# Dimensions

## of Early Childhood

Supporting the Child Who is Shy in the Classroom

Apoyando en el aula a los niños que son tímidos

We're All in this Together: Relationships, Responsibilities, Reciprocity, and Resilience

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# It Starts with Relationships

**Debbie Ferguson**

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." This inspiring Maya Angelou quote speaks to the importance of building effective relationships with others. In a way, it was relationships that brought me to this incredible field of early childhood education.

I was introduced to the world of childcare almost 30 years ago as a parent when I enrolled our 14-month-old in a preschool in Nashville, Tenn. I quit my job in property management to stay home to care for our child when he was born.

Handing my son over on his first day to a stranger was one of the hardest and best things I have ever done! Even through my helicopter parenting moments, those early childhood educators patiently answered my questions, listened to my concerns and helped me become a better mother. The relationship that was fostered during that process reminds me often how important our role is in fostering positive, loving relationships with children and their families. The teachers always made me feel what a great mother I was, even on those days I struggled.

Looking back, I realize through their kindness and their willingness to teach ME without making me feel inadequate, my son was the real beneficiary from these relationships.

I'm proud to share that I have stayed connected with those amazing educators, and we have become life-long friends as a result of the love they invested to build that relationship with me. They truly made a difference in my life.

The 71st annual SECA conference theme this year is "It Starts with Relationships." I have had the pleasure of reviewing many of the presentations that will be offered, and our conference program will not disappoint! We are thrilled that Pam Schiller will offer our keynote address. We will be in Tulsa, Oklahoma February 27-29 at the Hyatt Regency. You can find more information on our website www.seca.info.

I am honored to begin my term as your president. I will have the pleasure over the next two years to travel across all fourteen SECA states. I would love to buy you a cup of coffee or tea so that we can begin building these important relationships and make a difference in the lives of children and families. I want to take these opportunities to listen to your concerns, learn how SECA can support you and help you make connections in your communities.

Stay up to date on our social media pages and look for those #SippinwithSECA moments! Thank you for all you do daily to connect with the children you serve.
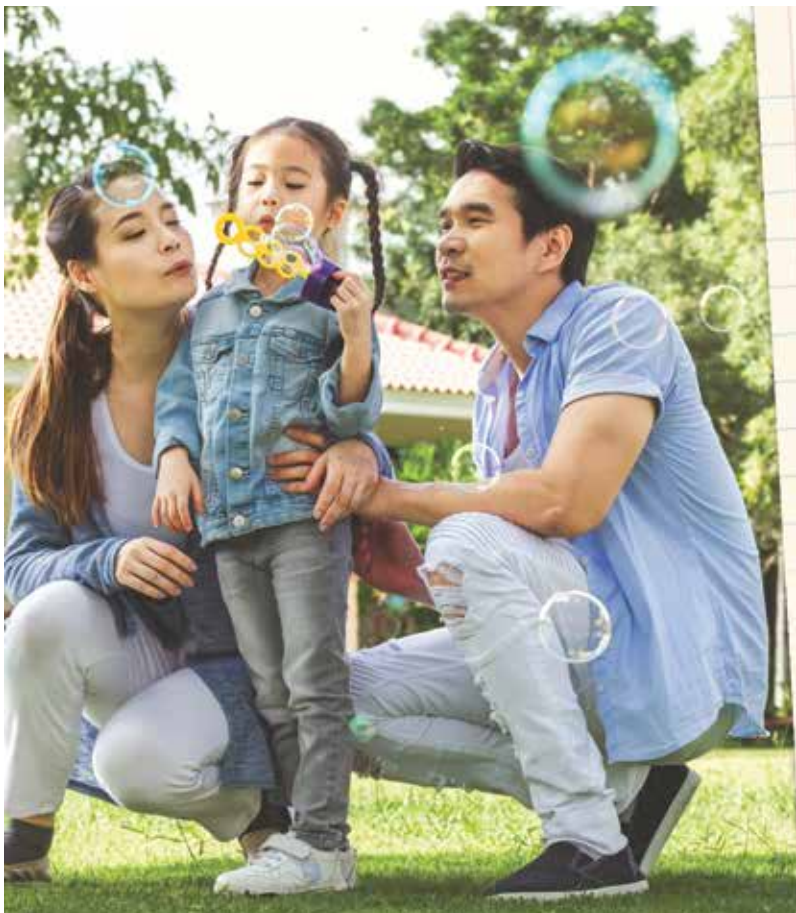
# Relationships, the Key to Individual Success

**Wilma Robles-Melendez**
**Guest Editor**

As a child, I still remember the time when after a minor accident, my mother softly caressed my arm while she sang one of our childhood rhymes, which magically made everything else disappear. Moments like that are treasured times when one realizes that someone else cares about you. They are another reminder about the power of relationships and how they make you feel. Images of a parent cuddling their infant, of family members enjoying a walk with their young child, or of a concerned teacher responding to a student in need, all speak to the magic of relationships.

Relationships, the special connection that bonds children and adults together, continue to be the foundation for individual wellbeing. During the early years, feelings of being connected to others–of being understand and known–are a critical factor as children build their sense about self and others. From birth, relationships play a leading role influencing a child's holistic development. Relationships glue us together as individuals as we connect with others and as our own understanding of others influences our actions and decisions. How we connect and build relationships with others happens in a variety of ways. Yet, they all pursue the same goal: connecting us together to support our own social and emotional wellbeing, as well as that of others. In this issue, the four articles that are included present a variety of perspectives about relationships and expanding views about its role and influence in early childhood practices.

In her article, Helene Arbouet Harte reminds early childhood professionals about the role and importance of relationships and how foster children aim to reach their full potential, all within the framework of respect. Sharing some of her own experiences, Mushira Shamsi addresses the challenges faced by the shy child and guides us to consider the influence of understanding relationships with teachers. Danika Aday, Alison Kenney and Cathy Grace present another perspective on relationships, reminding us how what is learned about the life realities of children connect and guide us to bring social justice into their experiences. Finally, Jennifer Longley and Jennifer Gilken examine the mentoring process and its role helping early childhood professionals establish successful relationships with children in the context of the classroom. We hope each article provides new ideas and expands your views on the role of relationships, leading you to reflect on the power of relationships and how they support a child's development.

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Aún recuerdo como de pequeña en una ocasión en que tuviera un pequeño accidente, mi madre cariñosamente tarareó una nana tradicional mientras acariciaba mi brazo y así, mágicamente, me olvidé de lo ocurrido. Estos son los momentos que atesoramos al saber que hay otras personas para quienes somos importantes. Son estas experiencias las que nos llevan a darnos cuenta sobre el poder que tienen las relaciones y de cómo estas nos hacen sentir. Cada vez que vemos a los padres acariciando a su bebe, a las familias y sus niños sonrientemente disfrutando de un paseo, o a una maestra consolando a uno de sus pequeños alumnos llegamos a comprender el poder y magia que tienen las relaciones. Las relaciones, esa conexión especial que une a niños y adultos, sigue siendo el fundamento para el bienestar individual. Durante la edad temprana, el sentirnos que estamos conectados con otros, que otros nos comprenden y conocen es un factor vital que contribuye al desarrollo del sentido de sí mismo y la consideracion con los otros. Desde el nacimiento, las relaciones juegan un papel primordial influyendo en el desarrollo general de los niños y niñas. Las relaciones con otros son el elemento que nos une como individuos mientras establecemos lazos que nos conectan con los demás permitiéndonos conocerlos, lo cual influye en nuestras decisiones y acciones.

Cómo establecemos relaciones que nos conectan con los demás implica la variedad de perspectivas en que estas ocurren. Todas persiguen el mismo objetivo: apoyar nuestro bienestar socioemocional así como el de otros. En esta edición, los cuatro artículos que presentamos ofrecen diferentes perspectivas sobre las relaciones con otros llevándonos a ampliar la visión sobre el rol e influencia que estas tienen en las prácticas de la educación temprana. En su artículo, Helene Arbouett Harte nos recuerda a los profesionales de la educación temprana sobre la importancia y rol de las relaciones y de cómo estas promueven el desarrollo del potencial de los niños y niñas, visto desde el marco de respeto y consideración. Compartiendo algunas de sus experiencias, Mushira Shamsi nos habla sobre los retos que enfrentan los niños tímidos y nos lleva a ver cómo influyen las relaciones con maestros que les conocen y entienden. Por otro lado, Danika Aday, Alison Kenney and Cathy Grace presentan otra perspectiva sobre las relaciones y que surgen de las reflexiones de dos estudiantes y su profesora. Las mismas nos recuerdan como lo que conocemos sobre las realidades que viven los niños nos conecta con lo que viven llevándonos a establecer experiencias en el aula ancladas en la justicia social. Finalmente, Jennifer Longley y Jennifer Gilken examinan el rol de los mentores en la educación temprana y como contribuyen a apoyar a los profesionales de la educación temprana a establecer relaciones exitosas con los niños en el contexto del aula escolar. Esperamos que cada artículo sea fuente de ideas que amplíen la forma en que vemos el rol de las relaciones y guiándonos a reflexionar sobre el poder que tienen las mismas en el desarrollo de los niños y niñas.

# Supporting the Child Who is Shy in the Classroom

**By Mushira Shamsi**



Children who feel shy may wish to hide from the world.

desire to reach, touch and inspire all children in the classroom so that they may bloom and grow to their maximum heights. Children who feel shy, perhaps because of the quiet cocoon they may live in, often get overlooked and may thus not reach the promise of their potential. Educators may not only have disregarded these children, but also the whole issue this implies for the actualization of human capability. This article presents a focused and respectful understanding of and strategies for teachers to help the child who feels shy move forward toward emotional liberty and security. In her book *Complete Confidence*, Hankin (2004) says, "To be confident, a person must walk a path of freedom, arriving at a place called Emotional Maturity" (p.1).

As a child growing up, I loved my school friends, and revered my teachers. Indeed, I have golden memories of my school life. Except for one thing…. I felt very shy in the classroom. I had a hard time speaking or being in the limelight. My teachers wrote in my report cards consistently that I was a refined but reticent child. Most teachers accepted my quietness, were kind and tried to help me emerge from my shell. However, I had one teacher who was angry with me for not participating more in class. So great was her annoyance that one day, when she asked a question and as usual, I did not raise my hand, she threw the blackboard eraser at me and shouted furiously, "I **_know_** you know the answer but you just won't answer!" Luckily, I ducked and was not hurt. Shockingly violent as this outburst was, the point to note is that this teacher did not understand my trait of shyness[1]. It is more likely, however, that teachers overlook children who are shy because of their silent obedience.

In the heart of every early childhood professional lies the deep

## Understanding Shyness

### Definition

The research on shyness is limited. According to Blankson, O'Brien, Leerkes, Marcovitch, and Calkins (2011), "Although there are currently different conceptualizations about the origins and definitions of shyness, one common thread among various definitions is that shyness involves wariness about, and fear of, people and social stimuli that are unfamiliar" (p. 106). Shyness is seen as a predisposition to be fearful of being rejected by others and causes inhibited behavior, quietness, awkwardness, and discomfort in social situations.

### Statistics

Butler (2008) indicates that only about five percent of adults believe they have never been shy at all, and about 80% of people say that they experienced periods of pronounced shyness during childhood and adolescence. It seems that over half the people

[1] Editor's note: There is NEVER a reason for violent behavior towards children.

who felt shy grow out of the problem to a large degree, but about 40% of people in America still describe themselves as shy.

## Causes
Although there is agreement among researchers that shyness may be an inherited trait, what is significant for teachers is there is even stronger agreement between authorities on this subject, that environment and child guidance may determine ultimately whether a child will be shy or not (Shapiro, 2000). Studies by Blankson, O'Brien, Leerkes, Marcovitch, and Calkins, (2011) indicate shyness is modified when parents and teachers are taught to guide their young children to be more at ease.

Children who feel shy may be apprehensive and fearful.

In their longitudinal study, Zhang et al. (2017) conclude that, "Given the early emergence of negative social and academic correlates of shyness, efforts to improve shy children's school adjustment may be needed to occur early in the school years" (p.477).

## Features of Shyness and Related Strategies for Teachers

### Physical Features of Shyness
Based on a neurobiological analysis, shyness can be seen as an over-generalized fear response. According to Carducci (1999) the main physical effects of shyness as a stress response may include dry mouth, clammy hands, upset stomach, tension headaches, faintness, stuttering, pounding heart, sheepish grin, downcast eyes, silence, and speaking in an unnatural voice. Zimbardo (1981) suggests that adrenaline may shoot up, pulse may race, stuttering or silence may follow, butterflies may flutter around the stomach and a blush may follow.

Five Strategies for Addressing Physical Features of Shyness. Teachers can address the physical traits of shyness to support children in the classroom in several ways. Here are some ideas.

1. **Relaxation techniques.** Deep breathing, yoga, music, quiet reading, stretching, stress-relieving toys and solitary spaces in the classroom help to disengage the stress response (Foxman, 2004). Shapiro (2000) suggests that we teach the child to take three steps forward when she is afraid to do something new, and to take a deep slow breath after each step. This will have the combined effect of bringing her closer to the situation that is making her nervous and also keeping her anxious feelings in check.

2. **A well-organized environment.** A predictable schedule calms the agitated brain. Zimbardo (1981) suggests arriving a little earlier can ease the children who are shy into the classroom, and parents can help with this. Having an aquarium with fish swimming peacefully, softer light and calming music are also a help.

3. **The process of growth through play.** Play is natural, non-threatening, self-paced, and low stress for children of all ages. Using play as the vehicle for teaching and learning is optimal for all children, but especially meaningful for the child who feels shy.

4. **Affirmations in physical ways.** A loving touch or hug is worth a thousand words. A daily, warm, individual greeting starts the day well for the child who feels shy.

5. **Smooth, well-planned transitions.** For older children, time reminders, as well as smart techniques to move children gradually from one activity to another reduces stress; for infants Shapiro (2000) recommends making sure baby has a comfort object like a teddy to ease transitions

### Socio-emotional Features of Shyness
Longitudinal studies by Tu & Erath (2013) point to shyness as being connected to social disturbances such as behavior inhibition, peer rejection, anxiety, depression, and loneliness in preschool years, with these relationships extending into adolescence.

The main socio-emotional effects of shyness, according to Han, Wu, Tian, Xu, and Gao (2014) include anxiety, low self-esteem, and withdrawal from social interactions. Children who feel shy are more prone to peer rejection, loneliness, and are likely to be

Shyness as a trait persists as children grow unless addressed.

ucators should give children strokes for effort, not just results, build on talents, hobbies, and interests while at the same time avoiding pushing children further into their shell by forcing performance of talents. This elicits shyness.

**5. Opportunities for healthy social interaction.** Educators must gently introduce friends or new experiences into their comfort zone first and later scaffold them to widen this zone. Teach the words and provide practice for pleasantries, etiquette that helps to form relationships. Placing an emphasis on cooperation and consideration in class rather than competition, and staying away from any comparisons between children helps. Teachers must never single children out or humiliate them, and any bullying must be immediately addressed.

more dependent on the teacher. This does not promote the establishment of good teacher-child relationship and peer relationship. Shyness has a negative correlation with positive emotions.

**Five Strategies for Addressing Socio-emotional Features of Shyness.** Teachers can support children who feel shy in the classroom in several ways to build their socio-emotional coping skills, as well as by changing educator attitudes toward children.

**1. Recognition of their condition.** Witkin (1999) suggests seeing shyness as a trait, not a flaw. Educators should try seeing the world from the child's perspective and help put shyness into perspective by sharing how each person is unique and special and should be loved for who they are. Rather than the label of one who is "shy", identifying the child as someone who is a good listener, as a deep thinker, and as respectful of others' opinions, is helpful.

**2. Positive messages.** Aim at appreciation and encouragement (over global empty praise), which are crucial for healthy self-esteem. Children who feel shy will also benefit from positive self-talk (Foxman, 2004).

**3. Authoritative guidance style.** This style of guidance helps the child know that the love of their teachers is unconditional. Blame and criticism intensify shyness, so guidance should focus on clear communication skills, clarity, consistency, calmness, and responsive respect.

**4. Extra recognition and boosting of unique talents.** Teachers can understand every child's unique way of smartness and can identify and build upon the child's strengths, thus enhancing self-esteem and shaping their personalities (Foxman, 2004). Ed-

## Cognitive Features of Shyness

Shyness strongly affects the child in learning situations. Blankson et al. (2011) indicate that some cognitive factors linked to shyness include reduced concentration on the current assignment and constricted intake, storage and retrieval of incoming information. One is unable to pluck up the courage to ask questions in the classroom, thus losing out on learning opportunities. The nagging feeling of inadequacy may lead to a need for approval from others. Saying 'no' may be difficult and may cause taking up more responsibility than one is capable of handling. These children may become perfectionists, pushing themselves to overwhelming limits to gratify others.

**Five Strategies for Addressing Cognitive Features of Shyness.** Teachers can address the cognitive characteristics that plague children who feel shy in the classroom by using several strategies themselves and teaching them to children as well

**1. The art of rehearsal.** Rehearsing new situations helps the child who is shy. Shapiro (2000) suggests that if the child is afraid of birthday parties, teachers can have a pretend birthday party with stuffed animals. Being concrete helps visualization of all detailed sequences, so there are no surprises. This cognitive rehearsal helps connections between the emotional and thinking brain to flow.

**2. Articulation of feelings.** Educators must listen, understand, provide vocabulary, and paraphrase what children are feeling. Understanding and acceptance of one's feelings brings peace.

*Every child who feels shy can be successful.*

**3. Sharing one's story of shyness.** Educators can tell how they overcame their shyness and thus be role models (Carducci, 1999). Children can see their teachers as live examples who demonstrate how to be "successfully shy" by developing coping strategies for this condition.

**4. Supportive classroom structures.** Planning mixed-age pairings is a good idea according to Zimbardo (1981). When older children who feel shy are paired with younger children for brief periods, they become less withdrawn later in groups their own age. Small group activities and one-to-one pairings in projects ease shyness. Offering private help in preparing speeches and recitals will also help.

**5. More time to respond to questions.** After asking a question, we must wait a little longer for the child to come up with an answer. More processing time helps children who feel shy in the classroom increase their comfort level and reduce the pressure to respond.

## Conclusion

Studies by researchers Han, Wu, Tian, Xu, and Gao (2014) and also Sette, Baumgartner, and Schneider (2014) verify that warm, open and close relationships of children who feel shy with teachers, along with teacher support and guidance, does moderate and mitigate the negative effects of shyness. Recognizing, understanding, and working with the emotion of shyness in the classroom will unlock the hidden potential of those children who experience it. Teachers are in the perfect position to empower children who feel shy to realize their full and immense promise. Whether shyness is a friend or a foe depends upon our awareness and how we address it in our classrooms. Every child who is shy in the classroom can shine.

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# Apoyando en el aula a los niños que son tímidos

**Por Mushira Shamsi**



Los niños tímidos parecen querer esconderse del mundo.

por ser ignorados, sino que muchas veces por su condición de timidez, los educadores no se percatan de las implicaciones que esta conlleva para maximizar su capacidad humana.

Con gran respeto, este artículo presenta una serie de puntos y estrategias a dirigidos a los maestros para ayudar al niño con timidez a superar emocionalmente el mismo y a sentirse seguro. En su libro, *Complete confidenc*e, Hankin (2004) señala que, "para tener confianza en sí mismo, una persona debe tomar la senda donde sea libre llegando al lugar llamado madurez emocional" (p.1).

Durante mi niñez, tuve gran cariño para mis amigos de la escuela y sentía gran admiración por mis maestros. Sin duda, tengo recuerdos muy hermosos de mis experiencias en la escuela. Excepto por una cosa … era muy tímida en el salón. Me era muy difícil hablar o sentir que era el centro de atención de los demás. Mis maestros siempre escribieron en los informes de notas que tenía buena conducta pero que siempre estaba muy callada. La mayoría de mis maestros aceptaron mi forma de ser, fueron cariñosos y trataron de ayudarme a dejar atrás mi timidez. Sin embargo, tuve una maestra que demostró gran enojo por mi poca participación en clase.

Tanto fue su enojo que un día, cuando hizo una pregunta y, como de costumbre, no levante mi mano para contestar, me lanzó el borrador y con enfado dijo: "¡Sé que sabes la respuesta, pero no quieres contestar!" Tuve suerte y pude esquivar el borrador. Su violenta respuesta sin duda es difícil de entender y el punto a notar es que esta maestra no pudo comprender mi timidez. Sin duda, es muy común que los maestros no se percaten de los niños tímidos debido a su callada obediencia.

Profesionalmente, para todo educador del nivel infantil su mayor compromiso es llegar a entender, apoyar e inspirar a los niños y niñas para que estos alcancen su máximo desarrollo. Los niños que son tímidos, dada la callada forma en que viven, muchas veces pasan desapercibidos, y, por tanto, muchos no llegan a lograr la promesa de su potencial. No solo terminan estos niños

## Comprendamos la timidez

### Definición
Las investigaciones sobre la timidez son limitadas. De acuerdo con Blankson, O'Brien, Leerkes, Marcovitch y Calkins (2011), "aunque actualmente hay diferentes opiniones sobre los orígenes y definiciones sobre la timidez, un punto en común en las varias definiciones es que la timidez implica sentimientos de cautela y temor de la gente y de los estímulos sociales que no son familiares" (p. 106). La timidez es vista como una predisposición a tener miedo a ser rechazado por otros lo cual resulta en conductas de inhibición, silencio, vergüenza y de sentirse incomodos en situaciones sociales.

### Lo que nos dicen las estadísticas
Butler (2008) indica que entre los adultos solo un cinco porciento considera no haber sido tímidos mientras que un 80 porciento de la gente dejaron saber que en algún momento experimentaron algo de timidez durante su niñez y adolescencia. Al parecer, más de la mitad de aquellos que fueron tímidos pudieron superar su condición. Sin embargo, cerca de un 40 porciento de la gente en los Estados Unidos aún siguen describiéndose a sí mismos como tímidos.

### Causas

Aunque los investigadores están de acuerdo en que la timidez es una característica hereditaria, lo que es importante para los educadores es que, según Shapiro (2000), entre las autoridades en este tema hay mayor acuerdo sobre el hecho de que el ambiente y apoyo al desarrollo socioemocional es lo que finalmente puede determinar si un niño es tímido o no. Estudios realizados por Blankson et al., (2011) demostraron que la timidez se modifica cuando los padres y maestros aprenden a guiar a los niños a sentirse con más confianza. En su estudio longitudinal, Zhan, Eggum-Wilkens, Eisenberg y Spinrad (2017) concluyeron que, "dada la pronta correlación de las experiencias negativas sociales y académicas con la timidez, es necesario dedicar esfuerzos durante la edad temprana para optimar el ajuste de los niños tímidos al ambiente escolar" (p. 477).



Muchos esperan a vencer su timidez para disfrutar una mejor vida.

## Características de la timidez y estrategias para los maestros

### Características físicas de la timidez

Según un análisis neurobiológico, la timidez puede verse como una respuesta general al miedo. De acuerdo con Carducci (1999), los principales efectos físicos de la timidez como respuesta a una situación estresante pueden incluir las siguientes: boca seca, manos sudorosas, malestar estomacal, dolor de cabeza, desmayos, tartamudeo, expresiones de temor, palpitaciones, silencio, mirada baja y cambio en el habla. Las observaciones realizadas por Zimbardo (1981) sugieren que los niveles de adrenalina pueden aumentar, acrecentando el pulso y siguiendo al mismo el balbuceo o silencio mientras se siente un "mariposeo" en el estómago seguido del bochorno en el rostro.

**Cinco estrategias para atender los cambios físicos que provoca la timidez.** Hay varias formas en que los maestros en el salón de clases los pueden responder a los cambios físicos que manifiestan los niños tímidos. A continuación, se ofrecen varias ideas.

**1. Técnicas de relajación.** Respirar profundamente, la música, la lectura relajante, ejercicios de estrechamiento, juego con juguetes relajantes y los espacios que ofrecen privacidad en el aula ayudan a disminuir el estrés (Foxman, 2004). Shapiro (2000) sugiere que cuando los niños sientan temor de hacer algo nuevo les enseñemos a dar tres pasos hacia adelante y a lentamente respirar profundamente cada vez que tomen un paso. Esto permitirá al niño aproximarse a lo que le hace sentir temeroso mientras considera sus propios sentimientos.

**2. Un ambiente bien organizado.** Un programa de actividades que sean predecibles contribuye a aplacar cualquier sentimiento de desasosiego. Según Zimbardo (1981), llegar temprano a la escuela también ayuda a que los niños tímidos se sientan más seguros. Los padres pueden colaborar trayendo a sus hijos un poco más temprano. Tener un acuario con peces, luz tenue y música suave también son de gran ayuda.

**3. Crecer mientras se juega.** El juego es algo natural, no amenazante, autorregulado y de bajo estrés para los niños de todas las edades. Usar el juego como un vehículo para enseñar y aprender tiene un rol optimo para todos los pequeños, pero en especial para los niños que son tímidos.

**4. Expresiones de reafirmación de manera concreta.** Un toque o abrazo cariñoso vale más que mil palabras. Diariamente, para los niños tímidos, un saludo amable y personal es una manera que permite el buen inicio de las actividades del día.

**5. Transiciones bien planificadas.** Para los niños más grandes, recordatorios, así como técnicas para facilitar la transición de una actividad a otra contribuyen a reducir el estrés que puede

*Todo niño con timidez puede alcanzar el éxito.*

debe reconocer como son. En lugar de etiquetar al niño como "tímido," es más positivo identificarlo como alguien que sabe escuchar, que es un buen pensador y que respeta las opiniones de otros.

**2. Mensajes positivos.** Demuestra aprecio y ofrece ánimo (en lugar de reconocimiento hueco) lo cual es crucial para la buena autoestima. Los niños tímidos también se benefician de la auto-conversación positiva (Foxman, 2004).

**3. Estilo de guía de conducta autoritativo.** Este estilo de guía de conducta ayuda al niño a tomar conciencia de que el cariño de sus maestros es incondicional. La culpa y la crítica intensifican la timidez por lo que el manejo de conducta debe dar atención a las destrezas de comunicación, claridad, consistencia, calma y respuesta respetuosa.

**4. Acentuación en el reconocimiento y realce de los talentos particulares.** Los maestros entienden las diferentes capacidades y talentos únicos de cada niño colocando así la atención en sus fortalezas, que llevan a realzar su auto-estima y personalidad (Foxman, 2004). En el aula, los maestros deben dar merito por el esfuerzo, no solo por los resultados, de manera que se acentúen los talentos, actividades favoritas e intereses, mientras se evita incitar al niño aún más a retraerse al sentirse forzado. Sentirse forzado lleva a muchos a la timidez.

**5. Oportunidades para una interacción social saludable.** Conscientes del espacio de confort emocional, es importante que los educadores gradualmente introduzcan amigos o nuevas experiencias que luego pueden ayudar a expandir su espacio de bienestar. Enseñar palabras y practicar frases para socializar contribuye en la formación de relaciones con otros. Destacar la cooperación y consideración en lugar de la competencia asi como evitar hacer comparaciones entre los niños también sirve de ayuda. En el aula, los maestros jamás deben singularizar a un niño o causarles humillación, así como deben responder a cualquier bullying o atropello.

## Características socioemocionales de la timidez

Los estudios longitudinales de Tu y Erath (2013) señalan que la timidez está relacionada con dificultades en las relaciones sociales que llevan a conductas de inhibición, rechazo entre pares, ansiedad, depresión y soledad manifestados durante los años preescolares que llegan a extenderse a la adolescencia. Social y emocionalmente, los principales efectos de la timidez incluyen la ansiedad, baja autoestima y el aislamiento social (Han, Wu, Tian, Xu, y Gao, 2014). Aquellos que sientan timidez están mas propensos a ser rechazados por sus compañeros, se sienten solos y tienden a depender mas de sus maestros. Estas conductas interfieren con el buen desarrollo de relaciones entre maestro-niño y con otros niños. La timidez tiene una correlación negativa con las emociones positivas.

**Cinco estrategias para responder a las características socioemocionales causadas por la timidez.** En el aula, los maestros pueden ayudar a los niños y niñas con timidez a desarrollar sus destrezas socioemocionales para manejar situaciones difíciles, así como también pueden variar su actitud hacia los niños tímidos. Algunas de las estrategias incluyen las que siguen.

**1. Reconocer su condición de timidez.** Witkin (1999) sugiere ver la timidez como una característica, no una falta. Los maestros deben hacer esfuerzos para ver las cosas desde la perspectiva del niño viendo la timidez como un aspecto y destacando como cada individuo es único y especial a quien se

### Características cognitivas de la timidez

La timidez es un factor que significativamente afecta el aprendizaje en el niño. Blankson et al, (2011) indican que algunos de los factores cognitivos relacionados con la timidez incluyen la reducción en la concentración en lo que se realiza y aprende, lo que se internaliza y de la información que se recuerda. El hecho de no atreverse a hacer preguntas en el salón de clases hace

que desaprovechen las oportunidades para aprender. El sentimiento de no poder puede llevarlos a necesitar la aprobación de los demás. Decir "no" puede resultar difícil y llevarlos a tomar responsabilidades más allá de lo que es viable para ellos. Estos niños pueden llegar a ser perfeccionistas exigiéndose a sí mismo mucho más de su capacidad para hacer sentir bien a otros.

**Cinco estrategias para atender las características cognitivas relacionadas a la timidez.** En el aula, los maestros podemos tomar pasos para atender los rasgos cognitivos que afectan a los niños tímidos, usando varias estrategias, así como también enseñando las mismas a los pequeños.

**1. El arte de ensayar.** Ensayar algunas situaciones sirve de ayuda a los niños tímidos. Shapiro (2000) sugiere que, si el niño siente temor por las fiestas de cumpleaños, en el aula los maestros pueden tener celebraciones de cumpleaños con muñecos de peluche. Tener experiencias concretas ayudan a visualizar los detalles y secuencia de actividades por lo cual no habrá sorpresas. Cognitivamente, a través del ensayo se forman conexiones mentales entre las emociones y el pensamiento.

**2. Expresar los sentimientos.** Es importante para los educadores escuchar, entender, proveer palabras y parafrasear lo que los niños sienten. El entender y aceptar lo que uno siente trae paz.

**3. Compartir nuestra experiencia con la timidez.** Los educadores podemos compartir como vencimos la timidez y asi convertirnos en modelos para los niños (Carducci, 1999). Los niños pueden ver en sus maestros ejemplos reales que demuestran cómo ser "exitosamente tímido" al desarrollar estrategias para manejar esta condición.

**4. Organizar el aula para dar apoyo.** La planificación de grupos de varias edades resulta ser una buena idea (Zimbardo, 1981) para apoyar al nino timido. Cuando apareamos por períodos cortos a los niños de más edad que son tímidos con los mas chicos, estos tienden a sentirse menos retraidos luego con los de su propia edad. Actividades en grupos perquenos y participación en proyectos en pareja ayudan a reducir la timidez. Ofrecer ayuda en privado mientras se preparan para hablar o participar en una actividad también sirve de ayuda.

**5. Ofrecer tiempo adicional para contestar preguntas.** Al preguntar, debemos esperar más tiempo para que el niño tímido pueda contestar. El ofrecer más tiempo para procesar una pregunta contribuye a que se aumente su nivel de confort y reduce la presión para contestar.

## Conclusión

Los resultados de las investigaciones comprueban que las relaciones sinceras, en grupo o individualmente, entre los niños tímidos y sus maestros que cuentan con el apoyo y guía del docente contribuyen a moderar y mitigar los efectos negativos de la timidez. En el aula, reconocer, atender y entender la timidez nos ayuda a descubrir el potencial escondido de aquellos niños que la experimentan. Los maestros están en la mejor posición para empoderar a quienes sienten timidez para que estos puedan llegar a hacer realidad su completa e inmensa promesa. Si la timidez es algo positivo o un enemigo depende de nuestra concienciación y de cómo la atendemos en nuestras aulas. En el aula, cada niño que es tímido puede también llegar a brillar.

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# WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER:
## Relationships, Responsibilities, Reciprocity, and Resilience

**By Helene Arbouet Harte**



The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct outlines areas of responsibility in professional relationships with children, families, colleagues, and the community. Integral to these areas of responsibility is the notion that they exist within the context of relationships. Whether the aspirational best practices described in the ideals or the requirements expressed in the principles of the code, the behaviors reside in relationships. These professional relationships can help strengthen families, support colleagues, enrich communities, create effective teachers, and build resilient children. Indeed, one of the core values emphasized in the preamble is a commitment to "Recognize that children and adults achieve their full potential in the context of relationships that are based on trust and respect" (NAEYC, 2011, p.1).

Professional ethics are about right and wrong. Ethical behavior and best practices are not the same thing. Ethical behavior involves engaging in actions consistent with the responsibilities outlined in the NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct. Best Practices are what we know to be effective based on evidence from research and experience (Feeney & Freeman, 2018). While these are not the same thing, they are aligned. It is important to note that guidelines about the right things to do align with, and are grounded in, what we know about effective teaching and interactions. If early care and education providers act with inten-

tionality, honoring areas of responsibility and striving for those exemplary behaviors, this may be consistent with relationship building strategies and yield positive outcomes. The use of ethical behaviors relationship strategies and best practices overlap, ultimately helping children to be more resilient. (*See figure 1.*)
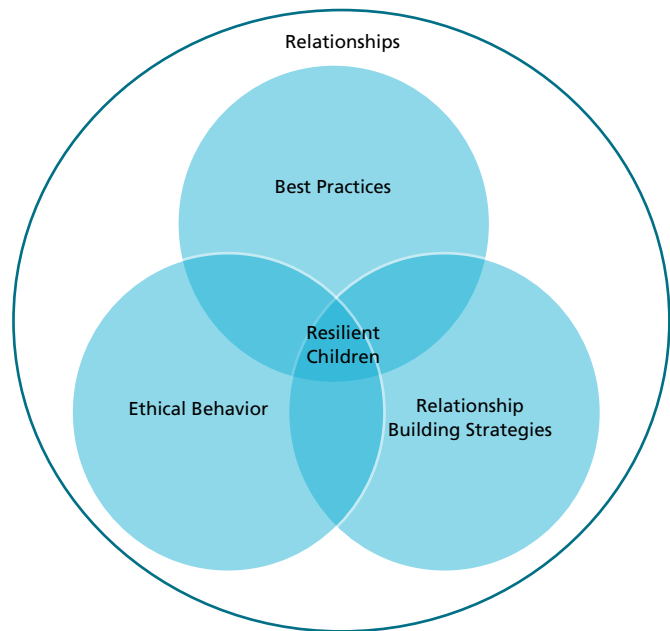
## Best Practices

A few examples of best practices include developmentally appropriate practice, anti-bias education, supporting equity and diversity, and family engagement. All of these practices take into consideration the context in which children live, supporting children in developing a positive self-identity, and collaborating with families to meet the needs of children.

Developmentally appropriate practice involves teachers as intentional decision makers taking into consideration what we know about child development, individual development and the social and cultural contexts of children to inform practice (NAEYC, 2009). Anti-bias education strives for each child to have a positive social identity, be comfortable with diversity, make authentic human connections, and to recognize and respond to unfairness and discrimination (Derman-Sparks & Edwards, 2010). Kuh, LeeKeenan, and Given (2019) remind us that this is a daily act embedded in interactions that goes beyond activities. It involves experiences teachers plan as well as teachable moments. It is also important to examine our own assumptions and beliefs. Their framework for anti-bias teaching provides a tool for teachers to consider entry points into thinking about children and families, personal feelings, meaningful planning, responding, and sharing anti-bias learning. It is not a one-time event, but a constant search for opportunities to learn, process, and make learning visible.

All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities. If we recognize the context in which children live to inform

Figure 1. Practices supporting resilient children



those themes are what build strong relationships. Relationship building with children includes responsive care and quality interactions. The quality of interactions between teachers and children influences outcomes for children socially, behaviorally, and academically (Burchinal et al., 2008).

## Ethical Behavior

Ethical behavior involves intentional decision making in various areas of responsibility to do the right thing. We have responsibilities that outline what we must do such as not harm children, communicate effectively with families, and maintain confidentiality. Even when it is difficult or uncomfortable, we are bound to speak out and act adhering to the responsibilities in the Code of Ethical Conduct (Feeney & Freeman, 2018). The importance of relationships as a component of ethical behavior is evident throughout the Code. For example, "We shall encourage development of strong bonds between children and their families and children and their teachers (P.-1.4), collaborating with communities to ensure cultural consistency (P-1.5), work to create a respectful environment for and a working relationship with all families (P-2.1), establish and maintain relationships of respect, trust, confidentiality, collaboration and cooperation with co-workers (I-3A.1)." Whether an ideal or a principle, relationships play a key role in ethical behavior. Doing the right thing on behalf of children and their families, as professionals, will hopefully lead to positive outcomes.

## Resilient Children

Relationships are integral to promoting effective teaching, meeting the needs of families, and creating a supportive work environment. If we look to guidelines such as Developmentally Appropriate Practice, the Code of Ethics, and tools for supporting equity and diversity, we will see relationships tied to resilience. Resilience is "a positive adaptive response in the face of significant adversity" (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015, p.1). While a range of internal and external factors influence resilience, certain positive influences can increase chances of developing resilience, helping the positive outweigh the negative. These include nurturing consistent, supportive adult relationships, helping children develop a sense of control in their lives, having a supportive context of cultural traditions and helping children develop executive function and self-regulation skills (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2015). Explicit teaching of self- regulation skills can help children have tools to cope and problem solve. All of these factors necessitate relationships in order to practice skills, experience supports, and build resilience.

practice, it is important to be aware of structural and systemic inequities, personal bias and implicit bias. In addition, teachers must avoid a deficit perspective and learn about children's strengths and background knowledge (Gillanders, 2019).

Families also have "funds of knowledge" which include knowledge and skills that serve as a resource their households utilize to survive and thrive in challenging situations (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992). Connecting with and learning from families can help build linkages between homes and schools. Family engagement supports children's learning as a key component of quality early childhood education (Koralek, Nemeth & Ramsey, 2019).

Professional organizations such as the Division for Early childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) support family engagement. Working with families benefits children, teachers, and families.

## Relationship Building Strategies

Building strong relationships with all families is integral to family engagement (Koralek et al., 2019). Part of building relationships with families is learning about them and sharing some of yourself. It is a partnership, and the relationship is reciprocal. Communication goes both ways. Teachers are responsive to families by acting on information shared to meet the needs of children. Educators also recognize the expertise about how children learn and grow (Koralek et al., 2019). Relationship building strategies with families involve learning about them, listening to them and collaborating with them. Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson and Beegle (2004) identified six interrelated themes of family-professional partnerships. These include communication, commitment, equality, skills, trust, and respect. The behaviors in which teachers engage to create a shared sense of meeting

The areas of responsibility early care and education providers have all require building positive relationships. Engaging in intentional strategies to nurture these relationships may result in positive outcomes for all stakeholders. **Table 1** includes an overview of the areas of responsibility, various strategies and potential results.

It is important for educators to build meaningful relationships rather than surface level ones. Derman-Sparks and Edwards (2010) describe how anti-bias education helps teachers stay away from the "tourist curriculum." In the tourist curriculum

**Table 1 Responsibilities, Relationships and Results**

| Area of Responsibility | Relationship Building Strategy | Potential Results |
|---|---|---|
| Relationships with children | Responsive interactions<br>Culture of care<br>Co-regulation<br>Create a safe, welcoming environment | • Engaged learners<br>• Self-regulation |
| Relationships with colleagues | Maintain confidentiality<br>Share resources<br>(NAEYC, 2011) | • Professional partnerships<br>• Positive school culture |
| Relationships with families | Reciprocal communication<br>Learn about families<br>Be reliable and committed. Show that you value children and their families.<br>(Blue-Banning et al., 2004) | • Authentic Partnerships<br>• Informed teachers<br>• Strong families<br>• Trust and respect |
| Relationships with the community | Go into the community.<br>Invite community members into the classroom. | • Making Learning Visible<br>• Professionalizing the Early childhood profession<br>• Problem Based Learning and Place Based education within the community |

teachers focus on food, clothing and holidays. As a tourist you briefly visit, only getting a glimpse of a culture without the reality of daily life. When you return home from your visit that is viewed as the "norm." Just as one can have a tourist curriculum that minimizes people and reinforces stereotypes, you can be a tourist in a relationship. We can fall prey to minimizing families and children to assumptions and stereotypes. Rather than a tourist, one could be an ally. An ally works alongside members of a community to help meet their needs, listening to them, following their lead and recognizing unique strengths. In order to create a caring community of learners, a key practice identified in developmentally appropriate practice guidelines (NAEYC, 2009), building consistent, caring relationships with children, teachers and families we must use a range of relationship building strategies to listen, learn, and become allies.

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# Mentoring in Early Childhood Settings: Elements of Effective Relationships

**By Jennifer M. Longley and Jennifer M. Gilken**



*There is a reciprocal process between the mentor and the mentee*

skills in student interns, volunteers, and early childhood professionals. Some teachers request or accept a student intern or volunteer with the idea that the person will simply provide extra help in their classroom; however, this perception underestimates the tremendous amount of influence mentors have in shaping the future of the profession. Mentees tend to use their mentors' practices more often than they use practices learned in other contexts, such as teacher preparation programs (Agbenyega, 2012).

Early childhood educators take on many roles over the course of their careers. One role is that of mentor. Although mentors serve a variety of functions, they primarily act as role models, facilitators, and collaborators (Kupila, Ukkonen-Mikkola, & Rantala, 2017). Mentors offer advice, guidance, counseling (Altes & Pinholster, 2013), support, and assistance. This arrangement can be formal, such as when it is organized through an organization, or informal, such as when a person asks someone with more experience to be their mentor.In early childhood education, mentoring can involve teachers working with volunteers, student interns, teacher's aides, assistant teachers, newer teachers, and/or experienced teachers. It is different from supervising, as mentors do not evaluate the person being mentored, the mentee (Walkington, 2005). There is a reciprocal process between the mentor and the mentee, as both grow during the mentoring process (Graves, 2010; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015; Kupila et al., 2017).

Mentors are critical as cultivators and sustainers of early childhood education. They strengthen the abilities of those in the field, as mentoring facilitates the development and refining of

In addition, mentoring in early childhood education builds capacity in both mentees and mentors. Mentoring often strengthens confidence, deepens a sense of belonging in the community, fosters identity in the field, and enhances the skill set of mentees. It also instills the importance of professional growth and development in mentees, often from their entry into the profession. Mentors frequently articulate the rationale for their practices; enhance interpersonal skills; refine their pedagogical techniques; and ensure that valued traditions, philosophies, and practices will continue. They also have an opportunity to give back to the profession (Kupila et al., 2017; Walkington, 2005).

This growth of mentor and mentee occurs in the context of their relationship, so the quality of the relationship is vital to the success of mentoring. This article outlines three components of an effective mentoring relationship in early childhood settings: 1) relationship-based practices, 2) communication, and 3) reflective practices. This is not a complete list of the ingredients for effective relationships; however, these are the essential, foundational elements needed to build and develop effective mentoring relationships in early childhood settings. Masterful early childhood teachers use these same skills to build relationships with young

children, families, and colleagues; therefore, it is essential for mentors to model these skills, embed them into their relationships with mentees, and assist mentees in developing these capacities. Mentors have a pivotal role in augmenting and improving the field by guiding and supporting those who work with, or plan to work with, young children and families.

## Three Components of Effective Mentoring Relationships

*Jorge, the volunteer grandparent assigned to Denise's preschool class, walked into the classroom for his second day of volunteering. When Denise saw Jorge, she said, "Hi, Jorge, I am happy to see you! Would you like to join the children in play?" Jorge smiled, saw some children in the block area building with a train set, then went over and sat with them.*

*When Jorge saw Shanay begin to struggle to connect the train tracks, Jorge extended his hand to Shanay and said, "Give me." Shanay put the tracks in Jorge's hand. Jorge proceeded to connect the tracks and lay them on the floor. He then looked up at Shanay and said, "Maybe you should go play with the girls in the kitchen so the boys will have more room to play with the trains." The philosophy in Denise's class was to discourage play based on gender stereotypes and to refrain from assisting children with problems until after they asked for help. Denise would be mentoring Jorge while he volunteered in her class. What would she do and say? How would she address these issues with Jorge?*

## Relationship-based Practices

The success or failure of mentoring is based on the relationship between mentor and mentee, as relationships are the basis of learning. Therefore, one of a mentor's crucial responsibilities is supporting mentees in developing the skills to form effective relationships with children, families, and colleagues. Mentors who use relationship-based practices help to foster and sustain their relationships with mentees, while enhancing the mentee's ability to use relationship-based practices in the classroom and with families. Because mentees may feel insecure, have less experience in the field, and/or be unsure of how to develop a mentoring relationship, the onus of creating a relationship lies with the mentor. Mentors should use the following relationship-based practices: building trust, partnering, using a strengths-based lens, and fostering a sense of belonging.

Trust is the cornerstone of the relationship between a mentor and mentee (Chu, 2012). Trust involves believing that another person is acting in your best interest, is reliable, and will be an ally. Building trust in mentoring relationships involves a mentor's getting to know a mentee while helping them to feel safe and secure in both the relationship and in their role in the classroom. Denise, from the opening vignette to this section, could have worked to develop trust with Jorge by choosing to think about how to speak with him later, rather than correcting him in the moment, when she observed him talking to children in a manner inconsistent with the program's philosophy.

In addition to building trust, effective mentors create partnerships with mentees. A partnership recognizes that all of the parties involved have skills, knowledge, and expertise to share. Mentors frequently appreciate that children in a classroom can benefit from the communication styles, insights (Walkington, 2005), and abilities mentees bring. Mentors are often considered to hold a position of power over mentees (Hobb & Stovall, 2015; Loizou, 2011), as they have more experience in the field and frequently help mentees on their career paths by writing letters of recommendations and/or making professional connections. Yet an effective mentor understands that although they may have more teaching experience, relinquishing their role as the expert and the gatekeeper of information allows both to learn. This role release on the part of the mentor often leads to a shift in the dynamics in the mentoring relationship, enabling the mentor and mentee to be equal partners. After mentees have the ability to form partnerships, they can, in turn, partner effectively with families and coworkers.

As part of building a trusting partnership, mentors identify a mentee's strengths and use those assets to help a mentee grow. A strengths-based lens focuses on the qualities and characteristics, such as previous experience and talents, a mentee brings to a situation, rather than emphasizing their weaknesses or deficits. Just as teachers do, mentees bring their backgrounds, talents, and wealth of knowledge from their heritage culture to the classroom. Capitalizing on mentees' experience and expertise strengthens their self-esteem, benefits the classroom, and provides a framework the mentees can use in the workplace with children, families, and peers. Using a strengths-based lens, Denise from the first vignette would have seen Jorge sitting on the floor with the children, engaging in their play, and developing a good rapport with them, rather than just focusing on what Jorge could have done differently.

Focusing on mentees' abilities can foster their sense of belonging. Mentors also work in other ways to foster mentees' sense of belonging in the classroom, program, and profession. These efforts involve socializing mentees to the field (Walkington, 2005), program expectations, and classroom customs, which enables them to join the community and supports the development of their professional identity. Mentees who see themselves as members of the community will be more invested in the community, its well-being, and its members. Professional socialization can include assisting a mentee in developing connections to the field (Brown-DuPaul, Davis, & Wursta, 2013), creating a network of professional contacts, and becoming involved in professional organizations and activities. Although acclimating to the field is always important, how and to what extent each person is socialized to the profession depends on their role; for example, volunteers do not have the same professional belonging needs as professionals or future professionals. To foster Jorge's sense of belonging at the center, Denise would have taken him for a tour, introduced him to all of the staff and other grandparent volunteers, and made him aware of upcoming events. Relationship-based practices that foster a sense of belonging, use a strengths-based lens, nurture partnerships, and build trust are foundational to positive mentoring relationships.

# Communication

*As the children napped, Denise and Jorge sat down for their weekly meeting. Denise started by saying, "On Monday, when the children were playing, you joined them in playing with the shaving cream! I was surprised because last week you mentioned you didn't understand the purpose of open-ended sensory play." Jorge shrugged and replied, "I thought about our talk and then watched De-Shawn paint. First, he painted on paper, then his hands and arms, next the table, and then the floor. Every time he painted on something, he watched the paint closely. He watched the brush as it moved, too. Watching him made me realize that children learn from their senses." Denise continued, "I hear that you closely*



Good conversations support communication

*observed DeShawn painting and noticed how he used the information from his senses. Generally, how do you think everything is going this week? What would you like to talk about today?" Jorge paused for a moment. "There is something I've been meaning to ask: Why don't we have the kids line up? Like when they go to the bathroom, or to go outside? Sometimes they seem to go in a herd; where is the order?"*

Communication is an essential element in successful mentoring (Graves, 2010). The aspects of communication that contribute to an effective mentoring relationship include open communication, clear expectations, active listening, formal meetings, and communication with the mentee's agency. As with relationship-based practices, the mentor has the responsibility to initiate and set the tone for the communication. Mentors introduce or reaffirm to mentees the acceptable and appropriate interaction styles used in early childhood settings, and mentees then can use their communication skills with others in the field.

Communication between a mentor and a mentee should be open, enabling both parties to exchange ideas (Walkington, 2005). Mentees should feel comfortable bringing up issues and questions, and to do this they must know they will receive support and guidance. When mentees are comfortable in relationships that promote open communication, they can later develop relationships using open communication with others. In the vignette to this section, Jorge felt comfortable asking Denise questions about classroom practices because Denise created an environment in which Jorge's questions were welcomed.

One aspect of open communication is clear expectations. When

both the mentee and mentor articulate their expectations at the outset, both tend to view the relationship as positive and supportive (Graves, 2010; Loizou, 2011). Expectations and protocols should be shared verbally and in writing to ensure that mentees are aware of their roles and responsibilities. Furthermore, sharing routines and practices, such as where to store personal belongings, how transitions flow, and what to expect during activities, helps to integrate mentees into a program. This is a model for how mentees can interact with young children, families, and colleagues in their future early childhood work.

Active listening is also a vital skill for mentors when they communicate with mentees. An active listener not only hears what a person is saying but also stops and paraphrases back the speaker's message. In other words, mentors should be a sounding board for mentees (Brown-DuPaul et al., 2013). Although they frequently have key information to share, it is also important for them to listen and respond. In the second scenario, Denise demonstrated active listening by rephrasing Jorge's experience of observing DeShawn's painting. Active listening is especially useful during formal meetings between mentors and mentees, and it is also a skill that mentees can learn to use with young children, families, and coworkers.

Formal meetings are particularly useful for fostering communication because they provide mentors and mentees with specific times to meet and talk in a quiet, private space apart from the routine of the day. These meetings are a crucial component of the mentoring process (Graves, 2010) and should occur regularly. The meetings should begin with specific examples of what the mentee has done well, and then the mentee should identify

what they would like to address. These meetings facilitate mentees in developing the skills they may later use in team meetings, meetings with families, and in following the lead of a child. In the vignette above, Denise demonstrated these practices when she met with Jorge. She started the conversation by noting changes in Jorge's behavior related to a previous discussion. Then Denise let Jorge guide the discussion by posing questions to address in the meeting. If Jorge did not have any questions, Denise could have observed the children and asked Jorge for his insights. Chu (2012) offers a model of using inquiry and research as a method to support mentees' growth and development.

In formal mentoring situations, communication between mentees and mentors should not be limited to one-on-one meetings, but, rather, should also regularly include the agency or person who matched the mentee with the mentor (Baum & Korth, 2013; Walkington, 2005). The communication between the mentee, mentor, and agency liaison can be viewed as a triangle. In a situation like Denise and Jorge's, the liaison from the grandparent volunteer agency should be given routine updates regarding the volunteer's work. If a significant problem arises, the teacher and/or the volunteer could reach out to the agency liaison for support. Ensuring there are regular meeting times that promote open, clear communication with active listening creates fertile ground for both the mentor and mentee to fully participate in the mentoring relationship.

## Reflective Practices

*One day when Jorge was volunteering, DeShawn and Shanay were playing in the dramatic play kitchen. As DeShawn cooked and Shanay got dressed, Denise walked over, asking Shanay, "Are you getting ready to go to work?" Shanay replied, "Yes, I am an engineer, and I have a briefcase," holding it up. Denise nodded, turning to DeShawn to inquire, "What are you cooking? It smells delicious!" DeShawn answered, "Pancakes and grits," as he stirred. "Yum," Denise continued as she sat on the floor. "Is that breakfast for you, Shanay, and the babies?" "Yup," DeShawn said, grabbing another pot and spoon from the cabinet, putting the pot on the stove, turning the knob for the burner, then stirring intently. "Are you staying home with the babies?" Denise asked, as DeShawn began gathering cups, plates, and utensils and setting the table.*

Reflective practices are integral to both mentoring and working in early childhood settings. Reflective practices involve taking a moment to think about a situation, what happened, each person's actions and reactions, their possible motivations for their words and/or deeds, and the consequences. When early childhood professionals are able to reflect on their interactions with children, families, and peers in the workplace, they develop stronger relationships with them. Mentors who model reflective practices and embed reflectivity into their relationships with mentees assist mentees in developing the ability to be reflective. Because reflection is a vehicle for growth and development, mentors' use of reflective practices helps mentees make meaning from their experiences in early childhood settings (Altes & Pinholster, 2013). To facilitate the development of reflective

practices, mentors should recognize that mentees are always learning, reflect on their own practices, be empathic, and engage in self-care.

A mentor's modeling of reflective practices is particularly important in mentoring because those entering the field of early childhood education often have not yet developed reflective skills (Agbenyega, 2012). Being self-reflective is a process, based on the context of an interaction; it is a skill that can take years to develop. A mentor who asks open-ended questions in a non-threatening and non-judgmental manner can help their mentee develop reflective skills (Chu, 2012). The goal is for mentees to develop the habit of asking open-ended questions about their work. At their first regularly scheduled meeting, Denise could have begun the discussion about non-gendered play in the classroom by asking Jorge, "How do you think Shanay felt when you suggested she go play in the kitchen?"

Effective mentors are aware that mentees enter with different skill sets, different experiences, and at different places on the learning continuum (Chu, 2012). Such mentors honor those differences while supporting each mentee on their individual path of growth and development. They provide opportunities for their mentees to observe new strategies, experiment with using pedagogical techniques, and reflect on the outcome in supportive environments. Mentors can encourage mentees to set goals for their learning and growth and then scaffold learning. Scaffolding learning can take various forms, including providing direct instruction on specific skills, such as what specific words to say in particular situations, or creating opportunities for mentees to develop their skills for the classroom. In the second scenario, Denise could have responded to Jorge's questions about lining up by explaining how expecting young children to wait is inappropriate and can lead to behavioral issues. After processing the concept with Jorge, she could have helped him identify activities for children faced with wait time, asking Jorge to lead one of the activities the next time a group of children had to wait.

In the process of teaching mentees about pedagogical practices, effective mentors also reflect on their practices. Denise became very cognizant of her actions and words around gender-stereotypical play after she observed Jorge's comment to Shanay in the opening vignette. This caused Denise to intentionally include statements about non-traditional gender roles in the classroom, as can be seen in the third vignette.

Because the learning process often exposes a person's vulnerabilities, empathy is also vital to a mentoring relationship. All early childhood professionals were once new to the field. Mentors who are able to put themselves into the shoes of their mentees, understanding the difficulties of developing one's identity in the field, will develop relationships that are more successful. Mentees who have experienced empathy are more likely to be empathic in their relationships with others. When Denise learned that this was Jorge's first experience volunteering in an early childhood classroom, she thought back to her experience volunteering, while in high school, in a classroom with very young children, and how supportive her mentor was. Denise realized

she should carefully and clearly guide Jorge through the process of getting to know the children, practices, and program, just as her mentor had done for her.

As a mentor works to create learning opportunities for, and be empathic towards, their mentee, they should remember to practice self-care as well. Mentors often don't feel prepared for or supported in their role (Baum & Korth, 2013; Hobbs & Stovall, 2015). Mentors should thus seek support from others and attend training when possible to develop the skills to be effective. The agency that placed a mentee can be a source of support by offering training and guidance. Ensuring that mentors engage in practices they find nurturing and rejuvenating helps to prevent their feeling overburdened. To use the above example, Denise might participate in an online support group for mentors of grandparent volunteers and go hiking on the weekends to rejuvenate.

Infusing self-reflectivity in the mentoring relationship involves mentors' recognizing that mentees are learning and mentors' reflecting on their own practices, being empathic, and attending to self-care. Although mentoring is a significant responsibility, it is also very rewarding. The first time Denise heard Jorge say, "Hitting DeShawn hurts his body," instead of his usual, "Don't hit DeShawn," Denise was both surprised and thrilled; she saw that her mentoring efforts were paying off.

## Conclusion

Mentoring is a vital process in early childhood education. Mentors build and strengthen the field as they support volunteers, student teachers, new professionals, assistant teachers, teacher aides, and peers. They enhance the capacities and skills of mentees, who then can use these skills in their work, thus ensuring the continuation of quality programming in early childhood settings. Successful mentoring is dependent upon an effective relationship, which the mentor must take the initiative to build. Three elements are fundamental for effective mentoring relationships: 1) relationship-based practices, 2) communication, and 3) reflective practices. Masterful early childhood professionals need to develop these skills. When effective mentors model and embed these capacities into their relationships with mentees, both parties are likely to have a productive relationship, with the result that mentees will develop the skills necessary for successfully engaging with young children, families, and colleagues in early childhood settings.

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# How Emmett Till Changed Our Lives:
## *A New Perspective for Teaching Social Justice*

**By Danika Lynn Aday, Alison Lynn Kenney, and Cathy Grace**



The authors, from the left: Alison Kenney, Cathy Grace and Danika Aday

these nearly dead communities and who are all too often trapped by poverty. By taking this trip, you have the opportunity to feel and understand the true essence of the Mississippi Delta, even if for only a few hours. The Delta is a very unique place to say the least. Many students who attend the University of Mississippi are from out-of-state who have never heard of the Mississippi Delta, much less visited it. This trip was created to show people from other states, countries, and even the Mississippi natives what life in the Delta is really like. Multiple lessons can be drawn from the Delta trip including; the impact of generational poverty, racial discrimination, cultural differences, resilience, lack of access to high quality education, social injustices, and inequalities. The Delta trips provide graduate students with opportunities to take these lessons to heart and transform impressions and ideas into teaching practices upon graduation. It is by learning about the lived realities of children that we begin to build connections with their experiences. The ultimate hope is that real change and enhanced teaching will take place.

*This two-person account by graduate assistants (GAs) at the Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning at the University of Mississippi constitutes a reflection of "new to the field" early childhood educators on how place-based experiences influence how and what you teach. The two students present their own stories in their own voice and combine thoughts with their guide in a concluding section, which challenges all seasoned educators to reflect on our own teaching.*

## Background

The graduate student (GA) experience is as successful as one chooses to make it. Given the interests of the major professor, the focus of the work varies. It is understood when someone is a GA at the Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning, a trip to the Mississippi Delta is expected. The purpose of the Delta trips, according to our supervisor, is to experience the real life of Delta residents along with the history, up close and personal, not just words written in a text. We see small towns that are filled with boarded up stores and pot-hole filled streets. We hear stories that illuminate the lives of those who stay in

## The Trip

The most recent trip involved driving to the southern portion of the Delta, but not taking the I-55 route. Instead, we took the back roads, right through the heart of the Delta. We traveled through small towns that we had never seen before. Getting to see how students different from us were living was an eye-opener. Coming from small towns ourselves, we knew the possibilities for different living situations existed, but these areas were like nothing we had ever seen before. Poverty is such a real thing, and this was evident while driving through these small towns. While in one Delta town, we visited a local public

preschool and observed two pre-kindergarten classrooms. One thing that struck us was how segregated the schools appeared to be where we visited. In the Delta, most schools are not racially integrated. Basically, white children attend private schools and black children attend local public schools. It appears in most Delta towns, neighborhoods are still segregated and defined by railroad tracks; the white families on one side and black families on the other. Historically towns have always been racially divided and unfortunately, it does not appear to have changed.

Child care and early education policies are often shaped by a history of systemic and structural racism (Johnson-Staub, 2017). It appears from what we saw and heard it is true in this Delta town. On one side of the tracks there are nice looking privately funded schools, and on the other side of the tracks poorly funded public schools with poorly kept buildings. The private schools are located in "safe" areas of the community where affluent homes are located. The public schools are located in areas of the community where streets and homes are in disrepair, which gives a sense of potential crime. The public schools are almost always completely gated, resembling a prison more than a school. When we arrived at the school, it did not seem very welcoming from the outside; however, the teachers had done a wonderful job at creating a welcoming environment for students on the inside.

High quality early education is extremely important and has long term benefits for children. Knowing this, our supervisor works with the public schools to provide training for pre-kindergarten (pre-k) and kindergarten teachers and teaching assistants. She wanted us to see what an appropriate pre-k classroom can look like in even one of the most impoverished areas of the state. Many teachers in Mississippi work and live in high needs school districts and it is important for us to know how to set up classrooms and teach with little to no resources, especially considering many of my fellow graduates will be serving in the same type setting.

During our visit, we witnessed centers developmentally tailored to meet the learning needs of four-year old students. The students behaved and transitioned between the centers in unbelievable ways. In the centers, the students interacted in appropriate dramatic play, as well as worked on writing skills, fine motor skills, and social skills. The students' art was displayed across the room as well. A lot of what was seen around the room can be obtained at little or no cost or by donations from community partners and on teacher resource sites for free.

The next stop on the Delta trip consisted of visiting Money, Mississippi, the community where one of the most horrific events related to racial unrest in the country's history occurred. While there, we learned about Emmett Till, a young black teen who sparked the civil rights movement. We got to see where Emmett was accused of flirting with a white woman back in 1955, the location of where he was accused, and a museum, Sumner Courthouse Museum that was created in remembrance of him which was also reported as the place his body was left after his murder.

Emmett Till is a major part of Mississippi history and the civil
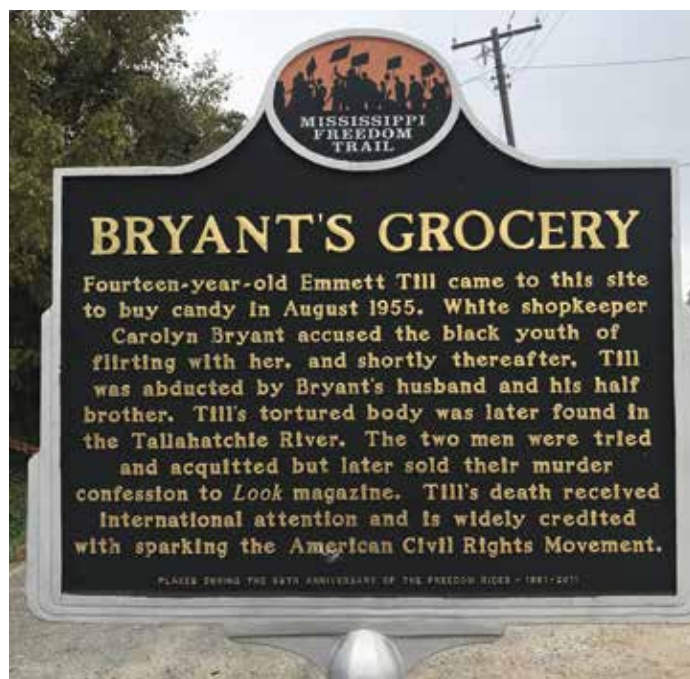


The historical marker at the Bryant Grocery site where Till was accused of whistling at a White woman. Years later she recanted her accusations that led to his death.

rights movement; sadly however, Emmett's story is not taught in some schools. It appears that some educators believe that to promote change they have to educate students according to what truly happened in history, while others want to bury the past and continue down the same road we've always traveled. We come from both sides of this teaching philosophy: one of us was taught Emmett Till's story and the other was not. The event had a lasting impact on how one of us viewed society and this region of the country where people of color have been treated and still are in some ways. The trip had a different meaning for the one of us who did not know Emmett Till existed and never would have if it wasn't for this trip to the Delta.

## Teaching Social Justice

This new information has been a catalyst for thinking differently about equity issues in and out of school. As teachers, we need to acknowledge that social injustices make up our history and do our part in ensuring that social justice occurs in our classrooms and communities. According to Oxford dictionaries (2020) , Social Justice is justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society. One way to incorporate social justice education is by using the K-12 social justice standards which are divided into four domains: Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action. With today's diverse classrooms and society, it is important for teachers to be knowledgeable about these standards and incorporate them into lessons. These standards and resources can be found on tolerance.org. Just like the state's College and Career Readiness Standards, the social justice standards have a complete set of anchor standards, outcomes, and scenarios for each section.

and the children engage with each other and their teacher than in a civics' lesson.

There are many ways to incorporate social justice education in our future classrooms using literature, Emmett Till's story being one of them. *Emmett's Story* (Crowe, 2018), to be read by adults in preparation of lessons taught, can touch many lives and that is why it can be used to teach his story and make his life real to second and third graders in an age appropriate way. Younger children will grow in their understanding of equity from stories such as *The Story of Ruby Bridges* or *We Are All Born Free*. Creating a classroom environment that is open to discussing the realities we see in the world will be a top priority. We can discuss both sides of a story, review the facts and learn to develop our own opinions while exploring ways to help the situation. Even for minds as young as five years it can be powerful.

In a K-3 classroom, teaching young children about social justice and equality can be difficult. As teachers, we need to consider our own views on social justice and equality, and how we will extend those views to our students. We also need to consider the community in which we will be teaching, the demographics of that community, and how to incorporate the community values into our class lessons. Teachers need to be intentional with the content they teach students following evidence- based practices as well as those that are age appropriate. A teacher needs to intentionally incorporate equality and social justice in their classrooms. For example, at dramatic play centers Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic and Asian baby dolls should be available for play instead of only ones from one race. It is important for young students to be familiar with the content of topics being taught, such as incorporating community sightings and providing them concrete examples when teaching new content. Some familiar community sightings would include local restaurants, factories, or stores they visit frequently or where their parents are employed. In the dramatic play centers or writing centers, common places from around the community can be featured. Students can act out their job as someone who works at a local restaurant or write a letter to a local store about what they like about the store. Through their interactions with others, they will be put in both positions of leader as well as follower. This dichotomy allows children to figure out how it feels when you are not treated fairly as well as to demonstrate how to practice treating fairness through group play situations.

In the K-3 classroom, identity is about self- discovery, who their family is in society, and their likes and dislikes. The diversity standards look at the student and how they compare and feel toward others. The justice standards look at fairness, how students and citizens should be treated, and how students when they know something happened that should not have. The action standards take a step up from the justice standards and allow the student to learn the choices they have when injustices occur.

## Practical Lessons Learned

From this trip, we gained many take-aways that can be used in our future classrooms, including the need for early childhood education related to social justice/injustices. While deliberating on how to incorporate what we learned into our own classrooms, we think about where we will be teaching. No matter the location of the school, classrooms should be an open place where students feel safe and comfortable enough to discuss sensitive topics. Observations and experiences lead us to believe that white privilege and racism is still alive and well. We have asked ourselves why teach in areas of the state with racial challenges? Why not just stay and make an impact in places like the Delta? We can take what has been learned and make an impact in an area, regardless of physical geography. Knowledge of racism, poverty, and social injustices can be used to make a difference in the thinking and lives of the students we will be teaching.

Teaching all subject areas are required at any grade. How the learning standards for each grade are met are, in part, a result of the teacher's creativity and understanding of how children best learn. In thinking of how to teach social justice and equity to young children, it is more in how the classroom is managed

The "egg lesson" (A to Z Teacher Stuff, 2018) is one used to

demonstrate to young children using a concrete example of "sameness." Teachers can adapt this lesson to fit their classroom and different variations of it can be found online. Two eggs are shown to the class, one brown and one white. The children are asked questions about similarities and differences of the appearance of the eggs. The eggs are broken open and shown to the students. The eggs that looked different on the outside were the same color and had the same components and consistency on the inside. In the egg activity teachers explain that eggs are like people; we may look different on the outside, but on the inside, we are similar. We have hopes, dreams, wishes, families, likes, and dislikes just like everyone else no matter what color our skin and we must help each other to ensure that equality prevails.

Another way to incorporate social justice, equality, and fairness is by choosing multicultural books to read as a class with follow up activities surrounding the main topic of the story. *The Barefoot Mommy* blog (Gienapp, 2018) has multiple lists of multicultural books for young children and ways to address social justice to students through activities. Another great tool from this blog (Gienapp, 2018) is "Nineteen ways parents and educators can introduce children to social justice." This is a great start up guide for intentionally incorporating social justice into your classroom and how to do it. Millions of books are easily available for teachers to select and utilize in their classrooms and are one of the easiest ways to introduce social justice education into the class.

The K-12 Social Justice Standards (Teaching Tolerance, 2016) can be incorporated into classroom lessons through the four domains: Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action. Identity Standards can be accomplished by having show-and-tell days that allow the student to freely talk about the item they are showing and what it means to them personally. One way to incorporate the Diversity Standards is to promote sharing and acceptance of everyone's families. One student may be raised by their grandparents while another student has two dads. We need to let students know through our actions a family is comprised of people who love and care for one another, regardless of the gender or race of the parents.

A way to incorporate Justice Standards is by educating students and adults on how we should act toward one another. Students should know when they see injustices, such as bullying of classmates at school because of skin color differences, they should come talk to the teacher about it if they cannot peacefully resolve it on their own. Creating a safe and open classroom environment is a major priority. A way to incorporate the Action Standards is by teaching students how to handle and take action in situations they may encounter in the future. For instance, if one student is being unkind to another, the observing student can step in and explain why the behavior is not acceptable and if necessary, call for the teacher to mediate. Through consistent modeling by the teacher, students can learn how to resolve differences in peaceful fashion resulting in an equitable solution.

This is not an easy topic to discuss with peers, because we often feel unprepared to do so. More discussions will bring us closer together as a profession. More discussions will allow us to come together as a community with a shared vision for all of our children. We must have "the talk" over and over until we get it right and our classrooms reflect it.

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# Playing with Language: Rhyming and Connecting with Infants and Toddlers

### By Wilma Robles-Melendez

## Welcome spring!

Spring is in the air! As the days begin to get longer during springtime, the season also brings endless opportunities to enjoy playful language with our youngest learners. Just listening to the sounds of nature is an adventure into sounds of the season. With spring, nature reawakens, once again bringing the many sounds of birds, water, and of buzzing insects. Whether you live where there are cooler days or in warmer areas, the many sounds of the season will grasp children's attention. It is an even greater experience when we turned these into an opportunity to play with the sounds of spoken language. Familiar rhymes like *Old McDonald, The Wheels on the Bus, or The Itsy-Bitsy Spider* continue today to be enjoyed by young children. Rhyming, the ability to recognize similar word sounds, engages children in listening and recognizing sounds of spoken language. These are two skill areas critical for building a child's emergent literacy and reading development.

It all starts at home when parents and caregiving adults engage children in familiar and traditional rhymes and finger play. We all remember the catchy rhyming words and phrases from our childhood. Childhood rhymes introduced us to the many sounds of language. Today, rhymes continue as one of experiences supporting emerging language and literacy abilities of infants and toddlers. The rhythm and musicality of words found in nursery rhymes and finger plays is an engaging way to begin recognizing the sounds of language, helping to build the child's phonological awareness.

## Sharing rhymes, another way to build relationships

Children enjoy the magic of rhyming across cultures. We all have a favorite rhyme that we remember from our childhood. Rhyming is another activity common to every cultural group, typically experienced at home. The joy of sharing rhymes with infants and toddlers has many developmental benefits. Besides supporting emergent literacy development, it also serves to emotionally connect children with parents and caregivers. A joyful experience, it is another way to establish social and emotional relationships with young children. Simply consider the enjoyment of parent and child sharing a traditional rhyme like pat-a-cake or tortitas (sometimes tortillitas), as it is called in Spanish. The shared experience of playing with language also reinforces their emotional bonds or sense of attachment of child and parent. The rhythm of language paired with the caring expressions and interactions are invaluable contributing to secure the child's emotional connections.

We invite you to share some rhymes with the little ones. Here you will find some suggested children's books about nursery rhymes to enjoy with the youngest ones. But, of course, you can always create your own, too!

Wilma Robles-Melendez, Ph.D., is a Professor of Early Childhood Education and Leadership at the Abraham S. Fischler School of Education of Nova Southeastern University in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. During her over 25 years of experience as an early childhood educator, Dr. Robles-Melendez has served as a classroom teacher, school principal, state supervisor, program director, and teacher educator. She feels privileged to be an educator, continuing to learn as she works with her students. She is active in her community and has several publications addressing diversity issues. Her research areas include cultural diversity, dual language learning, program practices for infants and toddlers, and issues of social justice and equity for immigrant children and their families.

## Suggested Resources about Rhyming with Infants and Toddlers

Delacre, L. (1992). *Arroz con leche*. Popular songs and rhymes from Latin America. NY: Scholastic. [bilingual]

Griego, M., Bucks, B., Gilbert, S. & Kimball, L. (1988). *Tortillitas para mamá and other nursery rhymes.* NY: Henry Holt. [bilingual]

Prelusky, J. (1988). *Read-aloud rhymes for the very young*. NY: Knopf.

## Board books to share with infants and toddlers:

Church, C. (2013). *Rain, rain, go away!* NY: Cartwheel.

Kubler, A. (2009). *Ten little fingers.* Child's Play. [bilingual edition]

Rescek, S. (2006). *Hickory, dickory, dock and other favorite nursery rhymes.* CT: Tiger tales.

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# CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

## By Dina Treff

Choosing a book to review for the special edition issue was a responsibility of great importance to me. After working in the field of Early Childhood Education (ECE) for over eighteen years, fostering genuine relationships with the children in my classroom is the most important thing I do each day. Assisting and supporting children in social emotional development is something that I pride myself in. I frequently use children's books to reinforce social and emotional topics and open the door to begin new discussions.

When selecting a book, I wanted to make sure to choose a book that envelops the theme of relationships. As I browsed the library, I kept coming across books from the Mo Willems's *Elephant and Piggie* series. Relationships involve connections and as a reader of this series, one is bound to have a connection with Gerald the Elephant and Piggie the Pig. Debuting in March 2007 with *Today I will Fly!* and ending the series with *The Thank You Book* in May 2016, these books are the epitome of relationships.

The relationship between Elephant and Piggie is the main focus of the twenty-five book series. The books are written and presented in a comic book style. The characters' voices are composed within word bubbles, grey for Gerald and pink for Piggie. Each character possesses different characteristics. Piggie is outgoing and daring while Gerald is much more reserved and cautious. Their understood personalities seem to create a balance within their relationship. Piggie tries to convince Gerald to become more adventurous and go outside of his comfort level. Then Gerald is there to be the seemingly voice of reason and support when Piggie has her hopes crushed, especially in *Today I will Fly!*

My current classroom's favorite of this series is *Waiting is Not Easy*. This story addresses the struggles of having to wait. Piggie has a surprise to show Gerald but Gerald has a difficult time waiting. In the end Gerald is able to wait long enough to see the surprise with Piggie.

I have become connected to the stories, and as I share this series with my children, they too become connected with them as well. My personal relationship with these books has evolved over the years. Due to my connection with the characters and stories, I have not been able to bring myself to reading the final book of the series. I am not ready to experience the closure of the relationships formed throughout this series.

Mo Willems' *Elephant and Piggie* series is great for readers and book lovers of all ages. The playful stories are great for three through five years old, while also being perfect as early readers for the younger elementary aged child.

Elegir un libro para revisar para la edición especial fue una responsabilidad de gran importancia para mí. Después de trabajar en el campo de la Educación de la Primera Infancia (ECE) durante más de dieciocho años, fomentar las relaciones genuinas con los niños en mi clase es lo más importante que hago cada día. Asistir y apoyar a los niños en el desarrollo social y emocional es algo de lo que me enorgullezco. Con frecuencia uso los libros para niños para reforzar los temas sociales y emocionales y abrir la puerta para comenzar nuevas discusiones.

Al seleccionar un libro, quería asegurarme de elegir un libro que incluyera el tema de las relaciones. Mientras navegaba por la biblioteca, seguía encontrando libros de la serie *Elephant and Piggie* de Mo Willems. Las relaciones implican conexiones y, como lector de esta serie, uno está obligado a tener una conexión con Gerald, el Elephant, y Piggie, el Pig. Debutando en marzo de 2007 con *Today I Fly!* y terminando la serie con *The Thank You Book* en mayo de 2016, estos libros son el epítome de las relaciones.

La relación entre Elephant y Piggie es el enfoque principal de la serie de veinticinco libros (algunos publicados en español). Los libros están escritos y presentados en un estilo de cómic. Las voces de los personajes se componen de burbujas de palabras, gris para Gerald y rosa para Piggie. Cada personaje posee diferentes características. Piggie es extrovertido y audaz, mientras que Gerald es mucho más reservado y cauteloso. Sus personalidades entendidas parecen crear un equilibrio dentro de su relación. Piggie intenta convencer a Gerald para que sea más aventurero y salga de su nivel de comodidad. Vemos entonces que Gerald está allí para ser la voz aparentemente de la razón y el apoyo cuando Piggie tiene sus esperanzas aplastadas …¡especialmente en *Today I Fly!*

El libro favorito de mi clase actual en esta serie es *¡Esperar No Es Fácil!* Esta historia aborda las dificultades de tener que esperar. Piggie tiene una sorpresa para mostrarle a Gerald, pero a Gerald le cuesta mucho esperar. Al final, Gerald puede esperar el tiempo suficiente para ver la sorpresa con Piggie.

Me he conectado con las historias y al compartir esta serie con mis estudiantes, ellos también se conectan. Mi relación personal con estos libros ha evolucionado a lo largo de los años. Debido a mi conexión con los personajes y las historias, no he podido leer el libro final de la serie. No estoy lista para experimentar el cierre de las relaciones formadas a lo largo de esta serie.

La serie *Elephant and Piggie* de Mo Willems es ideal para lectores y amantes de los libros de todas las edades. Las historias divertidas son geniales para niños de tres a cinco años, y también son perfectas como lectores tempranos para el niño más joven de primaria.

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