move away from teaching the basics, or the three Rs. Sometimes, teachers can be constrained by a tight timetable which leaves little time for explicit language teaching.

Recent international tests have shown that standards of literacy are slipping, and as a result there has been a concerted effort to teach grammar, spelling and punctuation. This not only includes writing skills but also reading, speaking and listening. Strong language skills will set a student up for success in most subjects. To write in an effective way, children need to be able to use adjectives and verbs, and communicate with their readers in an intelligible manner.

Conventional spelling and grammar these days is being eroded with shortcuts used in social networking. Although some children know the difference and can easily switch between the two, others can find this confusing and get into bad habits. This does not change the fact that young people should be able to write grammatically correct English. Spelling is becoming a less important skill due to spell-check programs but students still need to understand the conventions of spelling and basic etymology where appropriate.

It may be difficult to define standard English but the ability to articulate ideas clearly and concisely is increasingly important in our information-rich modern societies. Children should be preparing themselves to engage fully in this process. It is not old fashioned to expect grammar, spelling and punctuation to be taught properly. This is a vital part of primary education, laying the foundation for secondary school and beyond.

Julie McGuire teaches at a Hong Kong primary school.

This article appeared in the South China Morning Post print edition as Teaching of literacy skills being eroded.

Family Literacy Day

January 25 2014
12 to 3pm
Confederation Centre Art
Gallery



Family Literacy Day is a national awareness initiative created by ABC Life Literacy Canada in 1999. It is held annually on January 27 to raise awareness of the importance of reading and engaging in other literacy related activities as a family. More than 1.5 million Canadians have already participated in the initiative since its debut. Taking time every day to read or do a learning activity with children is crucial to a child's development. Even just 15 minutes a day can improve a child's literacy skills dramatically, and can help a parent improve their skills as well.

The PEI Literacy Alliance has been celebrating Family Literacy Day since its creation. This year will be our 14th year hosting a special event for families. We will be hosting our event at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery on Saturday, January 25 from 12-3pm. This event is free.

This year's theme is "15 Minutes of Fun", encouraging Canadian families to have "15 Minutes of Fun" learning together. Learning can happen at any time. Practicing literacy together every day has tremendous benefits for both children and parents.

Last year's event hosted over 200 Island families for a day of fun filled learning. This year, families will enjoy two performances from The Music Man, a reading from Corey Tremere of Ocean 100, a puppet show presented by the PEI Public Library Service and more. There will be face-painting, information booths, snacks and an art table.

For more information please contact the PEI Literacy Alliance at 902-368-1810.

Family Literacy Tips for

Parents

Ask your child questions about a story to make sure they understand.

Book family time to read every day.

Create a special reading place in your home, with favorite books within reach.

Donate funds to the literacy cause!

Encourage children to read words on TV, street signs, and t-shirts.

Find new stories to read with every week. Vary their length and subject matter.

Give time to read to a child.

Have a child read a book to you.

International Literacy Day is Sept. 8 every year. Celebrate the day by reading to a child.

January 25 is Family Literacy Day! Join us for our annual celebration.

Keep teens reading. Give them books, newspaper articles and magazines that interest them.

Let children count change when making a purchase. Reinforce the importance of math in everyday life!

Make every day a learning day. Ask your children to make a shopping list, read recipes weekly or help them make a calendar.

Newborns benefit from reading too!

Organize a children's book club with friends.

Pick one night a week to make a regular visit to the library.

Quiet, cozy reading spaces are good places for your child to read alone.

Remember that children learn by example - if you read your children will too!

Start early! It's never too early to read to your children.

Treat a child to a story a day.

Use reading time to create a special bond with a child.

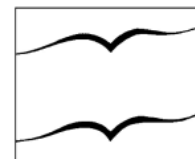
Volunteer your time. Family literacy groups can use your help tutoring adults, reading to children and with administrative tasks.

Write a letter.

X-ercise your mind! Literacy is like a muscle. If you don't use it you lose it!

You are the key to improving a child's reading ability by placing a high priority on reading in your home.

Zap off the TV - pick up a book instead.



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December 2013 Bursary Winners



(L to R) Winner Crystal Arsenault with Instructor Karen Ford Doyle

Crystal plans to become an Resident Care Worker.

Her instructor Karen said, “Crystal is an extremely hard worker who has some memory challenges but she continues to remain positive and approach each day with a pleasant attitude and a smile on her face.”

Judy is very determined to complete her GED and this shows in her work ethic.

“Judy has dealt with many challenges throughout her life but has worked constantly to move ahead. She is a very kind person who goes out of her way to help everyone,” says instructor Lois.



(L to R) Winner Judy Blakely with Instructor Lois Praught



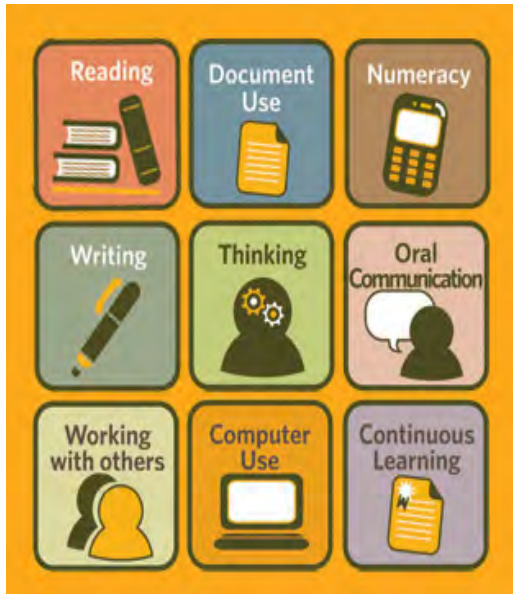
(L to R) Winner Kayla MacLeod with Instructor Karen Ford Doyle

Kayla dreams of running her own daycare.

Karen stated that “Kayla is a determined young lady. She has set short term goals and accomplished them. The smile this put on her face was amazing. Kayla is moving forward with a whole new outlook on life.”

Thanks to Lois and Karen for the photos.

Family Literacy and Essential Skills



The Canadian government recognizes **nine essential skills** that are used in in daily life. We use these skills everyday and can share them with our families.

Taking time every day to read or do a learning activity with children is crucial to a child's development. Even just 15 minutes a day can improve a child's literacy and essential skills dramatically, and can help a parent improve their skills as well.

Try spending 15 minutes developing skills with these fun activities.



Reading Text: Try reading a story to your child, or have them read to you. You could also try playing a game of "I Spy Letters" using signs, packages or the newspaper.



Writing: Have your child write out the grocery list, you may find Oreos and ice cream at the top of the list!



Oral Communication: Use mealtime for everyone to share stories about their day.



Working With Others: Get outside! Plant a garden, rake the leaves or build a snowman together.



Thinking Skills: Ask your child questions about the stories you read together, such as what will happen next?



Numeracy: Have your child help measure out the ingredients for your favorite family recipe.



Computer Use: Write an email to a loved one together.



Document Use: Help your child make a calendar of upcoming birthdays and family activities.



Continuous Learning: Sign up for a family cooking or martial arts class.

The Back Page

Thank You

Many thanks to First Book Canada for supplying us with books that we used for contest prizes and Christmas gifts for children who visit the Food Bank.



A Foal, Five Kittens and Confederation

This intriguing name is the working title for Deirdre Kessler's children's book about Confederation. The Alliance has contracted Deirdre and illustrator Brenda Jones to produce this book as part of the 2014 celebration.

The Alliance was awarded a grant to help us complete the work and honor the 150th anniversary of the first Charlottetown meeting to form Confederation.

We expect to launch the book at the Confederation Centre Art Gallery on August 28, 2014.

\$750 Bursaries for Adult Learners

This bursary is a \$750 grant for adults who are working toward a grade 12 certificate or grade 12 equivalency (GED). Up to ten bursaries will be awarded this year.

To qualify, you must be an adult who:

- has not completed grade 12 or your GED
- has been out of the school system for at least three years
- is in or plans to enter an upgrading program in PEI, and
- needs financial assistance

The deadline for applications is March 1, 2014.

Visit <http://bit.ly/JYuMWu> for details and an application form.