Dimensions
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Editor: Wilma Robles-Melendez, PhD
Dimensions of Early Childhood

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Debbie Ferguson

Serving as your president…what an amazing, crazy, exciting and tremendous ride! This will be my last message as your president, and I cannot express how much I have enjoyed this opportunity. I have loved this association for years and gained so many meaningful relationships that will continue over time. I was so honored to begin my time and had so many goals for you, our members. Who could have expected that just two short months into my term we would all be devastated by a terrible pandemic? Despite not being able to meet in person, we figured it out like all remarkable early educators did and learned to navigate or operate differently. We maintained, never giving up, and we continued to show how much we cared for our children and families.

I longed to be able to sit down and have "real" conversations with you. What do you need from SECA? How can we help or serve you best as you work with young children? Then in May 2020 we all endured hearing the tragic news of George Floyd's murder. Along with the board of directors, SECA took action to begin hosting Conversations for Change to provide a safe space to ask the hard questions or express anger without judgement. These monthly calls became a lifeline for me. I shared my experience of being raised in a household with my father being in law enforcement. I struggled to understand why this was happening and my growth began when so many of our members advocating for equity and justice for people of color cared enough to have a conversation with me. We begin to hear and listen to different perspectives. These calls are still happening and I'm still learning how to be a better person. If you would like to join in these conversations, please reach out to be included (info@seca.info). We would love to have you sitting at the table as we change the world.

I am delighted for SECA's future under the guidance of your incoming president, Judy Whitesell. We have worked closely over this past year, and she has some tremendous plans for SECA. I hope you are making plans to join us in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina for our annual conference. The conference will be held February 3 – 5, 2022. You can find more information on our website (www.seca.info). Hope to see you there!

I am so grateful for my time serving as your president. If I didn't have the opportunity to visit your state in person, I will! My passion and commitment for every SECA member will never end, and I will always be your cheerleader as you provide wonderful experiences for our children and families. Keep up the great work and know that you will always have SECA to support you.

Servir como su presidenta … ¡qué viaje tan increíble, delirante, emocionante y colosal! Este será mi último mensaje como su presidenta, y no puedo expresar cuánto he disfrutado de esta oportunidad. He amado esta asociación durante años y he ganado tantas relaciones significativas que continuarán con el tiempo. Me sentí muy honrada de comenzar y tenía tantas metas para ustedes, nuestros miembros. ¿Quién podría haber esperado que solo dos meses después de comenzar todos estaríamos devastados por una terrible pandemia? A pesar de no poder reunirnos en persona, lo descubrimos como lo hicieron todos los valiosos educadores del nivel temprano que aprendimos a navegar u operar de manera diferente. Nos mantuvimos firmes y, nunca nos dimos por vencidos y continuamos demostrando cuánto nos preocupamos por nuestros niños y familias.

Anhelaba poder sentarme y tener conversaciones "reales" con ustedes. ¿Qué necesitas de SECA? ¿Cómo podemos ayudar o servirle mejor mientras trabajan con los niños pequeños? Luego, en mayo de 2020, conocimos de la trágica noticia del asesinato de George Floyd. Junto con la junta directiva, SECA tomó medidas para comenzar a organizar Conversaciones para el Cambio para proporcionar un espacio seguro para hacer las preguntas difíciles o expresar enojo sin juzgar. Estas llamadas mensuales se convirtieron en un salvavidas para mí. Compartí mi experiencia de haber sido criada en un hogar con mi padre un oficial de la ley. Luché por entender por qué estaba sucediendo esto y mi crecimiento comenzó cuando muchos de nuestros miembros que abogaban por la equidad y la justicia para las personas de color se preocuparon lo suficiente como para tener una conversación conmigo. Comenzamos a escuchar y escuchar diferentes perspectivas. Estas llamadas todavía están sucediendo y todavía estoy aprendiendo cómo ser una mejor persona. Si desea unirse a estas conversaciones, comuníquese con nosotros para ser incluido (info@seca.info). Nos encantaría tenerte sentado a la mesa mientras cambiamos el mundo.

Estoy encantada con el futuro de SECA bajo la dirección de su presidenta entrante, Judy Whitesell. Hemos trabajado estrechamente durante este último año, y ella tiene grandes planes para SECA. Espero que estén haciendo planes para unirse a nosotros en Myrtle Beach, Carolina del Sur para nuestra conferencia anual. Las fechas en que se llevará a cabo esta conferencia son del 3 al 5 de febrero de 2022. Puedes encontrar más información en nuestra web (www.seca.info). ¡Espero verte allí!

Estoy muy agradecida por mi tiempo sirviendo como su presidenta. Si no tuve la oportunidad de visitar su estado en persona … ¡Lo haré! Mi pasión y compromiso por cada miembro de SECA nunca terminará y siempre seré su animadora mientras brinden experiencias maravillosas para nuestros niños y familias. Mantengan tan excelente trabajo y sepan que siempre tendrán a SECA para apoyarlos.

Children Need Us!/¡Los niños nos necesitan!

Wilma Robles-Melendez, PhD

Fall is here and, once again, a new school year has begun. New hopes also arrive even though society continues to struggle with a pandemic. With the start of a new year of learning experiences, our dedication and commitment to children is reaffirmed. While we continue seeking an end to the pandemic, we must strive to provide children with the best experiences and opportunities. "Children cannot wait", as Nobel laureate poet Gabriela Mistral asserted, a reminder to continue onwards for our youngest. Her words also remind us about the ongoing efforts needed to overcome challenges faced by children. One of those challenges is the need for quality and equitable learning opportunities for all children and their families.

This issue provides ideas to bring new strategies to support our children's learning. It also brings attention to the ongoing need for building respectful and strong collaborations with families who are culturally and linguistically diverse. We hope you will enjoy these ideas as you continue building children's future through your caring and learning teaching efforts. Happy fall!

El otoño está aquí y con este, ha comenzado un nuevo año escolar. Con él, también llegan nuevas esperanzas a pesar de que la sociedad sigue luchando contra una pandemia. Con el inicio de un nuevo año de experiencias de aprendizaje, se reafirma nuestra dedicación y compromiso con los niños. Mientras continuamos buscando el fin de la pandemia, debemos esforzarnos por brindar a los niños las mejores experiencias y oportunidades. "Los niños no pueden esperar", como afirmó la poeta premio Nobel Gabriela Mistral, un recordatorio para seguir hacia adelante por nuestros niños. Sus palabras también nos recuerdan todos los continuos esfuerzos que realizamos y que son tan necesarios para superar los desafíos que enfrentan los niños. Uno de esos desafíos es la necesidad de oportunidades de aprendizaje equitativas y de calidad para todos los niños y sus familias. Este número proporciona ideas para traer nuevas estrategias para apoyar el aprendizaje de los pequeños. También llama la atención sobre la continuada necesidad de construir relaciones y colaboración sólidas y respetuosas con familias que son cultural y lingüísticamente diversas. Esperamos que disfruten de estas ideas mientras continúan construyendo el futuro de los niños a través de sus esfuerzos en el aula. ¡Feliz otoño!

Perceptions of Project Approach:
How Veteran Teachers Can Challenge the Status Quo

Amanda Wilson

On a chilly day in September, 19 third-graders trek across a field toward a community garden on the campus of their local private school. Accustomed to more traditional measures of classroom learning, these third graders express a palpable excitement as they speed up to enter the grounds of the garden. Without the need for verbal directions, the primary-age children scurry every which way to explore the fresh vegetables and flowers. With clipboards in hand, they take descriptive notes on all that is seen and heard. They visit with the two gardeners, pick vegetables, taste fresh banana peppers, and call to the teacher to showcase their new observations. Over the next hour, each child engages in meaningful exploration and discovery.

Children learning content based on their inquiries and discovering new knowledge about worthwhile topics related to the world through in-depth investigation is the hallmark of the Project Approach (Burns & Lewis, 2016; Helm & Katz, 2016). Admittedly, I am a project approach rookie. I am a veteran teacher with over 15 years of experience in education and last year was my first attempt at the Project Approach. Reflecting on our first project, The Community Garden Project, and my inadequacies, I wonder why more teachers do not engage in the Project Approach. In my experience and in reading the research, most teachers do not participate in project-based learning because of misunderstandings surrounding the approach, a perceived lack of time, and excessive preparation. However, I invite veteran teachers to challenge the status quo because the benefits of the Project Approach outweigh the challenges.

The Basics of Project Approach

The Project Approach consists of deep and authentic means of gathering knowledge where children learn to research their natural world and gain understanding through firsthand experiences and interesting questions (Helm & Katz, 2016). Whether initiated by the teacher or emerging from child interest, project work begins with the teacher as she or he anticipates needs and directions for a possible topic (Figure 1). In fact, Bills et al. (2018) found many older students lack the confidence to choose topics and prefer suggested topics or adequate time to fully research a topic of potential interest. Then, the teacher completes an anticipatory web with possible questions, resources, curriculum opportunities, and field sites. During Phase I, the teacher introduces the topic to garner interest and decide feasibility for continuance with the topic. If interest is high and the topic is practical, the teacher webs with the children to find out more about the topic.

Community Garden Project

For our project on community gardens, I researched the on-site garden and spoke with the gardener prior to introducing the topic to my students. The Community Garden Project fit nicely with the science standards for third grade. Quick access to the field site and knowledgeable gardeners increased the likelihood that this project would be successful in our class. At this point, I created an extensive web to anticipate the direction we might go as a class. I was prepared to discuss community gardens but also prepared for the topic to morph into an investigation of a specific vegetable or the role of the gardener. Then, I introduced the topic to the students. Most of the class was excited to visit a garden, something they had not done yet, and they asked many questions. The children did not lack for questions about the garden. Initial questions included simple ideas such as "Can we eat the vegetables?" and more complex questions such as "How long does it take to create a garden?"

Phase II of a project includes the investigation and research of the topic (Helm & Katz, 2016). Before the site visit, children reexamine their questions and webs to define what they want to know as a class about the topic. The teacher helps the students prepare for the field visit and potential interviews by ensuring the children learn how to take notes or represent their

learning. Then, the investigation begins. Children visit the field site often, if permissible, and speak with experts about the topic. There are multiple opportunities for representation of learning, and the class webs are revisited and questions answered.

In retrospect, the class reexamined our questions to narrow what they wanted to know about gardens, but I did not prepare them adequately for how to take notes while visiting the garden. Upon reaching the garden, the excitement was so tangible that many of the children were walking around for fifteen minutes without any pencil marks on their papers. When prompted, they wrote immediately, but the initial garden experience overwhelmed many. Still, they happily took notes, asked questions of the gardeners, and ate vegetables. After our trip to the garden, the children prepared for a separate interview with the gardener. As a class, they answered some questions and redefined others.

When interest in the topic wanes, the teacher debriefs with the students. The class revisits the final questions and goals, and Phase III begins. Projects end with a culminating event where students share what they have learned over the past weeks (Chard, 1999; Helm & Katz, 2016). The culminating event is a collaborative effort where children represent their learning in a final project. In many cases, the class invites parents, other students, and administration to witness the culminating event. Our Community Garden Project culminated after four weeks with four small groups. Each group prepared a short presentation to share with the other third grade classrooms.

Despite the mishaps associated with the implementation of my first project, I recommend the Project Approach. Teachers and students gain valuable learning opportunities that extend beyond the classroom. We met many standards and fostered many dispositions as the classroom came alive with curiosity and questions. Do not be dissuaded by looming perceptions. Instead, challenge the status quo and attempt your first project. You may be surprised by what you learn about yourself and your students.

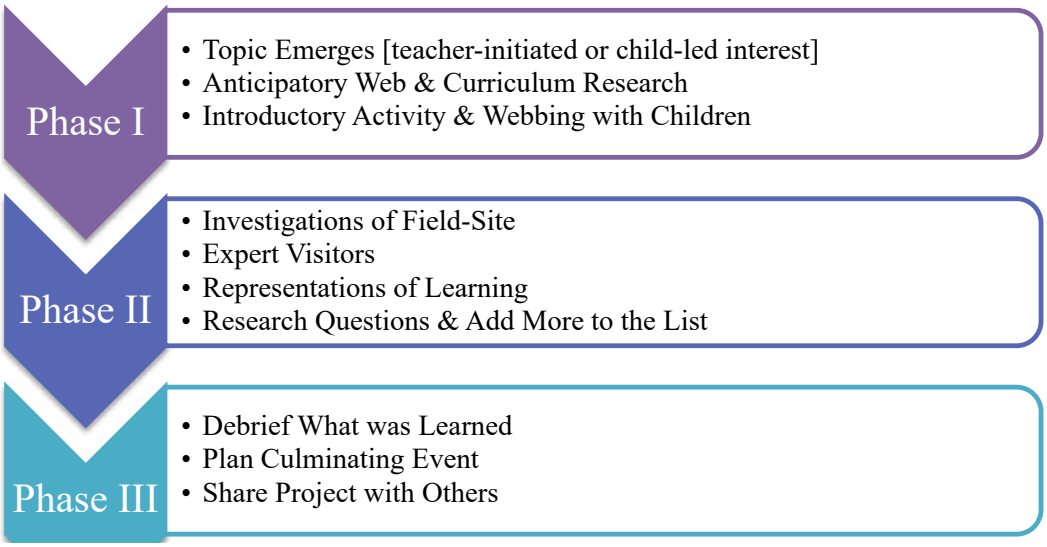
Perception #1: Projects are the Same as Units

The perception that projects are the same as units is inaccurate. Projects are distinctive and standalone from other project-like work such as teacher-directed units or theme-based curriculum. Under traditional units, students complete work simultaneously, with many directions from the teacher, and all worksheets and art resemble each other (Chard, 1999). The unit is based on the teacher's preexisting knowledge of the topic because units and themes do not provide opportunities for student input. According to researchers, projects include "child initiation, child decision-making, and child engagement," and without these necessary pieces "the learning experience is less likely to provide the unique benefits of project work" (Helm & Katz, 2016, p. 6). It is the curiosity factor that drives motivation and learning for students in project work. Empowered by a sense of self and active investigation, children dive deep into project work where they find satisfaction, pride, and answers to their questions, something not as likely to develop when the teacher is making decisions for learning. According to Chard (1999), teachers must discover the uniqueness of project work to uncover the richness and value of the Project Approach.

Children created representations about their project experiences.

Whereas themes are limiting, projects allow children an active voice in the classroom (Chard, 2000). Alfonso (2017) spoke of her intentionality to honor the curiosity and questions from her students when engaging in her first project. She reported that her children responded positively to her efforts to answer questions, even those unrelated to project work because she was building a basis for understanding, vocabulary development, and inquiry. Her efforts paid off as the students worked independently to find answers to questions and displayed inquiry in later conversations.

Figure 1. Phases of the Project Approach



Note. This figure has been adapted from Phases of a Project (Helm & Katz, 2016). The detailed figure can be downloaded free of charge from https://www.tcpress.com/filebin/PDFs/9780807756904_journal.pdf.

I found this to be valid during the second phase of our Community Garden Project. I saw investigation skills such as inquiry and questioning multiple times throughout the project, but mostly during the development of questions in preparation for an interview with the gardener. The children worked in small groups to devise potential questions. Some questions seemed irrelevant, but I still encouraged them to ask. For example, several children were interested in rabbits or bunnies in the garden even though we did not see any rabbits. They thought gardens included rabbits and wanted to find out if this community garden contained any rabbits. Being sensitive to their needs, I honored their thought processes and welcomed these inquiries.

Children were curious about the hotness in the peppers.

On the other hand, some questions were developed out of the experience. More specifically, the children asked about the hot peppers. During our initial site visit to the garden, Margot accidentally touched her eye after coming in contact with a hot pepper. This caused redness and her eye to tear up. The gardeners flushed her eye, but many of the children questioned the "hotness of peppers" and if there was a way to distinguish this by looking at them. For example, Chloe asked, "why some peppers are hot" and surmised "does the red have anything to do with it?" With the help of her group, they decided that the peppers might have levels of hotness possibly determined by colors. Chloe thought maybe the green peppers were not hot and the red ones were hot, like the colors of a stoplight. In the end, the children asked the gardener, "Do the colors correspond to the levels of hotness in the peppers?"

This example of questioning showcases the main difference between units and projects. Collaborative and student-led questioning are not part of units and themes, but they are an essential part of project work. The Project Approach necessitates "openness to children's ideas, interests, questions, individual learning styles, and competencies" (Chard, 2000, p. 9) especially if that openness invites an opportunity for debate and discomfort (Burns & Lewis, 2016). In the Project Approach, students take risks and safely express opinions and theories without fear of being wrong. Follow-up investigations provide the basis for support or denial of hypotheses. "Some students find this uncertainty uncomfortable and challenging, but it is this discomfort that leads the young thinker to the realization that there is more to explore" (Burns & Lewis, 2016, p. 141). The students reasoned questions based off of their experiences and collectively decided an appropriate question. In the end, Chloe's hypothesis was incorrect, but her thinking was authentic and connected to her first-hand experience. She is more likely to remember this event and the answer to her question because she wrestled with the answer and reasoned collectively with her classmates. Traditional units do not provide these kinds of opportunities.

Perception #2: Projects Take Too Long

Before implementing a project, I wondered if projects were worth the time. Successful projects include three distinct phases, can take weeks or months to complete, and require detailed documentation (Helm & Katz, 2016). Sufficient project work involves profound first-hand experiences with the topic, student-led investigations, and multiple representations of learning. Other priorities such as standards, curriculum, and administration have louder voices when considering whether to implement a project. Still, I always went back to a lack of time as my main excuse for not including a project as part of the classroom. Yes, projects are extensive work by students and teachers; this perception of the Project Approach is accurate. However, I now see the time utilized as an investment not waste.

Traditional teaching styles accomplish the teacher's agenda but do not recognize the importance of the students' voices. Mastery of standards leads the learning and each content area housed during a timeslot in the day. The teacher maintains a traditional timetable and ignores the leadings of her students.

Projects are compatible with other learning experiences and classroom structures (Helm & Katz, 2016). Burns and Lewis (2016) described the Project Approach as an emergent curriculum inclusive of standards, goals, and essential questions. The teacher takes on a new role where she relinquishes control to her students in favor of a role of support and advisor instead of director (Chard, 2000). Standards are controlled and manipulated, not the children (Mitchell et al., 2009). Students work within groups to study meaningful topics, and the teacher provides designated project time for site visits, exploration, and provocations. Bills et al. (2018) recognized the need for balancing enough time to commit to the importance of deep project work and enough time that students do not become overwhelmed and lose steam for their projects. It is a delicate balance of time.

Project work accomplishes the goals of the teacher and the students with looser time frames based on interest. Throughout the Community Garden Project, I operated in time frames but not with specific goals in mind. For example, each visit to the garden or with the gardener lasted one hour, but I did not direct the time. The students led the task and conversation.

Project work allows for differentiation and individualization of the curriculum. Thorough investigation allows for children to express themselves individually in multiple representations and different methods (Beneke & Ostrosky, 2013) which is time-consuming. Deep project work takes time, but the value is immeasurable. Beneke and Ostrosky (2009) purported heightened motivation and interest from diverse learners as well as increased social development from learners engaged in projects. Without large blocks of concentrated time, the Project Approach would not have the same effects.

Perception #3: Projects Require Too Much Preparation

The perception that projects require too much preparation is accurate but not in the manner that most teachers observe. The

Project Approach requires teacher preparation of primary sources such as field trips and expert visitors to the classroom. Teachers also provide secondary sources such as materials for representations, books, videos, and more. These are time-consuming tasks; however, the most important preparation is not physical. The most important preparation for project work happens in the creative and imaginative minds of teachers as they anticipate student needs, access prior knowledge, and determine the level of interest for proposed projects (Chard, 1999).

One veteran teacher explained that you must have a vision for projects, not a plan (Mitchell et al., 2009). Fruitful preparation provides a vision for project work and allows teachers to be present while children work in comparison to more traditional measures of learning. Burns and Lewis (2016) admitted to the challenges of helping students while not answering every question and Alfonso (2017) reported difficulties with the culminating event. Still, those challenges are part of the process. Both students and teachers are problem solvers working toward deep understanding that cannot result when mental preparation is lacking.

During our Community Garden Project, I mentally and physically prepared for Phase I. I created an anticipatory web (Figure 2), planned visits to the community garden, spoke with the gardeners, checked out books from the library, and created an anticipation guide to glean what my students already knew about gardens. From day one, I felt successful in the direction of our project.

During Phase II, I realized my preparation fell short. I neglected the needs of my students because many were ill-equipped to engage in project work and accustomed to a particular style of learning. They often waited for me to answer their questions or strayed from the topic. They also had difficulty constructing questions or offered simple questions that required much less investigation. My students needed to learn how to question, how to take notes, and how to sketch learning on field visits. In addition, they needed intentional teaching strategies for how to adequately reflect about learning and how to construct representations of what was seen and felt during our field site visits. Anderson et al. (2021) concluded effective projects involve students thinking at the highest levels

Project Approach encourages children to work together.

Figure 2. Anticipatory Web

Community Garden Teacher's Anticipatory Web

What Grows in a Garden
- Flowers/bulbs
- Summer veggies
- Watermelon
- Fruit
- Beans
- Lettuce
- Peas
- Carrots
- Corns
- Peppers
- Eggplant
- Broccoli
- Pumpkins
- Squash
- Herbs
- Tomatoes
- Cabbage
- Jalapenos

- Science
  - Terrariums
  - Plant seeds

Helps Plants Grow
- Soil
- Temperature
- Sun
- Water/rain
- Fertilizer

- Science
  - Dramatic play
  - Water cycle

Learn to Garden
- Local garden centers
- Garden magazines
- Classes

- Literacy
  - Write stories
  - Write fiction pamphlets
  - Create TV show

Role of Gardener
- Plants seeds
- Tends the garden
- Composting
- Water
- Farmer's Market (organic)

- Reasons to garden
  - Food
  - Pretty
  - Cheaper
  - Feed animals
  - Relaxation
  - Meditation
  - Job

- Social Studies
  - Dramatic play
  - Speeches
  - Citizenship
  - Caring for the environment
  - Recycling

Tools of the Garden
- Wheel barrow
- Stakes
- Belt
- Apron
- Trowel
- Water bottle
- Hoe
- Shovel
- Pruners
- Mallet
- Watering can
- Gloves
- Shed
- Boots
- Tomato cages
- Dirt
- Seeds, plants, roots

Garden Décor
- Gnomes
- Rocks
- Waterfall
- Statues
- Benches
- Pathways
- Garden stools

- Art
  - Create statues
  - Create a garden
  - 3D constructions
  - Illustrate stories

Creatures
- Praying mantis
- Ladybugs
- Rabbits
- Spiders
- Worms
- Bees (pollination)
- Butterflies
- Insects

- Science
  - Life cycles
  - Insect/spider
  - Pollination

using deep reflection and prolonged periods of time versus simple recall over shortened periods of time. This lack of preparation cost us valuable education as a classroom unit.

Phase III concluded when four groups emerged with children indicating a preference for their shared information including topics surrounding the turtle, the flowers, the garden, and various garden creatures. In an attempt to allow the children to take the lead, I willingly watched the children enter and organize these groups and work together to create something to share with the other third grade classrooms.

The various culminating projects were not part of my initial anticipatory web, but the children fostered many dispositions such as independence and creativity. I saw many planning and organizing behaviors as each group decided how to create a collaborative piece and speaking order for presentation. More specifically, one group chose to use note cards to write what they would say in their presentation. Using notecards was Augie's idea, a member of the group, who displayed high levels of leadership and organization. The other members followed when he explained the value of the note cards. Another example came when two group members problem solved how they would help their three-dimensional turtle stand up for the final presentation. Using a variety of materials, they eventually placed the turtle between large sticks and glue with three sticks used to prop the two-dimensional turtle upright. The organization, collaboration, and discussion surrounding this event were successful.

An investigation is easier for older students to complete, but research supports Project Approach for younger children (Helm & Katz, 2016). The teacher's level of preparation paves the way for successful projects at all ages (Bills et al., 2018). Chard (2000) surmised projects take a considerable amount of trust and confidence in oneself and faith to journey the unknown. Yes, projects take much preparation but also willingness to relinquish control opting to support children's thinking and not direct it. Only when we challenge the status quo do we illuminate potential misperceptions.

My Perception: Reflections on a Community Garden Project

What did I learn?

First, I learned the initial phase provides a foundation and groundwork before the project begins. I was surprised by how much teacher reflection and anticipation of needs is necessary before the project work begins. Second, I learned Phase II is only as active as the first-hand experiences that are present in the learning. While the Community Garden Project incorporated high levels of engagement and first-hand experiences, the children still went back to their original thinking in many ways. I needed more first-hand experiences and representations to adjust their thinking to align with more accurate accounts of the community garden. Third, the culminating event contained partially irrelevant and ineffective representations of what was learned in the garden and through interviews with the gardener. The children focused on unrealistic ideas of gardens instead of the garden they visited. Therefore, I learned that the children needed more guidance, inquiry, representations, and time with the garden to produce more accurate projects that reflected learning.

What would I change?

Everything and nothing all at the same time. In many ways, I would change everything that we did from how we interacted with the garden to how I engaged the class in conversations and webbing. On the other hand, I would change nothing. I learned more than the children, and I challenged the status quo. It is easier to maintain the same traditional measures and teach what I have always known, but I did not. I engaged in something new, something unknown and gained a new understanding and a new appreciation for the Project Approach.

What will I do next time?

Mitchell et al. (2009) summed up my biggest takeaway when they stated, "teachers must shift their ideas about planning to embrace co-creating and participating in the learning context with children" (p. 345). Teaching is more about them and less about me, but when I learn alongside them, we all move forward. So, challenge the status quo. I promise it's worth it.

Amanda Wilson, Ed.D., is an Associate Professor in the College of Education at Oral Roberts University. Working for her alma mater, Dr. Wilson holds four degrees in education with certifications in elementary, early childhood, special education, and reading. This project was completed in conjunction with a dear friend and teacher, Mrs. Brandi Trompler, who teaches third grade at a local school.

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Supporting Dual Language Learners through Culturally Responsive Early Childhood Family Education Programs

Robert A. Griffin, Katherine B. Green, Tamra W. Ogletree, and Sandra Hess Robbins[1]

While we know early childhood education experiences promote foundational knowledge for success in later years, especially regarding literacy and numeracy skills (Ansari, 2018; Phillips et al., 2017), culturally and linguistically diverse children are particularly positioned to benefit from exposure to early childhood education (Grant & Ray, 2019). Dual language learners (DLLs) are one prominent subgroup of culturally and linguistically diverse students for whom preschool attendance is growing nationwide. For the purposes of this article, we define DLLs as preschool-aged children who have at least one caregiver at home who speaks a language other than English (Park et al., 2017; Werblow et al., 2020). Approximately 1 in 4 students who attended preschool in 2017 were DLLs (Office of English Language Acquisition, 2019), and 2 in 3 of these were Latinx[2] students whose home language was Spanish (Child Trends, 2021).

Attending preschool may be particularly advantageous for DLLs for several reasons. First, achievement gaps are already established when DLLs enter kindergarten without having attended a preschool program, such as being less able to recognize English letters, count to 20, or write their names compared with their English-dominant peers (Ansari, 2018). Second, preschool attendance promotes the native or first language (L1) and the target or second language (L2; English) and literacy development (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2016; Phillips et al., 2017). Academic language and social-behavioral skills also increase when DLLs attend public preschool programs (Ansari & López, 2015). Gains in English proficiency, reading achievement, and math performance have also been demonstrated (Halle et al., 2012).

Family involvement and participation in early learning experiences and interventions have been shown to enhance the positive outcomes of early childhood learning for students across culturally and linguistic backgrounds (Barnett et al., 2020). For example, when caregivers are actively involved in early childhood learning, children's social and emotional skills may improve (Sitnick et al., 2015). While family engagement in early childhood education benefits all students, DLLs and their families are uniquely positioned to benefit from exposure to early childhood family education (ECFE) (Sommer et al., 2020). The Minnesota Department of Education (2020) provides the following description of ECFE:

> Early Childhood Family Education…is based on the idea that parents provide their child's first and most significant learning environment and parents are children's first and most enduring teachers. ECFE works to support…caregiver[s] and to strengthen and empower families. The goal is to enhance the ability of all parents and other family members to provide the best possible environments for their child's learning and development. (para. 1)

This article explores the benefits of culturally responsive ECFE

1 Posthumous

2 We use "Latinx" throughout to be inclusive of all gender identities (Salinas & Lozano, 2019) and intend it to be equivalent to "Hispanic" or "Latina/o."

programs for DLLs and their families. We focus on how capitalizing on the wealth of knowledge and experiences DLL families possess can help practitioners structure and implement authentic learning experiences for DLLs and their families. We present three such culturally responsive ECFE programs—Saturday Family Education Academy, Weekday Family Education Programs, and Monthly Family Education Days—as examples for educators to use to create similar programs in their professional settings.

Constructs of Culturally Responsive Family Education

Attending formalized preschool environments can raise literacy and math scores for DLL children while reducing inequality in kindergarten (Barnett et al., 2020; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2016). DLL children from first-generation immigrant families may be particularly well positioned to benefit the most from ECFE programs (Magnuson et al., 2006). In addition to situating DLLs for success in the early grades and beyond, culturally responsive ECFE programs like the ones advocated for here not only educate young children but engage and support their families (Grant et al., 2019; Jain et al., 2019). What follows are six constructs that emerge from the literature to inform successful implementation of culturally responsive ECFE programs, ranging from family empowerment to share decision making. Saturday Family Education Academy, Weekday Family Education Programs, and Monthly Family Education Days—the three ECFE programs highlighted in this article—all reflect these constructs by placing children and their families, including their cultures and native languages, at the forefront of program planning, implementation, and outcomes.

Family Engagement

Research demonstrating the benefits of early learning experiences has steadily accumulated, gained national attention, and generated increased funding (Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). Despite the increase in notoriety and funding for pre-kindergarten education programs, a child's home learning environment may be just as influential, if not more so, on later academic and social success than formal education in classroom settings (Melhuish et al., 2008). This is particularly true for DLLs (Hoff, 2015). As such, parental involvement is a critical component for ensuring high-quality early childhood education. Family engagement at an early age predicts later positive learning outcomes, such as social, behavioral, literacy, and mathematics skills (Marschall, 2006; Powell et al., 2010). For example, family participation in early learning experiences designed for DLL parents focused on literacy has been shown to enhance the quality and quantity of these experiences, such as increasing the amount of time parents read with their children (Mendez, 2010; Mesa & Restrepo, 2019).

Funds of Knowledge

Family education programs founded on strengths-based approaches are most effective. A strengths-based orientation to ECFE includes (a) fostering strong family bonds, (b) including more social support networks, and (c) capitalizing on the strengths of the cultures and languages of families (Jain et al., 2019). In addition, valuing the funds of knowledge DLL families possess is essential to any strengths-based model (Souto-Manning, 2016). González et al. (2005) explain how these funds of knowledge are based on the principle that "people are competent, they have knowledge, and their life experiences have given them that knowledge" (pp. ix–x). Families bring with them skills and understandings they have acquired over time that help them navigate their lived experiences. The funds of knowledge and strengths DLL families possess include home knowledge, cultural practices, lived experiences, family support networks, and bi/multiliteracy. For example, many Latinx families share strong bonds with their families (Bustamante & Hindman, 2020). Strong family traditions anchor their child-rearing values, such as eating meals daily with their families. In addition, most Latinx children live in two-parent households, where the potential for emotional and economic well-being is present (Murphey et al., 2014). When perceived through a lens that focuses on funds of knowledge, practitioners are able to capitalize on the skills and resources that DLL families possess to create effective ECFE programs (Souto-Manning & Martell, 2016).

Culturally Responsive Practices

ECFE programs targeted to DLL families, like those discussed in this article, are holistic and build on the strengths and funds of knowledge of DLL families and incorporate culturally responsive family-centered practices. When some educators consider multicultural education, they mistakenly think of the antiquated holidays-and-heroes approach (Lee et al., 1998), such as inviting parents to participate in a cooking demonstration in which they prepare a cultural dish to share with the group, singing native songs, or wearing native dress. While these practices are well-intentioned, they can easily lead to "othering" DLLs and families instead of embracing their cultures as normal within the classroom. Put differently, the cultures and family backgrounds of all students should be equally represented in the curriculum, and none should be perceived as exotic or different. Bennett et al. (2018) outlined several frameworks that embody a culturally responsive early childhood learning environment: (a) family engagement, (b) critical literacy within a social justice framework, (c) multicultural literature, and (d) culturally responsive print-rich environments. Building on these frameworks, early childhood educators should create learning environments that incorporate multiple perspectives about issues; foster nurturing, meaningful relationships between children and adults; and include authentic learning experiences (Grant & Ray, 2019; Jain et al., 2019).

Family-Centered Practices

Quality early childhood education involves a set of flexible practices designed to support individual families and children by treating each of them with dignity and respect. Responding to the unique needs of every family, especially for those who are culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse, is critical to achieving true family-centered practices (Division for Early Childhood [DEC], 2020). However, in our increasingly multicultural society, being a family-centered educator is not possible without first being culturally responsive (Rossetti et al., 2018).

Family-centered practices are designed specifically for the unique needs of the population of children and families involved. In order

to create family-centered activities, teachers and administrators should work to build trust and respect with families who are culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse (DEC, 2020). Resources are also needed to build trust and support diverse families, such as providing families with free learning materials translated into their native languages so that families can support their children at home. Other accommodations should also be provided, such as translators or bilingual volunteers and complimentary meals when possible (Jain et al., 2019).

Family-centered practice is also achieved when practitioners are familiar with and sensitive to the culture of each family (Rossetti et al., 2018). In ECFE programs, recruiting additional supports for families, such as community healthcare workers, counselors, and social workers, is also important to consider. This is particularly true when there is a perceived incongruity between the culture of the program developers and the children and families for whom the program is designed (Jain et al., 2019). Community stakeholders who are familiar with the language and culture of the students and families being served can help to develop and translate materials, communicate with families, and facilitate support for finding resources. Moreover, families should be provided with comprehensive and unbiased information in a way that the family can understand and use to make informed choices and decisions (DEC, 2020).

Given the unique strengths and needs of DLLs, engaging families in ways that are culturally respectful, safe, and supportive is critical. Responsiveness to families' concerns and priorities, as well as to their changing life circumstances, is also important (DEC, 2020). Some DLL children may face a variety of socio-emotional challenges including stresses related to the process of acculturation and rebuilding family relationships (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). These challenges make understanding and responding to family strengths and needs particularly imperative when engaging and implementing family-centered practices for DLL students and families.

Family Empowerment

Many states have utilized family-centered programs to increase parent capacity. For instance, Mueller (1998) investigated the state of Minnesota's ECFE program. Minnesota's ECFE model was state-funded and implemented by public schools. The purpose of Minnesota's ECFE model was to strengthen families by supporting the parents' abilities to educate and nurture their child's development (Mueller, 1998). Mueller found the majority of parents felt that ECFE made a positive difference in their parenting, parent-child relationships, and their child's behavior. After 10 months of participation in the program, 92% of the economically underprivileged families showed improvements in their awareness and understanding of childhood physical and cognitive development, and they reported feeling more confident as parents because of increased social support. Child language and social-emotional skills also improved as a result of the program.

Although universal pre-kindergarten is gaining national attention, many states do not designate funding specific for early childhood parent or family education, outside of IDEA Part C services. According to DEC (2020), practitioners build family capacity by including opportunities and experiences for parents that strengthen their existing knowledge and promote the development of new skills. As such, ECFE programs should be designed to meet parents where they are, build upon their existing level of knowledge, and support the development of new parenting skills and abilities. These newly learned skills and abilities will allow caregivers to better promote successful early childhood development with their children at home.

Shared Decision Making

Being respectful and responsive to family needs and using a strength-based approach while promoting self-efficacy are the building blocks for developing strong relationships between families and professionals (Jain et al., 2019). Solid relationships open the door for meaningful dialogue and the development of mutually agreed upon outcomes and goals. Practices that promote collaboration are highly recommended (Zepeda et al., 2011) so mutual goals that promote family competencies and support the development of the child can be achieved (DEC, 2020).

One challenge for some DLL families is that educators may dictate goals and strategies for parents rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue and collaboration (Rossetti et al., 2018). Authentic collaboration between practitioners and families includes shared goal writings. For example, parents may agree to read to their child every day or practice letter names or sounds. Rather than educators and

Table 1. Constructs of Culturally Responsive Family Education

Construct	Key Takeaways	Research Support
Family Engagement	Predicts later positive learning outcomes, such as social, behavioral, literacy, and mathematics skills Enhances the quality and quantity of learning experiences, such as increasing the amount of time parents read with their children	Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Mesa & Restrepo, 2019; Powell et al., 2010
Funds of Knowledge	Include home knowledge, cultural practices, lived experiences, family support networks, and bi/multiliteracy Enable practitioners to capitalize on the skills and resources that DLL families possess to create effective ECFE programs	Bustamante & Hindman, 2020; González et al., 2005; Murphey et al., 2014; Souto-Manning, 2016
Culturally Responsive Practices	Engage families in critical literacy within a social justice framework, multicultural literature, and culturally responsive print-rich environments Incorporate multiple perspectives about issues, foster nurturing adult-child relationships, and include culturally authentic learning experiences	Bennett et al., 2018; Grant & Ray, 2019; Jain et al., 2019; Lee et al., 1998
Family-Centered Practices	Build trust and respect with families who are culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse Engage families in ways that are culturally respectful, safe, and supportive	Division for Early Childhood, 2020; Jain et al., 2019; Rossetti et al., 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015
Family Empowerment	Centers on positive outcomes for families, such as achieving positive differences in parenting skills, parent-child relationships, and child behavior Includes opportunities and experiences for parents that strengthen their existing knowledge and promote the development of new skills	Division for Early Childhood, 2020; Mueller, 1998
Shared Decision Making	Includes meaningful dialogue and the development of mutually agreed upon outcomes and goals Families create action plans with the assistance of their child's teacher or social worker	DEC, 2020; Jain et al., 2019; Rossetti et al., 2018 Zepeda et al., 2011

administrators providing goals to the families, the families should create action plans with the assistance of their child's teacher or social worker. Family and professional collaboration is essential when working with DLLs and their families. Practitioners are encouraged to work with families on goal-setting, developing individualized plans, and implementing plans based on family's priorities, as well as the child's strengths and needs (DEC, 2020).

Models of Culturally Responsive ECFE Programs

Three culturally responsive ECFE models are described in this section: Saturday Family Education Academy, Weekday Family Education Programs, and Monthly Family Education Programs. All three programs were designed to build on the strengths of DLL families and provide flexible programming, while also introducing families to various community and school resources. Each program, while similar in nature, differed slightly in frequency, programming, and location. While the authors were involved in designing, implementing, overseeing, and evaluating the three models described here, these are simply examples of how early childhood educators can implement similar family-centered ECFE programs for DLLs and their families in their professional contexts.

Saturday Family Education Academy

Saturday Family Education Academy (or simply Saturday Academy) is one example of an ECFE program designed to promote student and family engagement in a culturally responsive manner. Saturday Academy was a collaboration between a community center, a public library, a public school district, and a university. The program was held for six Saturdays, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., at a local community center. The facilitators of the intervention group included one pre-kindergarten certified teacher and a bilingual parent coordinator. The Opening the World to Learning (OWL) curriculum (Savvas Learning Company, 2020) was adapted to specifically address parent-child interactions within each activity. Each class consisted of breakfast, a

bilingual storybook reading, and learning stations for the first 1.5 hours, and the last 30 minutes were reserved for parents to meet with a bilingual community healthcare consultant while the children played on the playground with the facilitators.

Weekly family education programs can imitate a typical preschool day, including storytime, learning stations, free play, and a meal. The weekly meeting with the healthcare consultant consisted of: (a) writing a family action plan; (b) reviewing community resources; and (c) discussing parenting, education and healthcare in the United States, and other topics of interest to the parents. Storytime was an important component of Saturday Family Education Academy. In working with families whose primary language is not English, best practices suggest that practitioners provide families with information about the benefits of children learning in multiple languages for the child's growth and development (DEC, 2020). Each week, parents in Saturday Family Education Academy were informed about the benefits of their children learning both English and Spanish. Parents were encouraged to speak and read to their child in their home language (Hancock, 2009). The teachers worked diligently to dispel the myth that parents should only read and speak in English to their children.

Weekday Family Education Programs

A local school district replicated Saturday Family Education Academy by inviting families who had bi/multilingual children, ages four to five, who were not participating in pre-kindergarten or formal preschool environments. This program was conducted for two to three days a week through a similar model utilizing family social workers and school district family educators. Classes were provided throughout the regular school year. Parents and children interact, learn, play, and even cook together on weekday mornings. Community partners, such as the state community healthcare program and local hospital pediatrics units provide information throughout the weekly sessions with themes aimed to increase parents' understanding of the importance of positive parent-child relationship building, early learning activities, and healthy living lifestyles.

Many of the families involved in these programs were first-generation immigrants. Even though the school district had universal pre-kindergarten available at no cost to the parents, the parents did not choose to send children to formal schooling until they were in kindergarten. Thus, part of the programming for these activities was to introduce families to the schools in the community. Some of the sessions were held at the local schools in order to familiarize families with the building and the teaching staff.

Monthly Family Education Days

Early childhood settings may be able to modify the weekly family education and engagement activities and provide monthly family education. Family Education Days were designed around the concept of capacity-building, family-centered education and engagement for culturally and linguistically diverse families within a metro Head Start agency in the southeast U.S. Family Education Days occurred monthly, on Saturdays or weekday evenings, for two hours at a time. Each day was created around a preschool storybook theme, such as The Hungry Caterpillar. Six stations were created around the themes: (1) Literacy and Language Arts, (2) Mathematics, (3) Science, (4) Snack, (5) Gross and Fine Motor Activities, and (6) Arts and Crafts.

The Early Learning Center that implemented Family Education Days utilized community partners to help facilitate the activities, such as volunteers from a local university, volunteer translators, a local community health program, and their own teachers and staff. Parents were provided with opportunities to learn about their centers' early learning standards, positive and proactive social and behavioral supports, as well as engagement and interaction with the center staff.

Call to Action

ECFE programs, such as the three models described in this paper—Saturday Family Education Academy, Weekday Family Education Programs, and Monthly Family Education Days—are examples of how early childhood educators can collaborate with families and communities to improve early learning skills, build parent capacity, and implement family-centered support for culturally and linguistically diverse families. Using the framework for these models, practitioners can design and implement similar programs that will exemplify best practices and support families and children in achieving their goals. The importance of the first five years of a child's life is well documented within the research literature (e.g., Rose & Schimke, 2012). Providing programming to families of young children that is not only culturally responsive, but also attractive to families from a variety of backgrounds, can promote access to quality education for all children.

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Apoyando a los niños que aprenden dos idiomas a través de programas culturalmente receptivos de educación temprana para la familia

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Si bien sabemos que las experiencias de educación de la primera infancia promueven el conocimiento fundamental para el éxito en años venideros, especialmente con respecto a las habilidades de alfabetización y matemáticas (Ansari, 2018; Phillips et al., 2017), son los niños cultural y lingüísticamente diversos quienes particularmente se benefician de las experiencias de educación temprana (Grant & Ray, 2019). Los estudiantes que aprenden dos idiomas (DLL por las siglas en inglés, Dual Language Learners) son un subgrupo prominente de estudiantes cultural y lingüísticamente diversos para quienes el apoyo en el nivel preescolar está creciendo en todo el país. Para los propósitos de este artículo, definimos DLL como niños en edad preescolar que tienen al menos una persona que les cuida en el hogar que habla un idioma que no sea el inglés (Park et al., 2017; Werblow et al., 2020). Aproximadamente 1 de cada 4 estudiantes que asistieron a preescolar en 2017 eran DLL (Oficina de Adquisición del Idioma Inglés, 2019), y 2 de cada 3 de estos eran estudiantes latinos cuyo idioma materno era el español (Child Trends, 2020)$_{2}$.

Asistir al preescolar puede ser particularmente ventajoso para los DLL por varias razones. Primero, las expectativas de aprendizaje ya están establecidas cuando los DLL ingresan al aula preescolar sin haber asistido a un programa preescolar, como ser menos capaces de reconocer las letras en inglés, contar hasta 20 o escribir sus nombres en comparación con sus compañeros que dominan el inglés (Ansari, 2018). En segundo lugar, el apoyo preescolar promueve el) desarrollo del lenguaje y la alfabetización del idioma nativo o primer idioma (L1) y el segundo idioma (L2; Inglés (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2016; Phillips et al., 2017). El lenguaje académico y las habilidades socio-conductuales también aumentan cuando los DLL asisten a los programas (Ansari & López, 2015). También se ha encontrado que hay ganancias en la proficiencia en el inglés, lectura y matemáticas (Halle et al., 2012).

Se ha demostrado que la participación de la familia y la participación en experiencias e intervenciones de aprendizaje temprano mejoran los resultados positivos del aprendizaje en la primera infancia para los estudiantes de todos los orígenes culturales y lingüísticos (Barnett et al., 2020). Por ejemplo, cuando los cuidadores o personas responsables de los niños participan activamente en el aprendizaje de la primera infancia, las habilidades sociales y emocionales de los niños pueden mejorar (Sitnick et al., 2015). Si bien la participación de la familia en la educación de la primera infancia beneficia a todos los estudiantes, los DLL y sus familias están en una posición única para beneficiarse con la participación en programas de educación para la familia en el nivel temprano (ECFE por sus siglas en inglés; Sommer et al., 2020). El Departamento de Educación de Minnesota (2020) proporciona la siguiente descripción de ECFE:

> Educación para las familias en el nivel temprano…se basa en la idea de que los padres proporcionan el primer y más importante entorno de aprendizaje de sus hijos y los padres son los primeros y más duraderos maestros de los niños. ECFE trabaja para apoyar…cuidadores y para fortalecer y empoderar a las familias. El objetivo es mejorar la capacidad de todos los padres y otros miembros de la familia para proporcionar los mejores entornos posibles para el aprendizaje y el desarrollo de sus hijos. (párrafo 1)

Este artículo explora los beneficios de los programas de ECFE culturalmente receptivos para niños DLL y sus familias. Nos centramos en cómo capitalizar la riqueza de conocimientos y experiencias

1 Póstumo

2 Usamos "Latinx" para incluir todas las identidades de género (Salinas y Lozano, 2019) para hacerlos equivalentes a "hispano" o "latino/a".

que poseen las familias DLL que puede ayudar a los profesionales a estructurar e implementar experiencias de aprendizaje auténticas. Aquí presentamos tres de estos programas ECFE culturalmente receptivos: Saturday Family Education Academy, Weekday Family Education Programs y Monthly Family Education Days, como ejemplos para que los educadores puedan usarlos para desarrollar programas similares en sus centros de trabajo.

Constructos sobre la Educación Culturalmente Responsable con las Familias

Asistir a programas preescolares contibuye al aumento en los resultados de pruebas de alfabetización y matemáticas para los niños DLL y reduce la desigualdad en el nivel temprano (Barnett et al., 2020; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2016). Los niños DLL de familias inmigrantes de primera generación pueden estar particularmente bien posicionados para beneficiarse al máximo de los programas ECFE (Magnuson et al., 2006). Además de favorecer a los DLL para tener éxito en los primeros grados y más allá, los programas culturalmente receptivos como los que se presentan aquí no solo educan a los niños pequeños, sino que también involucran y apoyan a sus familias (Grant et al., 2019; Jain et al., 2019). Lo que sigue son seis constructos o conceptos que contribuyen a la implementación exitosa de programas de ECFE culturalmente receptivos, que van desde el empoderamiento familiar hasta la toma compartida de decisiones (Tabla 1). Los tres programas de ECFE destacados en este artículo, Saturday Family Education Academy, Weekday Family Education Programs y Monthly Family Education Days, reflejan estos principios al colocar a los niños y sus familias, incluyendo a sus culturas y lenguas nativas, a la vanguardia de la planificación, implementación y resultados del programa.

Compromiso familiar

Las investigaciones que demuestran los beneficios de las experiencias de aprendizaje temprano siguen acumulándose, ganando la atención nacional y generando una mayor inversión (Delalibera y Ferreira, 2019; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013). A pesar del aumento en su popularidad y l financiamiento para los programas de educación preescolar, el entorno de aprendizaje en el hogar de un niño puede ser tan influyente, si no más, en su posterior éxito académico y social al igual que ocurre con la educación formal en el aula (Melhuish et al., 2008). Esto es particularmente cierto con los DLL (Hoff, 2015). Como tal, la participación de los padres es un componente crítico para garantizar una educación de alta calidad en la primera infancia. La participación de la familia a una edad temprana predice resultados de aprendizaje positivos como son sus habilidades sociales, conducta, alfabetización y matemáticas (Marschall, 2006; Powell et al., 2010). Por ejemplo, se ha demostrado que la participación de la familia en experiencias de aprendizaje diseñadas para padres DLL enfocados en la alfabetización mejora la calidad y cantidad de estas experiencias, como el aumento de la cantidad de tiempo que los padres leen con sus hijos (Méndez, 2010; Mesa & Restrepo, 2019).

Fondos de Conocimiento

Los programas de educación familiar con enfoques basados en las fortalezas de la familia son los más efectivos. Una orientación basada en las fortalezas para ECFE incluye (a) fomentar fuertes lazos familiares, (b) incluir más redes de apoyo social y (c) capitalizar las fortalezas de las culturas y los idiomas de las familias (Jain et al., 2019). Además, valorar los fondos de conocimiento que poseen las familias DLL es esencial para cualquier modelo instituido en fortalezas (Souto-Manning, 2016). González et al. (2005) explican cómo estos fondos de conocimiento se basan en el principio de que "las personas son competentes, tienen conocimiento, y sus experiencias de vida les han dado ese conocimiento" (pp. ix-x). Las familias traen consigo habilidades y entendimientos que han adquirido con el tiempo que les ayudan a navegar sus experiencias vividas. Los fondos de conocimiento y fortalezas que poseen las familias DLL incluyen conocimiento del hogar, prácticas culturales, experiencias vividas, redes de apoyo familiar y alfabetización bilingüe / multi-alfabetización. Por ejemplo, muchas familias latinas comparten fuertes lazos con sus familiares (Bustamante & Hindman, 2020). Las fuertes tradiciones familiares sirven para anclar sus principios de crianza de los hijos, como comer diariamente con sus familias. Además, la mayoría de los niños latinos viven en hogares con ambos padres, donde el potencial de bienestar emocional y económico está presente (Murphey et al., 2014). Cuando se percibe a través de una lente que se centra en los fondos de conocimiento, los profesionales pueden capitalizar las habilidades y los recursos que poseen las familias DLL para crear programas efectivos (Souto-Manning y Martell, 2016).

Prácticas culturalmente receptivas

Los programas de ECFE dirigidos a las familias DLL, como los que se discuten en este artículo, son holísticos y se basan en las fortalezas y los fondos de conocimiento de las familias e incorporan prácticas centradas en la familia que son culturalmente receptivas. A veces algunos educadores al considerar la educación multicultural piensan erróneamente en el anticuado enfoque de las fiestas y los héroes (Lee et al., 1998), como invitar a los padres a participar en una demostración de cocina donde preparan un plato cultural para compartir con el grupo, cantando canciones nativas o vistiendo vestimenta nativa. Si bien estas prácticas son bien intencionadas, pueden conducir fácilmente a hacer ver a las familias DLL como los "otros" en lugar de abrazar sus culturas dentro del aula. Dicho de otra manera, las culturas y los datos familiares de todos los estudiantes deben estar igualmente representados en el currículo y ninguno debe ser visto como exótico o diferente. Bennett et al. (2018) esbozaron varios marcos que incorporan un entorno de aprendizaje de la primera infancia culturalmente receptivo: (a) participación familiar, (b) alfabetización crítica dentro de un marco de justicia social, (c) literatura multicultural y (d) entornos ricos en material impreso que sean culturalmente receptivos. Sobre la base de estos marcos, los educadores de la primera infancia deben crear ambientes que incorporen múltiples perspectivas sobre las situaciones y retos; fomentar relaciones enriquecedoras y significativas entre niños y adultos; e incluir experiencias de aprendizaje auténticas (Grant & Ray, 2019; Jain et al., 2019).

Prácticas centradas en la familia

La educación de calidad en la primera infancia implica un conjunto de prácticas flexibles diseñadas para apoyar con atención individual a las familias y a los niños al tratar a cada uno con dignidad y respeto. Responder a las necesidades únicas de cada familia, especialmente para aquellos que son cultural, lingüística y socioeconómicamente diversos, es fundamental para lograr verdaderas prácticas enfocadas en la familia (División para la Primera Infancia [DEC], 2020). Sin embargo, en nuestra sociedad cada vez más multicultural, es imposible ser un educador con orientación hacia la familia sin antes ser culturalmente receptivo (Rossetti et al., 2018).

Las prácticas centradas en la familia están diseñadas específicamente para las necesidades únicas de la población de niños y familias involucradas. Con el fin de crear actividades centradas en la familia, los maestros y administradores deben trabajar para generar confianza y respeto con las familias que son cultural, lingüística y socioeconómicamente diversas (DEC, 2020). También se necesitan recursos para generar confianza y apoyar a las familias diversas, como proporcionar a las familias materiales de aprendizaje gratuitos traducidos a sus idiomas nativos para que las familias puedan apoyar a sus hijos en el hogar. Igualmente se deben proporcionar otras adaptaciones, como traductores o voluntarios bilingües y comidas de cortesía cuando sea posible (Jain et al., 2019).

La práctica centrada en la familia también se logra cuando los profesionales están familiarizados y son sensibles a la cultura de cada familia (Rossetti et al., 2018). En los programas de ECFE, también es importante tener en cuenta el reclutamiento de apoyos adicionales para las familias, como trabajadores de atención médica comunitarios, consejeros y trabajadores sociales. Esto es particularmente cierto cuando existe una incongruencia percibida entre la cultura de los desarrolladores del programa y los niños y las familias para quienes está diseñado el programa (Jain et al., 2019). Aquellos en la comunidad que están familiarizadas con el idioma y la cultura de los estudiantes y las familias a las que se atiende pueden ayudar a desarrollar y traducir materiales, comunicarse con las familias y facilitar la búsqueda de recursos. Asimismo, las familias deben recibir información completa e imparcial de manera que puedan entender y utilizar para tomar decisiones informadas (DEC, 2020).

Dadas las fortalezas y necesidades únicas de los DLL, es fundamental involucrar a las familias de manera culturalmente respetuosa, segura y de apoyo. También es importante tener una capacidad de respuesta que considere a las preocupaciones y prioridades de las familias, así como a sus circunstancias de vida cambiantes (DEC, 2020). Recordemos que algunos niños DLL pueden enfrentar una variedad de desafíos socioemocionales, incluido el estrés relacionado con el proceso de aculturación y reconstrucción de las relaciones familiares (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015). Estos desafíos hacen que comprender y responder a las fortalezas y necesidades de la familia sea particularmente importante al involucrar e implementar prácticas centradas en la familia para los estudiantes DLL y las familias.

Empoderamiento familiar

Muchos estados han utilizado programas centrados en la familia para aumentar la capacidad de los padres. Por ejemplo, Mueller (1998) investigó el programa ECFE del estado de Minnesota. El modelo ECFE de Minnesota fue financiado por el estado e implementado por las escuelas públicas. El propósito del modelo ECFE de Minnesota era fortalecer a las familias mediante el apoyo a las habilidades de los padres para educar y nutrir el desarrollo de sus hijos (Mueller, 1998). Mueller encontró que la mayoría de los padres sentían que ECFE hizo una diferencia positiva en su crianza, las relaciones entre padres e hijos y en el comportamiento de sus hijos. Después de 10 meses de participación en el programa, el 92% de las familias con retos económicos mostraron mejoras en su conocimiento y comprensión del desarrollo físico y cognitivo durante la infancia, y reportaron sentirse más seguras como padres debido al aumento del apoyo social. El lenguaje infantil y las habilidades socioemocionales también mejoraron como resultado del programa.

Aunque el programa universal de preescolar está ganando atención nacional, muchos estados no designan fondos específicos para la educación de los padres o la familia durante la edad temprana fuera de los servicios de la Parte C de IDEA. Según DEC (2020), los profesionales desarrollan la capacidad de las familias al incluir oportunidades y experiencias para los padres que fortalecen sus conocimientos existentes y promueven el desarrollo de nuevas prácticas. Como tal, los programas de ECFE deben diseñarse para conocer a los padres donde se encuentran, aprovechar su nivel de conocimiento existente y apoyar el desarrollo de nuevas habilidades y habilidades de crianza. Estas habilidades y destrezas

Tabla 1. Conceptos sobre la Educación para las Familias Culturalmente Receptiva

Constructo	Puntos Principales	Documentacion
Involucración de la familia	Predice metas positivas de aprendizaje como el desarrollo social, conducta, aprovechamiento en lenguaje y matemáticas. Enaltece la calidad y cantidad de las experiencias de aprendizaje como lo es el aumento de tiempo que los padres toman para leer con sus niños.	Delalibera & Ferreira, 2019; Duncan & Magnuson, 2013; Mesa & Restrepo, 2019; Powell et al., 2010
Fondos de Conocimiento	Incluye el conocimiento y prácticas en el hogar, prácticas culturales, experiencias, red de apoyo de la familia y alfabetización bilingüe. Capacita a los profesionales a capitalizar las destrezas y recursos que poseen las familias DLL para crear programas ECFE efectivos.	Bustamante & Hindman, 2020; González et al., 2005; Murphey et al., 2014; Souto-Manning, 2016
Prácticas Culturalmente Receptivas	Involucrar a las familias en la lectura critica con enfoque en la justicia social, uso literatura multicultural y entornos ricos en material escrito. involucración familias en toma de decisiones. Incorporar múltiples perspectivas en temas y asuntos y fomentar las relaciones entre adulto-niño e incluir experiencias auténticas de aprendizaje	Bennett et al., 2018; Grant & Ray, 2019; Jain et al., 2019; Lee et al., 1998
Prácticas centradas en la familia	Esarrollar confianza y respeto con las familis que son cultural, lingüística y socioeconómicamente diversas. Involucración de familias de manera culturalmente respetuosa, que inspire seguridad y apoyo.	Division for Early Childhood, 2020; Jain et al., 2019; Rossetti et al., 2018; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2015
Empoderamiento de la familia	Se centra en resultados positivos para las familias, como lograr diferencias positivas en las habilidades de crianza, las relaciones entre padres e hijos y el comportamiento infantil Incluye oportunidades y experiencias para los padres que fortalezcan sus conocimientos existentes y promuevan el desarrollo de nuevas habilidades	Division for Early Childhood, 2020; Mueller, 1998
Toma de decisiones compartida	Incluye un diálogo significativo y el desarrollo de resultados y objetivos mutuamente acordados Las familias crean planes de acción con la ayuda del maestro o trabajador social de su hijo	DEC, 2020; Jain et al., 2019; Rossetti et al., 2018 Zepeda et al., 2011

recién aprendidas permitirán a los responsables por el cuidado de los niños promover mejor el desarrollo exitoso en el hogar durante la edad temprana.

Toma de decisiones compartida

Ser respetuoso y receptivo a las necesidades familiares y usar un enfoque basado en la fuerza mientras se promueve la autoeficacia son los bloques de construcción para desarrollar relaciones sólidas entre las familias y los profesionales (Jain et al., 2019). Las relaciones sólidas abren la puerta a un diálogo significativo y al desarrollo de resultados y objetivos mutuamente acordados. Las practicas que promueven la colaboración son altamente recomendadas (Zepeda et al., 2011) de manera que existan metas mutuas que apoyen el desarrollo de competencias en la familia a fin de lograr el desarrollo del niño (DEC, 2020).

Uno de los desafíos para algunas familias DLL es que los educadores pueden dictar metas y estrategias para los padres en lugar de participar en un diálogo y colaboración significativos (Rossetti et al., 2018). La colaboración auténtica entre los profesionales y las familias incluye escritos de objetivos compartidos. Por ejemplo, los padres pueden acordar leer a sus hijos todos los días o practicar nombres o sonidos de letras. En lugar de que los educadores y administradores proporcionen metas a las familias, las familias deben crear planes de acción con la ayuda del maestro o trabajador social de su hijo. La colaboración familiar y profesional es esencial cuando se trabaja con DLL y sus familias. Se alienta a los profesionales a trabajar con las familias en el establecimiento de metas, el desarrollo de planes individualizados y la implementación de planes basados en las prioridades de la familia, así como en las fortalezas y necesidades del niño (DEC, 2020).

Modelos de programas ECFE culturalmente receptivos

En esta sección se describen tres modelos de ECFE culturalmente receptivos: *Saturday Family Education Academy, Weekday Family Education Programs y Monthly Family Education Programs.* Los tres programas fueron diseñados para aprovechar las fortalezas de las familias DLL y proporcionar una programación flexible, al tiempo que ofrecen a las familias recursos comunitarios y educativos. Cada programa, aunque de naturaleza similar, difería ligeramente en su frecuencia, programación y ubicación. Si bien los autores participaron en el diseño, implementación, supervisión y evaluación de los tres modelos descritos aquí, estos son simplemente ejemplos de cómo los educadores de la edad temprana pueden implementar programas ECFE similares que estén centrados familias con niños que aprenden dos idiomas DLL dentro de sus contextos profesionales.

La academia sabatina de educación para las familias

Saturday Family Education Academy (o simplemente Saturday Academy) es un ejemplo de un programa ECFE diseñado para promover la participación de los estudiantes y la familia de una manera culturalmente receptiva. Saturday Academy fue una colaboración entre un centro comunitario, una biblioteca pública, un distrito escolar público y una universidad. El programa se llevó a cabo durante seis sábados, de 9:00 a.m. a 11:00 a.m., en un centro comunitario local. Los facilitadores del grupo de intervención incluyeron un maestro certificado de pre-kindergarten y un coordinador de padres bilingües. El currículo Opening the World to Learning (OWL) (Savvas Learning Company, 2020) se adaptó para abordar específicamente las interacciones entre padres e hijos dentro de cada actividad. Cada clase consistió en desayuno, una lectura bilingüe de cuentos y estaciones de aprendizaje durante las primeras 1.5 horas, y los últimos 30 minutos se reservaron para que los padres se reunieran con un consultor bilingüe de atención médica comunitaria mientras los niños jugaban en el patio de recreo con los facilitadores.

Los programas semanales de educación familiar pueden imitar un día preescolar típico, incluida la hora del cuento, las estaciones de aprendizaje, el juego libre y una comida. La reunión semanal con el consultor de salud consistió en: (a) escribir un plan de acción familiar; b) examinar los recursos de la comunidad; y (c) discutir la crianza de los hijos, la educación y la atención médica en los Estados Unidos, y otros temas de interés para los padres. La hora del cuento fue un componente importante de Saturday Family Education Academy. Al trabajar con familias cuyo idioma principal no es el inglés, las mejores prácticas sugieren que los profesionales proporcionen a las familias información sobre los beneficios de que los niños aprendan en varios idiomas para el crecimiento y desarrollo del niño (DEC, 2020). Cada semana, los padres de Saturday Family Education Academy fueron informados sobre los beneficios que reciben sus hijos al aprender inglés y español. Se alentó a los padres a hablar y leer a sus hijos en su lengua materna (Hancock, 2009). Los maestros trabajaron diligentemente para disipar el mito de que los padres solo deben leer y hablar en inglés a sus hijos.

Programas de educación familiar entre semana

Un distrito escolar local replicó Saturday Family Education Academy invitando a familias que tenían niños bilingües / multilingües, de cuatro a cinco años, y que no participaban en programas preescolares o preescolares formales. Este programa se llevó a cabo durante dos o tres días a la semana a través de un modelo similar utilizando trabajadores sociales y educadores del distrito escolar. Las clases se proporcionaron durante todo el año escolar regular. El programa, padres e hijos comparten, aprenden, juegan e incluso cocinan juntos en las mañanas durante los días laborables. Los socios comunitarios, como el programa estatal de atención médica comunitaria y las unidades de pediatría de los hospitales locales, brindan información a lo largo de las sesiones semanales con temas destinados a aumentar los conocimientos de los padres sobre la importancia de la formación de relaciones positivas entre padres e hijos, las actividades de aprendizaje durante los primeros años y estilos de vida saludables.

Muchas de las familias involucradas en estos programas eran inmigrantes de primera generación. A pesar de que el distrito escolar tenía programas de pre-kindergarten universal disponible sin costo para los padres, los padres no eligieron enviar a los niños a la educación formal hasta que estuvieran en el jardín de infantes.

Por lo tanto, parte de la programación de estas actividades fue introducir a las familias a las escuelas de su comunidad. Algunas de las sesiones se llevaron a cabo en las escuelas locales con el fin de familiarizar a las familias con el edificio y el personal docente.

Jornadas Mensuales de Educación Familiar

Los programas de educacion temprana pueden modificar las actividades semanales de educación y participación familiar y proporcionar educación familiar mensual. Los Días de Educación Familiar se diseñaron en torno al concepto de desarrollo de capacidades, educación centrada en la familia y participación para familias cultural y lingüísticamente diversas dentro de una agencia metropolitana de Head Start en el sureste de los EE. UU. Los Días de Educación Familiar ocurrieron mensualmente, los sábados o las noches de los días laborables, durante dos horas a la vez. Cada día se desarrolló en torno a un tema de un libro de cuentos, como *La oruga hambrienta*. Se crearon seis estaciones en torno a los temas: (1) Alfabetización y Artes del Lenguaje, (2) Matemáticas, (3) Ciencias, (4) Merienda, (5) Actividades Motoras Gruesas y Finas, y (6) Artes y Manualidades.

El centro de educación temprana que implementó los Días de Educación Familiar contó con la ayuda de socios comunitarios para ayudar a facilitar las actividades, como voluntarios de una universidad local, traductores voluntarios, un programa de salud de la comunidad local y sus propios maestros y personal. Los padres tuvieron la oportunidad de aprender sobre los estándares de aprendizaje temprano de sus centros, apoyos sociales y conductuales positivos y proactivos, así como el compromiso y la interacción con el personal del centro.

Llamado a la acción

Los programas de ECFE, como los tres modelos descritos en este documento, *Saturday Family Education Academy, Weekday Family Education Programs y Monthly Family Education Days*,son ejemplos de cómo los educadores de educacion temprana pueden colaborar con las familias y las comunidades para mejorar las habilidades de aprendizaje temprano, desarrollar la capacidad de los padres e implementar un apoyo centrado en la familia para familias cultural y lingüísticamente diversas. Utilizando el marco de estos modelos, los profesionales pueden diseñar e implementar programas similares que ejemplificarán las mejores prácticas y apoyarán a las familias y los niños en el logro de sus metas. La importancia de los primeros cinco años en la vida de un niño está bien documentado dentro de la literatura de investigación (por ejemplo, Rose & Schimke, 2012). Proporcionar programas a las familias de niños pequeños que no solo sean culturalmente receptivos, sino también atractivos para las familias de diversos orígenes, puede promover el acceso a una educación de calidad para todos los niños.

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Creating an Outdoor Loose Parts Classroom:
One Preschool's Quest for Boundless STEM

Carrie Cutler and Diane Skidmore

Play with loose parts is well-matched to the math, science, and engineering unleashed by children's creativity. The children in the above photo combined wooden spools, flooring scraps, wooden three-dimensional shapes, craft sticks, and natural wood slices called tree cookies into structures that showed evidence of geometric awareness, understanding of stability and physics, and engineering design.

As a church-sponsored preschool educating children 18 months to prekindergarten, loose parts play aligned with our emphasis on play-based, child-centered learning. Loose parts, first conceived by landscape architect Simon Nicholson (1971), are materials that can be combined, taken apart, transported, and manipulated by children in multiple ways. They offer creativity, divergent thinking, and cooperative endeavors for child-directed experiences. Our undertaking designing a loose parts classroom mirrored many of the experiences our preschoolers encountered in their loose parts play. As children created, collaborated, and invented, they practiced divergent thinking—the generation of new ideas. Loose parts play was a new idea for our school and offered opportunities for creating, collaborating, and inventing our loose parts space and routines. In this article, we share our experiences using loose parts to support children's STEM concepts through play.

Researching Support for Loose Parts Play

We started our journey by examining support for loose parts. Relatively few empirical studies examine the effects loose parts play has on children's learning (see Gibson et al, 2017). A few studies positively associate it with physical development (Sutton, 2011), social interaction (Flannigan & Dietz, 2018), language use (Smith-Gilman, 2018), constructive play (Maxwell et al, 2008), creativity (Lester & Maudsley, 2007), and imaginative play (Kuh et al., 2013). Loose parts play aligns with key principles of the National Science Teaching Association (NSTA) position statement on early childhood science education (NSTA, 2014). These principles include:

- Children have the capacity to engage in scientific practices and develop understanding at a conceptual level.
- Young children need multiple and varied opportunities to engage in science exploration and discovery.
- Young children develop science skills and learning by engaging in experiential learning.

Preschoolers encounter hands-on, varied experiences when choosing materials and deciding how they will use them, amplifying science concepts like cause and effect, force and motion, and problem solving.

Loose parts appeal to all children, regardless of their background or experience. Since loose parts play incorporates the senses, a preschooler's primary method for learning about his or her environment, children encounter boundless possibilities for manipulating the parts in developmentally appropriate ways, regardless of gender, culture, or ability level (Flannagan & Dietz, 2018). Unlike puzzle pieces that fit together in a single way, practically limitless uses and arrangements for loose parts exist (Daly & Beloglovsky, 2014). A child may use a bag of smooth stones for cookies for a tea party, math manipulatives to sort, graph, and count, objects to roll down a ramp, or the eyes on a cardboard robot. In loose parts play, children become decision makers, problem solvers, and designers.

Figure 1. Developmental Benefits of Loose Parts Play

Cognitive
- Incorporate the Senses
- Allow for Multiple Ways to Build Understanding
- Encourage Divergent Thinking and Problem Solving
- Support Science, Engineering, Math, and Art Development

Social
- Build Child's Persistence and Self-Direction
- Enhance Prosocial Skills

Linguistic
- Facilitate Collaborative Effort and Problem Solving
- Provide Context for Discussions

Physical
- Develop Fine and Gross Motor Skills
- Reinforce Crossing the Midline and Hand-Eye Coordination

Connecting Children to STEM through Loose Parts

Children's work in our outdoor loose parts classroom wove science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) together with problem solving, reasoning, and communication (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, 2000) and the cross-cutting concepts of patterns, cause and effect, and structure and function from the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) (2013). Rather than focusing on which individual STEM concepts a child's work entailed, loose parts play integrated rather than segmented the learning.

Collecting Loose Parts

Once we understood the potential benefits of loose parts play, our treasure hunt for materials began. Loose parts can be recycled or repurposed items, like toilet paper rolls or wine corks, or come from nature, like shells, seed pods, leaves, and sticks. Children can collect some from the playground while teachers purchase others from teacher supply or craft stores. Discount and dollar stores have many items well-suited to the loose parts philosophy such as scarves, ribbons, wooden bowls, and balls made of wood or fabric.

We chose to focus initially on natural items—sticks, pinecones, stones, and smooth pieces of driftwood. Using these items connected children to nature and extended their learning about living things, a major focus of life science (NGSS, 2013). We soon added items that had multiple-play value—boxes of all sizes, laminated cellophane in geometric shapes for window art, chalk, bubbles, shaving cream, letter beads, colored discs, spools of adding machine tape, dust pans and hand brushes. Figure 2 shows the items in our initial loose parts collection.

Budget constraints prompted us to find creative ways to gather materials. We asked home improvement stores to donate scraps and samples of wood flooring, plastic tubing, 2-inch tiles, and paint sample cards. We also relied on donations from parents and teachers for most of our consumable loose parts. See Figure 3 for suggestions for obtaining materials from contributions.

Figure 2. Our Initial Loose Parts Collection

- Seashells, stones, smooth small driftwood
- Sticks, pinecones, leaves, tree cookies (rings), acorns, seed pods
- Cardboard tubes, bubble wrap, Styrofoam peanuts
- Spoons, colanders, sifters, basters, funnels
- Pool pipes (noodles) cut in various lengths
- Scarves, ribbon, lace, felt
- Fabric and wooden balls, textured balls, whiffle balls, balls with bells inside
- Empty spools, corks, jar lids, heavy plastic water bottles
- Craft sticks, clothespins, pipe cleaners, adding machine tape
- Baskets, bags, boxes, buckets, bowls
- Wooden hoops, hula hoops, empty picture frames
- Laminated cellophane cut in geometric shapes, letter beads, colored discs
- Chalk, bubbles, shaving cream
- Dust pans and hand brushes

Figure 3. Obtaining Loose Parts from Contributions

1. Ask teachers and parents to collect specific loose parts like wrapping paper scraps or gift boxes.

2. Establish a consistent drop off location for donations.

3. Request ongoing donations of consumable household items like toilet and kitchen paper rolls so they can be used, discarded, and replaced regularly.

From the onset of our journey, we communicated with and involved families to help them see the benefits of loose parts play. Taking photographs and including them in school newsletters, emails, and our school's social media forums helped parents "buy-in" to the benefits of loose parts and assisted us in gathering consumable items.

Setting Up an Outdoor Loose Parts Classroom

While we initially envisioned loose parts play happening in the regular classrooms, we soon realized limiting the space for play constrained children's creativity. We needed an area dedicated to loose parts play. The outdoors seemed ideally suited to the boundless creativity loose parts inspires and offered fresh air, sunlight, relaxing sounds, and the colors of nature. Fortunately, we had an unused stretch of concrete and grass nestled between two buildings. We found our loose parts home!

With support from our school director, board, and trustees, we worked with a general contractor to refine our wish list and manage budget, space, and licensing constraints. We purchased three long sensory tables, a toddler-height sensory table, and built a low-sitting gravel box of treated wood with rounded corners and child-safe engineering. We added a sink and hose connection to address minimum licensing standards and oscillating outdoor fans and retractable awnings for more comfortable outdoor play along with self-closing magnetic latch gates to define the area. We invested in chutes and a high-quality wind tunnel from a commercial outdoor play company.

While we were fortunate with support for our classroom, we recognize many programs face constraints. Think creatively about your available space. Rather than dedicating an area solely for loose parts play, select items that can be transported from a central storage location then cleaned up afterwards. If you have ample room outdoors, pick large-size loose parts such as pipe-style ramps and tree stumps. If your space is smaller or limited to an indoor area, adding machine tape, tree cookies, shells, and strips of fabric also inspire complex loose parts play. Add pieces gradually, prioritizing items that maximize divergent play possibilities. For instance, wooden ramps, pulleys, and levers for engineering design challenges can be used inside or outdoors and exemplify loose parts' wide-ranging uses.

Our sensory tables are filled with a variety of materials. In this photo, a preschooler experiences physical science and engineering as she explores ways to slide ice cubes through clear plastic tubing.

This child builds gross motor skills, muscle strength, and an understanding of physics and engineering while using a pulley to lift plush toys.

Connecting with STEM in the Outdoors Area

Placing our loose parts area outdoors allowed unique connections between mathematics, science, and the arts. We set up a music area with aluminum coffee cans, a washboard, cymbals, and pots and pans where children created auditory repeating patterns bang-bang-crash, bang-bang-crash. To add variety, we sometimes attached the "instruments" to the fence and children ran alongside, creating a glissando of percussive clatters. Children explored textures, lengths, and other attributes of fabric as they wove strips of ribbon and material through the chain link fence. They composed symmetrical and asymmetrical shapes and repeating and growing patterns by squirting windows with spray bottles and sticking on die-cut foam shapes.

Planning and Reinforcing Safe Play

Teachers promoted safe behaviors in all areas of the loose parts classroom. Each morning teachers checked for tripping hazards, stinging ants, and properly functioning outlet covers and safety gates. We regularly sanitized materials and the sink area. Figure 4 shows additional safety procedures we have enacted.

Letting Children Lead

We found the children engaged with materials longer and encountered more varied experiences when we allowed them to direct their own loose parts play (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). Careful supervision, reminders, and common-sense expectations ensured safety. Children took care of the rest, showcasing their ideas and initiative. For example, our low-sitting gravel box was a favorite loose parts play space. For the 3-year-old classes, we sat beside the children as they played and gave gentle reminders about not throwing or placing pebbles in mouths or pockets. These children delighted in sitting in the box with their legs extended, piling rocks onto their legs, feeling the weight, and experiencing physics as the stones tumbled through their fingers. When the 4-year-old classes utilized the gravel boxes, they capitalized on mathematics by sorting, comparing sizes, and creating patterns with the pebbles (NAEYC/NCTM, 2002). All ages found ways to be engaged by exploring their own interests. The 5-year-olds might dig in gravel for a hidden treasure, experiencing a big idea in engineering by describing and comparing properties of materials. In this case, they identified orange-, lemon-, cinnamon-, and peppermint-scented tongue depressors. Another day they might treasure hunt for metal keys hidden in the pebbles, comparing the jagged edges. Both experiences helped build foundational ideas related to structure and function—fundamental concepts for science learning (NSTA, 2014).

Children learn about symmetry, patterns, and shapes by moistening windows with squirt bottles then making designs with our own die-cut foam shapes.

Our prekindergarten children sometimes chose to be engineers, selecting from our collection or designing their own scoops to fill funnels that spilled into clear plastic tubing, noticing that some rocks were too large while others slipped easily inside when the tube was lifted high above their heads. The open-ended features of the loose parts materials and developmentally appropriate expectations of our teachers ensured children learned science, technology, engineering, and mathematics through hands-on, child-directed experiences (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Observing and Assessing Growth

Children's engagement in loose parts play presented a window into their social-emotional, cognitive, physical, and linguistic

Figure 4. Safety Practices in the Outdoor Loose Parts Classroom

- Teachers display, review, and demonstrate safety rules daily.
- Copies of children's allergy alert forms are kept in the loose parts classroom.
- Lead teachers carry first aid kits and use walkie talkies to quickly contact school administration, if needed.
- Materials in the toddler and 2-year-olds' bins pass the choking tube test. These children have a ratio of four teachers to eight children and are not allowed in the gravel box area.
- During play at the gravel box and sensory table, 3- and 4-year-olds are supervised by a teacher assigned to that area.
- A bright orange rectangle painted directly below the pulley area keeps children out of range of the falling buckets.

Table 1. Anecdotal Records Taken of a 3-year-old during Loose Parts Play

Observed Behavior	Interpretation	Domains
Rebuilt block tower each time it fell. No tears. Adjusted tower base to increase stability.	Shows perseverance and tenacity, understanding of stability (science/physics).	Social-Emotional Cognitive Physical
Used rocks to create black, white, gray pattern.	Creates ABC pattern (mathematics).	Cognitive Physical
Held chalk with a full-fist grip in left hand. Drew several circular shapes and said, "It's a circle."	Shows left hand dominance, immature pencil grip. Creates and names circles (mathematics).	Physical Cognitive Linguistic
Told friend, "We can make a ramp. I will hold the top. You make it long."	Uses language to communicate ideas and engages in social play. Engages in ramp play (science/engineering).	Linguistic Social-Emotional Cognitive Physical

development—an observational viewing point for teachers' authentic assessments of children's learning and development. We sometimes set out items with an idea of how they would be used, only to discover that children found a completely different way of engaging with them. We completed anecdotal records and developmental checklists during loose parts play for rich documentation of children's growth. Teachers asked children for permission to take photographs and wrote down children's explanations of their work. These artifacts were used to document progress in all the domains in the process of play. Table 1 illustrates taking and interpreting observations in anecdotal records during loose parts play.

We also found that the relaxed environment of the loose parts classroom allowed us to see and assess language growth of emergent speakers of English—essentially *all* preschoolers—without the apprehension sometimes associated with the formality of academic settings. *May I watch you? Can you tell me about this?* and *I'm listening* empowered children to talk about their loose parts work but also brought out other things—moving to a new home, the lost soccer game, the birth of a sibling. The teacher, freed from pressure to instruct or redirect, could listen, observe, and assess linguistic and socio-emotional development resulting in enriched teacher-child relationships.

Adjusting and Improving Experiences

Loose parts play stimulates children's divergent thinking. Similarly, continually working to improve our loose parts routines and materials sharpened our own creativity. Seventeen classes spent 30 minutes a week in the loose parts classroom. We provided teachers with a list of the month's materials so they could prepare provocations in advance. For example, if we provided multiple types of ramp materials, teachers might choose to share books about ramps prior to coming to the loose parts classroom. We kept materials fresh and intriguing by connecting the school's monthly themes. During fall, children peeled corn cobs, poured dry corn kernels through funnels and tubes, and rolled small pumpkins and gourds down pipes and ramps. As a church-affiliated preschool, we shared space with many different groups and had to store our loose parts each evening. We stacked plastic pipes and wooden ramps and stowed most other materials in large plastic tubs that were easily spread out for play. When inclement weather prevented outdoor play, we moved our loose parts to the school's sport court where the play took a different, but also valuable, turn. Indoors, for example, the child in the photo shows how the 2-year-olds used rolls of adding machine tape to create mazes, pathways, and racetracks.

Respecting Children's Initiative and Creativity

We also worked to improve the quality of children's loose parts play by reminding staff to step back, observe for safety, and allow children to use loose parts in creative ways without directing the play or dictating a goal. Replacing an evaluative statement such as, "I like your ramp," with thoughtful questioning extended critical thinking and broadened the ways in which children use materials. For example, the children in the photo on page 29 used coffee cans, PVC pipe, and cardboard spouts to build ramps.

During inclement weather, our loose parts were moved inside.

The teacher encouraged engineering design and scientific thinking by asking, "How did you find out which materials make the best ramp?" This question prompted the children to explore the attributes of the ramps and the materials without issuing a direct engineering challenge. The question left open a child's interpretation of the word *best*. Is the best ramp one that stays upright, makes a ball roll farthest, or something different? Posting prompts in the loose parts classroom supported teachers in asking open questions. Teachers referred to these prompts, listed in Figure 5, as needed.

Conclusion

The outdoor loose parts classroom was a hive of STEM activity. One group of future scientists created a ramp for ice cubes by propping lengths of half round PVC pipe on tree stumps. Across

Children experience engineering design by building ramps with loose parts.

Figure 5. Open Questions to Ask During Loose Parts Play

- Will you tell me about your work?
- What do you think will happen if _....?
- What can you do to keep your design from falling over?
- Can you show me?
- Can you show your friend?
- What other way could you do it?
- Why do you think that happened?
- What do you like about working with the materials?
- How can you play/design/build with the materials in another way?

the classroom, a group of mathematicians counted pinecones and leaves for a squirrel's birthday cake. Other children used engineering design and simple technology to fashion a pulley to lift a heavy load of rocks. All children built and expanded language and social and emotional skills by sharing loose parts, taking turns, and using language to communicate their ideas. Our outdoor loose parts classroom invited boundless, inventive play rich with STEM learning and communication. When our children laid back in the gravel boxes to make "gravel angels" while gazing at a clear sky and inhaling fresh air, we felt all our work was worth it.

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Dr. Carrie Cutler authored *Math-Positive Mindsets: Growing a Child's Mind without Losing Yours* to tackle parents' and teachers' anxiety about teaching math. A proud mother of eight, she also serves as a clinical assistant professor at the University of Houston.

Diane Skidmore retired after a 38-year career teaching preschool, most recently at Wildwood Christian Academy in Magnolia, Texas. She was honored as classroom teacher of the year for the Houston Area AEYC and the state of Texas in 2002.

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The Power of Sharing:
When Kindergarten Students Write the Mentor Texts

Katie Schrodt and Erin FitzPatrick

Aliyah sat on the author's chair with a smile. She had two pages of her writer's notebook ready to share. "Today, I want to show you my pictures. They are about my sister. We went to get our nails done and we had Christmas jammies." Immediately there were murmurs around the room as Aliyah displayed her colorful drawings (Figure 1). A hand shot up and Aliyah's classmate said, "I have a compliment! I really like the different nails!" Another hand shot up, "But what are the numbers on the other picture?" Aliyah immediately responded, "Oh that is how old we are. I am five and my sister is six. It's labels." The teacher said, "Wow, Aliyah, I love all of the details in your illustrations, especially the matching hairstyles. It sounds like you and your sister have lots of fun together. Everyone, today and every day, you can use bright colors and labels like Aliyah to bring your illustration to life! Let's give Aliyah three snaps!"

Figure 1. Aliyah Shares her Drawings

Not long after Aliyah's time on the author's chair, Layla showed how she "drew like Aliyah" in her writer's notebook. (See Figure 2.) She explained that she colored the background just like Aliyah did on her drawing. If you look closely, you can even see the numbers five in the top right corner of the picture where Layla has "labeled" herself as a five-year-old. Layla is both imitating Aliyah and building in her own unique innovation. This is Layla's original story about unicorns and reindeer, using some of the techniques she learned from her classmate, Aliyah.

True mentorship is a relationship of trust and mutual respect. The best mentors do not offer a sterile set of rules or a mandate—not a decree, but rather, gentle modeling and guidance to support the mentee in their own success, their own pursuits, their own unique development. In this article, we explore the results of a recent study, and describe how within a community, kindergarten students became mentors to their peers by sharing their own writing passions and how the sharing process helped spread the blaze of creativity. Tips for facilitating this type of sharing are offered.

Figure 2. Layla is Inspired by a Classmate

Kindergarten Writing Communities

Much kindergarten writing research focuses on important foundational skills such as transcription (Graham, Bollinger, et al 2012; Puranik et al., 2014; Santangelo & Graham, 2016). Often kindergarteners are just learning the basics of letters, sounds, and letter formation when they enter formal schooling. The weight of this cognitive load can leave little resources for higher order writing processes such as composition (Puranik et al., 2014). This could be one reason so little kindergarten classroom time is spent with children writing their own stories (Puranik et al., 2014). But if you have ever been a kindergarten teacher, you know these children have stories to tell! This share time, when the stories are told, is where the magic happens— where a writing community is formed.

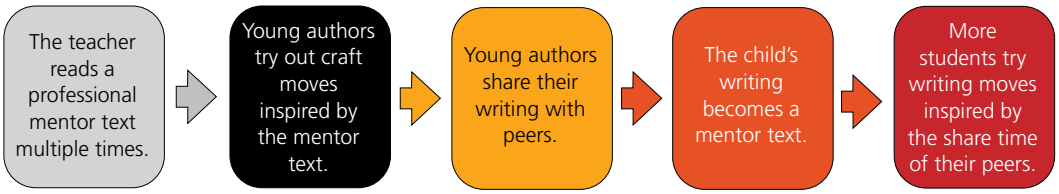
Sharing, a Tenet of the Writing Community

"Writing within a community is accomplished by its members for its audiences," (Graham, 2018, p. 264). That stands to reason, as writing is a form of communication only completed when it is received by the reader—real or imagined. When students write in communities, they engage in cooperative learning in a social context. One of the many ways students collaborate within these writing communities is through dialogue with peers during writing share time, which serves to mediate knowledge and learning (Calkins, 1986). Recent research has also documented the importance of improving oral language skills for kindergarten writers (Kirby et al., 2021). This dialogue—sharing their writing—also allows young authors to witness the response their writing has on an authentic audience.

Table 1. Considerations for Sharing in Writing Communities

Considerations	Child Friendly Definition	Strategy
Privacy	Students have a say in how and with whom their writing is shared.	Allow students to determine who their peers and audience members are. They may choose to present to a librarian, former teacher, or conduct a read aloud for a lower grade level. Allow students to opt out of sharing if they desire.
Choice	Students pick between two or more possibilities.	Writing Topics: Allow students to choose what they want to write about. As students share their writing, chart the writing topic ideas on a large piece of chart paper displayed for all to see. Title this chart "Our Writing Topics" and use it as a reference when students get stuck. Seating: Allow students to choose where they want to sit around the room and write. Set some boundaries and model good seating choices, allowing students to practice finding a perfect writing spot with efficiency.
Motivation	The desire inside to want to do something and finish it, even if it is hard.	Growth mindset self-talk: Acknowledge that writing is hard, but "We can do hard things." Consider a self-talk script for students such as, "I am stuck. What tool can I use to help myself keep going?" Goal Setting: Many established authors have self-regulation tools such as word count goals or writing time goals. Help students think through a reasonable goal for the day. "Today I am going to write one sentence" or "Today I am going to spell one long word bravely." Remind students to reflect on the compliments and next steps feedback they were given in previous writing sessions and act on those.
Feedback	Helpful information given to someone to indicate what strengths the writing has or what can be done to improve the writing.	Community Building: Receiving feedback requires a level of trust. Build community through icebreakers and group activities before students share and give feedback. Begin with Compliments: As the teacher, model how to give a specific compliment first. "I love how you made your characters talk! The speech bubbles helped bring your story to life." Allow students to give specific compliments to each other. After a couple of weeks of compliments, the class might be ready to learn next steps feedback.

Figure 3. The Process of Young Writers Penning Mentor Texts



In whole group sharing, a few students read their writing, share their process, and discuss challenges. Calkins (1986) sometimes refers to "conversation circles" (p. 344) as students grapple with the writing struggle and share in one another's inspiration. As students encounter these new skills and tools and assimilate them into their own writing, they increase in knowledge and confidence to the benefit of all writing community members (Graham et al., 2018).

"Writing development is a consequence of participation in writing communities and individual changes in writers' capabilities" (Graham, 2018, p. 258). The talents and resources of other young authors are encouraged through thoughtful sharing—through sharing, the students change. Participating in the sharing and development of writing increases students' writing repertoire and audience awareness (Bazerman et al., 2017). Producing writing ideas or trying out new writing skills are difficult writing hurdles for many students (Schrodt et al., 2019). By engaging with and as an audience, more ideas are made present within the writing community. Additionally, many students work out their ideas through discussion, conversation, and imitation. These conversations should serve to support students in rehearsing how they might use the tools of writing during the next independent writing time.

When Students Write the Mentor Texts

Often, within writing communities, teachers use children's literature as mentor texts to demonstrate ideation or craft moves for students to use as exemplars (Calkins, 1986). In this classroom setting, a mentor text is a children's trade book used as an example of great writing for the purposes of writing instruction. Students may use a mentor text to inspire and inform their own writing. In a recently published exploration of writing workshop in two kindergarten classrooms (Schrodt et al., 2019), researchers found that when kindergarten students shared their writing, their ideas and craft moves often became inspiration for others in the room. That is to say, the students' text became the next series of mentor texts. In crafting those stories and sharing with their peers, young writers begin to identify as authors and mentors themselves, spreading their own writing ideas.

The process of young writers penning mentor texts (represented graphically in Figure 3) is defined in this context as unique writing ideas or craft moves that start with one student and spread to other students through the sharing of writing. In this study, students created mentor texts that spurred a variety of changes in others' writing. Following, we explore the students' texts that introduced the class to a new (a) topic, (b) method of presentation, (c) craft move, or (d) vocabulary term and how those texts impacted the writing of others within the community.

Cory: Superheroes, A New Topic

Cory (all names are pseudonyms) was known in the classroom for talking about superheroes all day long, and leading superhero reenactments at recess. He generally was not known for his love of writing, as he stated to the whole class, "Sometimes I just want easy, and thinking of writing is not easy!" But one day Cory raised his hand for the first time to volunteer for the author's chair. He read his sentence proudly to the class, "I love Ninja Turtles" (Figure 4). He displayed his picture with a smile and said, "I make my mind up of what I like and what I don't, and this Ninja Turtle one was pretty cool." His topic idea and confidence had his friends impressed. Over the next few days, Cory would see his writing idea spread as other children began to write about superheroes and TV characters.

Figure 4. Cory's Writing and Illustration

Figure 5. Jacob Writes About E.T.

Inspired by his author-friend Cory, Jacob wrote about the movie E.T. (Figure 5). He said, "Elliot is happy to find E.T." Jacob had recently seen the movie E.T. for the first time, and he loved it.

Also inspired by Cory, Chase wrote about Star Wars (Figure 6). He said, "Luke is getting shot." Writing about heroes and TV characters was becoming a social and collaborative event. Chase said, "We all wrote some Star Wars type stuff today."

Figure 6. Chase Writes About Star Wars

In another example, Jacob and Keenan wrote about superheroes together after being inspired by Cory. Keenan had the idea to write about Batman. He told Jacob about his idea and Jacob said, "Oh, I like Spiderman! Let's write about Batman and Spiderman." The two boys sat next to each other and collaborated on two superhero stories. Jacob said, "Spiderman is a superhero." Keenan said, "Batman is cool" (Figure 7).

In this kindergarten classroom, students shared ideas as well as wrote together during independent writing time. Collaboration played a significant part in generating writing ideas as seen through this illustration of Cory's writing idea and how it inspired others in the classroom. Graham (2018) explains that both the social environment and the collective history of the writing community impact how writing is completed within a context.

Figure 7. Keenan and Jacob Collaborate

Figure 8. Tomás' First Two-Page Writing

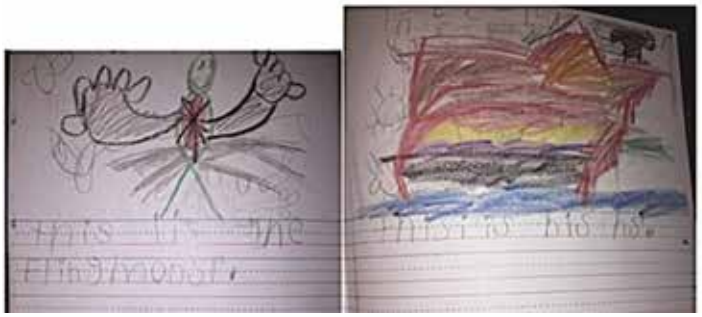
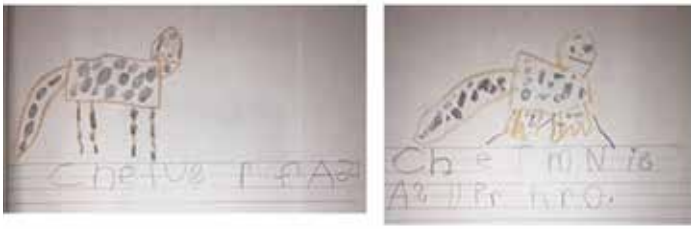


Figure 9. Jacob's Two-Page Writing



Tomás: Writing Across Multiple Pages

Many kindergarten students at the beginning of the school year write stories on one-page consisting of one sentence. One day Tomás sat in the author's chair to share his writing. He held up his writer's notebook to reveal two detailed pictures with two sentences across two pages. (See Figure 8.) The other students immediately noticed. "Whoa! Are you allowed to write on two pages?" Tomás replied, "Yes, you can write on lots of pages! My story says, 'This is the flying monster. This is his house.'"

Suddenly, Tomás' classmates were inspired to write more than ever and adopted his presentation style. Many students saw new possibilities for writing longer stories, increasing their writing stamina from mostly one-page stories to longer, two-page stories.

Jacob was a particularly reluctant writer who talked about how he and his mom argued over whether he could write or not. In

Figure 10. Natalia Writes Across Four Pages

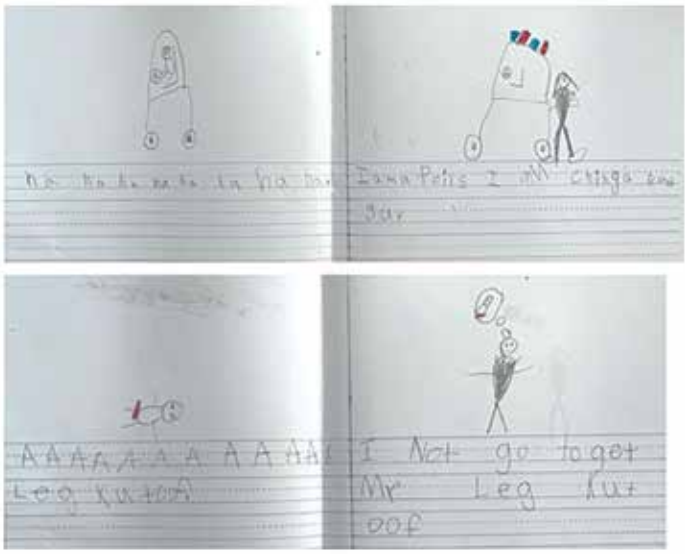
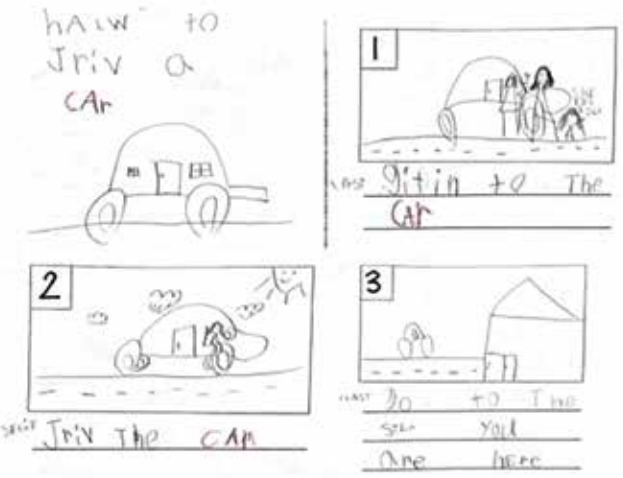


Figure 11. Emmett's Writing on How to Play a Drum

Figure 12. Emy's How to Drive a Car Illustration



his opinion, he could not. After seeing Tomas' two-page writing, Jacob wrote his longest story, a two-page story inspired by the mentor texts of both Tomas and Cory. "Cheetahs are fast. Cheetahman is a super hero."

Natalia took this idea to the next level by writing an action scene across four pages. (See Figure 10.) "Ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha. I am a police. I am chasing a bad guy. Aaaaaahhhh. Leg cut off. I (am) not going to get my leg cut off." Don't worry, no one was harmed in the writing of this story. Natalia was simply being a hero to someone who was injured and making sure she did not get injured herself. Writing can serve as a form of play and exploration, serving as a window into many different life experiences.

When other students in the class adopted Tomas' multi-page presentation style, their stories grew. Along with that, students willingly engaged in multiple opportunities to write, use text in

Figure 13. Evan Uses Onomatopoeia

meaningful ways, practice their phonics knowledge, create illustrations that support the text, and more. Tomas' mentor text inspired students to write more expansive stories that engaged them in meaningful literacy practices.

Emmett: Non-Fiction Writer's Craft Technique

During a "how-to" writing unit, Emmett wrote the steps for "How to Play a Drum" (Figure 11). He writes, "First, I get drums. Next, I sit on the seat. Last, I play the drum sound." In his writing, he uses the non-fiction craft technique of bolded words. With a black crayon, he bolds the word "chrum" (drum) each time he uses the word, indicating its importance as the main idea of the how-to.

Emmett shared this technique with the class and inspired Emy to go back into her "How to Drive a Car" story (Figure 12) and bold the word "car" with a pink crayon. Emmett and Emy are demonstrating a new-to-them craft technique that helps the reader understand the main topic and important vocabulary words within the book.

Evan: Onomatopoeia Craft Technique

Evan read his writing aloud during share time. "We are at the dog sitter (to) pick up Lucy." (See Figure 13.) He went on to explain that Lucy is his dog. Pointing to the picture, he mused about how there were lots of dogs that were asleep. Evan's peers immediately noticed his use of onomatopoeia (a word that names a sound, but also sounds like that sound), using Z's to represent the act of dogs snoring. The teacher pointed out this craft move to the class, saying she felt as if she was there herself listening to the dogs snore.

After hearing Evan share, Ciaran went back to his own writing. Ciaran had written a story about a carnival ride, "First we get to ride. Me and Carter play together." (See Figure 14.) Carter revised his picture, adding in the onomatopoeia "wee wee wee," representing the shouts of joy and fun on the ride.

Aliyah used her own approximation of the onomatopoeia by drawing emotion lines to demonstrate the feelings and cries of

Figure 14. Ciaran Uses Onomatopoeia

Figure 15. Aliyah Approximates Onomatopoeia

the baby in her "How to Babysit" piece of writing. Aliyah approximates, "Sad. The babysitter helped. The baby sister cried and how (to) babysit." Aliyah added lines coming out of the baby's face to show her crying loudly.

Emmett inspired Emy to incorporate the non-fiction craft move of making key ideas in bold and Evan inspired Ciaran and Aliya to incorporate the craft move of adding onomatopoeia to their writing. In both cases, students were also learning more about how text is organized, how comprehension is facilitated by use of craft, and how elements of writing work together to serve the reader. These young writers created mentor texts that facilitated the literacy growth of their peers in multiple ways.

Oliver's Idea: Using Complex Vocabulary

Many kindergarteners limit their writing to simple CVC words (words spelled with a consonant, vowel, consonant like "cat")—

Figure 16. Oliver Uses the Word Defeat

Figure 17. Two Students Use the Word Defeated

"easy words," in their estimation—rather than take the risk of sounding out longer, more complex words (Schrodt et al., 2019; Schrodt et al., 2020). Oliver shared a piece of his writing, "A police was gonna go to defeat the bad guys." (See Figure 16.) Reminiscent of Natalia's action story, Oliver adds in the complex vocabulary word "defeat." The use of the Tier 2 vocabulary word, defeat, inspired two others to use this word in their own writing. "Emmett defeated Lord Business and Bad Cop." "The angry birds defeated Darth Vader."

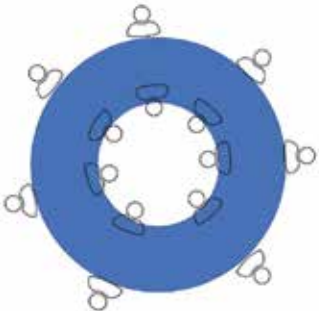
As students within the writing community continued to write and share, more and more complex vocabulary words showed up in the students' writing. Table 2 samples the Tier 2 vocabulary words students wrote in their stories as well as the phonetic spelling the students used when writing those words.

As students were inspired to put their expressive oral vocabulary on paper, they also received practice in their knowledge of phone-

Table 2. Samples of Tier Two Words Spelled by Kindergarten Writers

Tier 2 Vocabulary Word	Phonetic Spelling in Writer's Notebook
Fortress	fortr
Roasted	rostid
Mighty	mite
Invisible	nvezobl
Annoying	aning
Busted	bsd
Guarding	grding

Figure 18. Inside-Outside Circle Discussion Protocol



mic awareness—hearing all of the sounds in the words they were trying to use, the alphabetic principle, as well as more complex phonics skills. By creating an environment where the writing practice of communicating meaningful content was honored, students were free to explore their skills at encoding these words they desired to use rather than limit themselves to the "easy words" which also limited their creative expression.

Classroom Tips for Sharing Writing

The share time is an opportunity for authors to share new writing and to have choices about how they participate in that shared experience. When the writers are able to navigate the response or have choices about the types of feedback they receive from the audience, writers engage in a more authentic and meaningful experience (Kissel, 2017). There are many different ways to incorporate sharing into the classroom. An Inside-Outside Circle discussion structure (Figure 18) can help children share with three to four peers each day. Teachers can provide explicit instruction and practice on this protocol during a writing instruction launch unit each August. Students quickly become adept at forming two concentric circles to exchange peer feedback during share time.

Authors should be given the choice and opportunity to share their work when they are ready. Students can sign up for different kinds of sharing, depending on their purpose and comfort level. Table 1 describes sharing options that give the writer the choice and opportunity to zoom in on specific feedback needed. When students are offered self-determination in choosing their audience, it encourages even the most reluctant writers to share their work. As authors are able to share their writing with peers, it encourages more writers to try new writing moves and take on new challenges. See Table 3.

Table 3. Strategies for Sharing Writing in the Classroom

Strategy for Sharing	Procedure
Author's chair (Graves & Hansen, 1983)	Pose questions to the author: "What do you need from us to move you forward as a writer today? What kind of feedback would you like? A compliment? Something to work on?"
A star and a wish	Star: What is one thing you are proud of? Wish: What is one thing you want to work on for next time? After reading and displaying their writing with the whole class over a document camera, students can share what they are most proud of in their writing and what goals they have for the future with the class.
"Tea Party" sharing protocol (Beers, 2013)	Set a timer for five minutes. Authors share one-on-one with as many writers as they can, mixing and mingling like a "tea party" until the timer goes off.
One-item symphony share (Stoehr et al., 2011)	Each student chooses one line, word, or phrase they are particularly proud of from their writing. Taking turns in a quiet circle, students share their line, word, or phrase one after another in a symphony of shared ideas.
Post published pieces on a bulletin board with supplies available for feedback	Students' final writing products are published on a bulletin board. The teacher will include Post-it Notes and writing supplies for the admiring audiences from other classrooms to offer their responses, feedback, praise, and support.

Closing

As these students shared their work within the community of writers, their work often served as mentor texts to spur growth in their peers. Moreover, while incorporating these new ideas and writing moves, they were also engaged in further developing a variety of early literacy skills—concepts about print, phonemic awareness, oral language, the alphabetic principle, and the list goes on and on. By fostering a writing community that has a focus on opportunities to share, teachers create a space for students to become the authors of the mentor texts that impact their peers and increase the amount of time and effort students engage with essential early literacy skills.

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Developing Oral Language through Nursery Rhymes

Audrey Henry

Who doesn't have a nursery rhyme still resonating in our memory? According to Mem Fox (2001), "Experts in literacy and child development have discovered that if children know eight nursery rhymes by heart by the time they are four years old, they're usually among the best readers by the time they are eight" (n.p.). Whether in English or in the child's primary language, nursery rhymes are a traditional and engaging way to introduce and build language. For many of us, our earliest memories of language exchanges are tied to nursery rhymes learned during our early years. Nursery rhymes are a shared tradition across cultures. In essence, a nursery rhyme is a traditional rhyme, whether a poem or a song that very often tells a story. Many have been passed through generations and continue to engage young children in enjoying the sounds of language. More importantly, they provide a way to build connections with caring adults.

Despite the many benefits of nursery rhymes, they are fading away with fewer of them shared at home, and in classrooms. Nursery rhymes are beneficial because they are repetitive and rhythmic, they are an excellent way to develop vocabulary, they help children develop their confidence, and they are an avenue for developing creativity in children. As children sing, they act out nursery rhymes, (e.g. *Row Row Row Your Boat*) or they make their own rhyme, *Ride Ride Ride Your Bike*.

Why use Nursery Rhymes?

Nursery rhymes can be used to develop foundational skills such as phonemic awareness and phonics. Children can identify sounds at the beginning of words, they can replace those sounds with others and they can identify rhyming words and find other words that rhyme. Children develop listening comprehension before reading comprehension, and as they listen to nursery rhymes, they are developing comprehension skills. Children can be asked what is happening in the rhyme, what they think will happen next, and they can even create movements as they sing or recite the rhymes.

Nursery rhymes are an enjoyable and memorable way to learn. What do children learn? As children recite nursery rhymes they are introduced to alliteration (e.g. *Diddle Diddle Dumpling* or *Baa Baa Black Sheep*), onomatopoeia (e.g, words representing animal sounds), rhyming words as in *Lucy Locket lost her Pocke*t, or *Jack and Jill went up the Hill*. Children can replace names with their own. Instead of *Jack and Jill* they can use their children's names engaging and making the rhymes more personal.

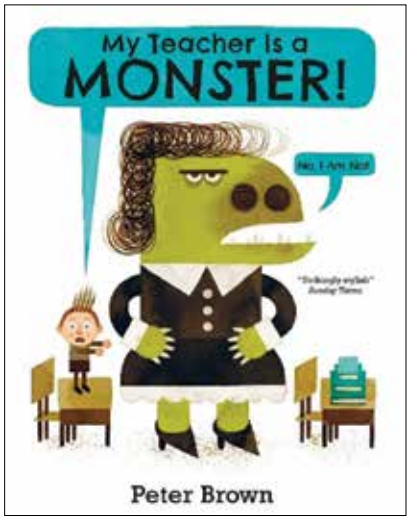
As children learn nursery rhymes, they are also introduced to dramatic play. Rhymes can be turned into songs which become plays, puppet shows, or stories using felt boards. As children reenact these rhymes, they are developing their listening skills, which is the precursor to reading comprehension. Finally, nursery rhymes provide a learning environment that is fun and engaging in which children engage in finger plays, language games, art projects, writing activities and class made books with children's own creations. Anytime is good to share a nursery rhyme with children!

Audrey Henry, EdD, has over 40 years of experience as a literacy and reading educator. She is Professor Emerita of Reading Education, Nova Southeastern University where she directed the Reading Education graduate program. Dr. Henry continues to teach and present at national and international conferences.

Children's Book Review
My Teacher is a Monster

By Dina Costa Treff

In Peter Brown's, *My Teacher is a Monster!* (No I Am Not.), Bobby is not so sure about school. According to Bobby, his teacher is a monster. Ms. Kirby stomps and roars. And she does not allow paper airplanes in the classroom. Bobby enjoys his time away from school spending unbothered time at the park. That is, until one day Bobby and Ms. Kirby end up at the park together. Both Bobby and Ms. Kirby are taken by surprise. Bobby is shocked to see his teacher outside of school and not sure how he should act in this situation. Seeing a teacher outside of school can be an intimidating experience, especially when seeing your teacher as a monster. This chance encounter away from school changes how Bobby sees his teacher. He shares his favorite part of the park with Ms. Kirby. Together, they experience the single greatest paper airplane flight in history. This fun and cunning picture book illustrates how things are not always what they seem. Brown's illustrations prove to be more defining and significant to the story than the words alone. It shows that through shared experiences, perspectives and images can be transformed. *My Teacher is a Monster!* (No I Am Not.), is great for children ages 3-8 years old, grades Preschool-3rd Grade. It is important to remember, monsters are not always what they seem.



En Peter Brown, *My Teacher is a Monster!* (No I Am Not), Bobby no está tan seguro de la escuela. Según Bobby, su maestro es un monstruo. La maestra Kirby pisotea y ruge. Y no permite aviones de papel en el aula. Bobby disfruta de su tiempo fuera de la escuela pasando tiempo sin ser interrumpido en el parque. Es decir, hasta que un día Bobby y la maestra Kirby terminan juntos en el parque. Tanto Bobby como la maestra Kirby son tomados por sorpresa. Bobby se sorprende al ver a su maestro fuera de la escuela y no está seguro de cómo debe actuar en esta situación. Ver a un maestro fuera de la escuela puede ser una experiencia intimidante, especialmente cuando ves a tu maestro como un monstruo. Este encuentro casual fuera de la escuela cambia la forma en que Bobby ve a su maestro. Comparte su parte favorita del parque con la maestra Kirby. Juntos, experimentan el mejor vuelo de avión de papel de la historia. Este divertido y sagaz libro de cuentos ilustra cómo las cosas no siempre son lo que parecen. Las ilustraciones de Brown resultan ser más determinantes y significativas para la historia que las palabras solas. Muestra que, a través de experiencias compartidas, las perspectivas y las imágenes se pueden transformar. Este cuento es ideal para niños de 3 a 8 años de edad, desde Preescolar a tercer grado. Es importante recordar que los monstruos no siempre son lo que parecen.

Dina Costa Treff is the lead preschool teacher in the Child Development Lab preschool program at University of Georgia.

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