

Dimensions

of Early Childhood

Volume 48 • Number 2



Reflection on Parent Engagement During School Closures Due to the Pandemic

Reflexión sobre la participación de los padres durante el cierre de las escuelas debido a la Pandemia

Building Competence and Promoting Quality Social Studies by Engaging Families

Effective Classroom Practices to Create Impactful Caregiver Interactions

Developmentally Appropriate Strategies for Letter Formation in Preschool

Using Home Visits with a Family-Centered Approach

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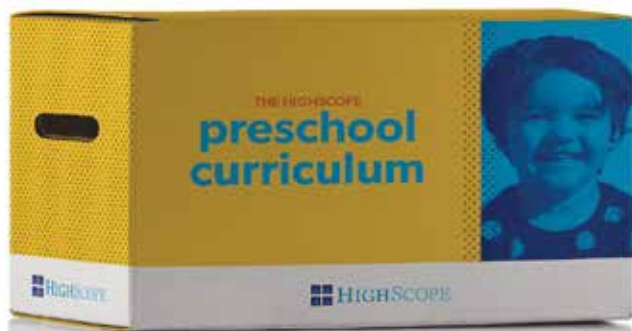


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**Southern
Early Childhood
Association**

Editor: Mari Riojas-Cortez, Ph.D.
Dimensions of Early Childhood

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SECA serves the interests of early childhood educators concerned with child development, including university researchers and teacher educators; early childhood, kindergarten, and primary grade teachers; and early childhood program administrators and proprietors. The association has affiliates in 14 Southern states. Non-affiliate memberships are available to anyone living outside the 14 affiliate states. For information about joining SECA, contact the executive offices at 501-221-1648. Members receive a one-year digital subscription to *Dimensions of Early Childhood*.

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In this Issue

Volume 48
Number 2

- 6** Reflection on Parent Engagement During School Closures Due to the Pandemic
By Andrea Greimel
- 8** Reflexión sobre la participación de los padres durante el cierre de las escuelas debido a la Pandemia
Por Andrea Greimel
- 10** Building Competence and Promoting Quality Social Studies by Engaging Families
By Kristine Calo
- 14** Little Hands, Little Feet, Little Moments: Effective Classroom Practices to Create Impactful Caregiver Interactions
By Alicia Deaver, Lindsay E. Wright & Brittany Herrington
- 18** A Misunderstood Fundamental: Developmentally Appropriate Strategies for Letter Formation in Preschool
By Kristi Cheyney-Collante, Vivian Gonsalves, Shaunté Duggins & Julie Bader
- 24** Using Home Visits with a Family-Centered Approach
By Siobian J. Minish & Laura S. McCorkle

MILESTONES

A Resource Devoted to Infants & Toddlers

30 An Invitation to Play: Pretend Play During the Toddler Years

By Wilma Robles-Melendez, PhD

31 Doctor's Corner

Featuring Dr. Kimberly L. Webb

Departments

President's Message	4
Editor's Notes/Nota del Editor	5
Children's Book Review	31

Adapting, Connecting in Times of COVID-19

Debbie Ferguson

During the last few months, we have been challenged with continuing to serve our children and families as we address all the concerns and risks of COVID-19. As director of a child care center in Nashville, we were also faced with either an opportunity or a struggle, depending upon your perspective. Mr. Rogers has a saying... "Imagining something may be the first step in making it happen, but it takes the real time and real efforts of real people to learn things, make things, turn thoughts into deeds or visions into inventions." The world learned how essential the role of caring for children and connecting to families is in supporting a strong workforce and economy.

We decided to view this uncertain time as an opportunity! We took the challenge, and we learned how to have a presence using social media, virtual meetings, good old fashion phone calls and written inspirational notes that encouraged parents during the time our center was required to close. I have a teacher who has worked with us for 38 years, and it was amazing to see how she adapted to reading books on Facebook Live for those children she loves so dearly. She stepped way out of her comfort zone, as I'm sure many of you did as well. It was that determination, the attitude of "we will not be deterred from loving on our children even if we can't be together", that will define us. That dedication to our families solidified our partnership with both parents and our community in helping children grow and learn about this new world.

We continue to redefine the new normal while we transition with a newfound understanding of the important role we play in serving our children. We have washed our hands like never before! We will take the extra steps to make sure our environments are as clean and safe as possible. We remain strong as early educators and will do what's necessary because our families need us. Those relationships we build with families can weather any storm, and we have emerged stronger and more connected than ever.

Connecting is vitally important and one of SECA's most successful resources is our professional journal. I want to sincerely thank Mari Riojas-Cortez, editor of *Dimensions*. Mari will be moving at the end of summer and has submitted her resignation. Although I've only had the opportunity to work with her a few short months, I have enjoyed each and every publication she has overseen since she began her work with SECA in November of 2013. She has brought insight, encouragement and skill as a mentor to many during her dedication to SECA. Mari, you will be missed tremendously!

Just as Mr. Rogers said "...it takes real time and real efforts of real people..." and our community of early educators gave real time to educate ourselves and others. We, real people, took the oppor-

tunity to devote real effort into continuing to serve, continuing to love and continuing to be there for our families from afar. I'm appreciative to have my SECA family as we learned how best to provide the best possible care for our families. We are here for you and are eager to help you through these unprecedented times.

SECA President-Elect: Meet the Candidates

For full interviews and candidate videos visit
www.seca.info/presidentelect.

Kristina Ellis, Oklahoma

Kristina Ellis serves as the Director of Health and Collaborative Services for a nationally recognized Community Action Project, CAP Tulsa. For ten years, she has been responsible for guiding the strategic direction as well as overseeing daily operations for multiple departments. This includes a state-wide program that provides the financial structure to align the Oklahoma State Department of Education and private resources to promote high-quality standards tied to minimum teacher qualifications, ongoing professional development, and parent supports designed to foster low-income families' independence and economic success. Before joining CAP Tulsa, Kristina Ellis was an education leader in two of the most extensive YMCA programs in Oklahoma for more than seven years.

Kristina holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Central Oklahoma and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Oklahoma.

Judy Whitesell, South Carolina

Judy Whitesell was born and educated in Florida before marrying and moving to South Carolina. She has been a member of SECA/SCECA for 24 years and active in the leadership of both organizations. She served on the SECA board of directors for 6 years and secretary for the last 3 years. For her state organization, she has served many offices including President and is currently the meeting planner.

Judy recently retired after teaching public school grades 5K-8th grade for forty years in FL, TN and SC. Thirty of those years were in early childhood. She also taught for 17 years in early childhood education for Midlands Technical College in the evenings while teaching full time during the day. Now aside from her professional duties with SCECA, she mentors new teachers.

Share Your COVID-19 Successes, Failures

Mari Riojas-Cortez

This summer is unlike any summer we have ever experienced. Usually we would be talking about summer activities that families and child care centers usually do. Unfortunately, this time is different. Children are at home engaged in remote learning while teachers and parents work together to provide the most appropriate experiences. We know that this will pass, but in the meantime, we have to work together to ensure the safety and success of our youngest. In order to do our part, *Dimensions of Early Childhood* will be featuring an article in every issue (until the pandemic subsides) from teachers and administrators in the field telling their stories, in order to learn from one another. I encourage you to send your stories to editor@seca.info. We are interested in unique stories of successes and challenges; we want to hear both.



On another note, I want to announce that this is my last issue as Editor of *Dimensions of Early Childhood*. I have accepted a position in California so my family and I will be moving to the West Coast. Being the editor for *Dimensions* has been the BEST experience in my professional career in early childhood. I have met many of you through your work. I've learned first-hand the issues that our children and families from the south encounter daily. I want to thank the members of the editorial committee Kenya Wolff, Wilma Robles-Melendez, Diane Bales, Karen Walker and Dina Costa Treff for always working with me through my tenure as editor. We have developed friendships as we tried to transform our field. Thank you also to our newest members of the editorial committee Mary Jamsek and Beverly Boals Gilbert. I know that your expertise is an asset to our committee. A big thanks to Jeff Leffler for his support not only when he was the board representative in our committee but also when he was Executive Director. I also want to thank our current President, Debbie Ferguson and our Past Presidents and the SECA Board, for their support, encouragement, and trust to continue our work with *Dimensions*. Noteworthy is that none of the editorial work can be done without Maurena Lopez. Her knowledge and support are highly needed in order to publish *Dimensions*. Thank you to our current editorial assistant Jay for working with me in the last year and of course Kim Scheberle our wonderful publisher. Last, but not least, I want to thank Glenda Bean, former SECA Executive Director who gave me a chance to become editor back in 2013. I will miss *Dimensions* but will continue to use it as a great resource for our field.

Este verano es diferente a cualquier verano que hayamos experimentado. Por lo general, estaríamos hablando de actividades de verano que suelen hacer las familias y los centros de cuidado infantil. Lamentablemente, esta vez es diferente. Los niños están en casa participando en el aprendizaje remoto, mientras que los maestros y los padres trabajan juntos para brindar las experiencias más apropiadas. Sabemos que esto pasará, pero mientras tanto, tenemos que trabajar juntos para garantizar la seguridad y el éxito de nuestros más pequeños. Para cumplir con nuestra parte, *Dimensions of Early Childhood* presentará un artículo en cada número (hasta que la pandemia disminuya) de maestros y administradores en el campo que cuentan sus historias, para aprender unos de otros. Te animo a enviar tus historias a editor@seca.info. Estamos interesados en historias únicas de éxitos y desafíos, queremos escuchar a ambos.

En otra nota, quiero anunciar que este es mi último número como Editor de *Dimensions of Early Childhood*. He aceptado un puesto en California, así que mi familia y yo nos mudaremos a la costa oeste. Ser editor de *Dimensions* ha sido la MEJOR experiencia en mi carrera profesional en la primera infancia. He conocido a muchos de ustedes a través de su trabajo. He aprendido de primera mano los problemas que nuestros niños y familias del sur enfrentan diariamente. Quiero agradecer a los miembros del comité editorial Kenya Wolff, Wilma Robles-Melendez, Diane Bales, Karen Walker y Dina Costa Treff por trabajar siempre conmigo durante mi mandato como editora, hemos desarrollado amistades mientras intentamos transformar nuestro campo. Gracias también a nuestros nuevos miembros del comité editorial Mary Jamsek y Beverly Boals Gilbert. Sé que su experiencia es una ventaja para nuestro comité. Un gran agradecimiento a Jeff Leffler por su apoyo no solo cuando era el representante de la junta en nuestro comité, sino también cuando era Director Ejecutivo. También quiero agradecer a nuestro actual Presidente, Debbie Ferguson y a nuestros Presidentes anteriores y a la Junta de la SECA, por su apoyo, aliento y confianza para continuar nuestro trabajo con *Dimensions*. Cabe destacar que ninguno de los trabajos editoriales se pueden hacer sin Maurena López. Su conocimiento y apoyo son muy necesarios para publicar *Dimensions*. Gracias a nuestro actual asistente editorial Jay por trabajar conmigo en el último año y a nuestra casa de publicación de Kim Scheberle. Por último, pero no menos importante, quiero agradecer a Glenda Bean, ex Directora Ejecutiva de la SECA que me dio la oportunidad de convertirme en editora en 2013. Extrañaré a *Dimensions* pero continuaré usándola como un gran recurso para nuestro campo.

Reflection on Parent Engagement During School Closures Due to the Pandemic

By Andrea Greimel

I have been working as a bilingual early childhood educator on the westside of San Antonio for 32 years. Prior to that I taught young bilingual learners in Mexico for 4 years. This month I am retiring. I have been grieving the fact that my last group of little ones suddenly could not come together in our classroom to learn, and that I would end my career in front of screens in my living room rather than dancing and singing and building and painting and laughing and all that great face-to-face, hands-on, spontaneous, unpredictable and wonderful stuff that has been my life for such a long time. Normally our time together after Spring Break in early childhood is a wonderful time when the children have really come to know one another and their teachers. They know the routines and expectations. They have some strategies for problem-solving and conflict resolution. This brings a sense of security, which allows a much more sophisticated level of communication, more good jokes and fun, creativity and great learning gains. I don't normally believe that young children should be on screens very much, so the new imperative was sobering and fraught with misgivings for me. Nonetheless, I forged ahead and started to try to engage students through the platform called Seesaw.

Initially there was a stop-and-go period when families had to make a huge shift in every area of their lives, many having lost jobs, suddenly with all their kids at home all day, many suffering from food shortages, and everyone operating in the context of fear of the contagion, especially those families with multiple generations under one roof or with family members who have underlying conditions, putting them at greater risk. Many of my families did not have internet service. While our school district provided every child with a tablet, it was not a familiar device for many and we needed to do lots of troubleshooting. Eventually all my families gained access to Seesaw, and my kiddos began to respond daily to the lessons and activities I was posting. While some families dabbled and then participated intermittently, others became my dedicated core of engaged learners.

There is an irony in this experience that has caused me to reflect. While the coronavirus has physically separated me from my students and families, it has also served to bring us together in a powerful new way. Early childhood educators have long recognized the fact that parents are the child's first teachers. In the current context, I have gained an entirely new and inspiring perspective on my students' parents as educators. In addition, parents are communicating with me about the insight into teachers and teaching that they have been gaining during the school shut-down.



Ms. Greimel (middle) at a literacy event.

The pandemic has required a huge shift in the locus of responsibility for the ongoing engagement of children (especially young children and children with special needs) with the educational process. Parents now share with professional educators, in a fairly equal division of labor, the responsibility to keep children engaged in learning. Of course, there is great diversity among parents in their ability to engage in these new and sudden conditions for schooling given the wide range of life situations. I am very concerned about the ways this virus has laid bare and exacerbated many of the disparities in our country, especially in terms of access to high quality education. But I am also deeply touched and filled with hope to observe directly the great dedication, patience, and love that has characterized the daily engagement of so many parents with their young children in ongoing learning at home.

Under normal circumstances, I consider myself fairly strong in the area of parent and family engagement. I greet my families every day upon arrival, take leave at dismissal, and interact with parents at these times daily. I visit the homes of all students twice a year and meet with all parents at school for conferences twice also. I bring families and parents into the classroom three times a year to share their stories and culture with students and families. I participate in all the campus-level family engagement events as well. These experiences have given me some knowledge about my families that have served to help me to incorporate my families' cultures into my classroom.

My current experience of providing learning experiences and receiving daily responses from families, interacting with individual kids and their parents at a distance about the learning—it has allowed me a delightful glimpse into the real interactions between parent and child as they engage in learning together. I have seen very busy moms and dads, with multiple kiddos in the home, blossom into creative, joyful, resourceful and encouraging educators of their own children. In these families, I cannot help but imagine that this difficult experience has uncovered or reinforced a very enriching form of family interaction that will serve their children well for a lifetime.

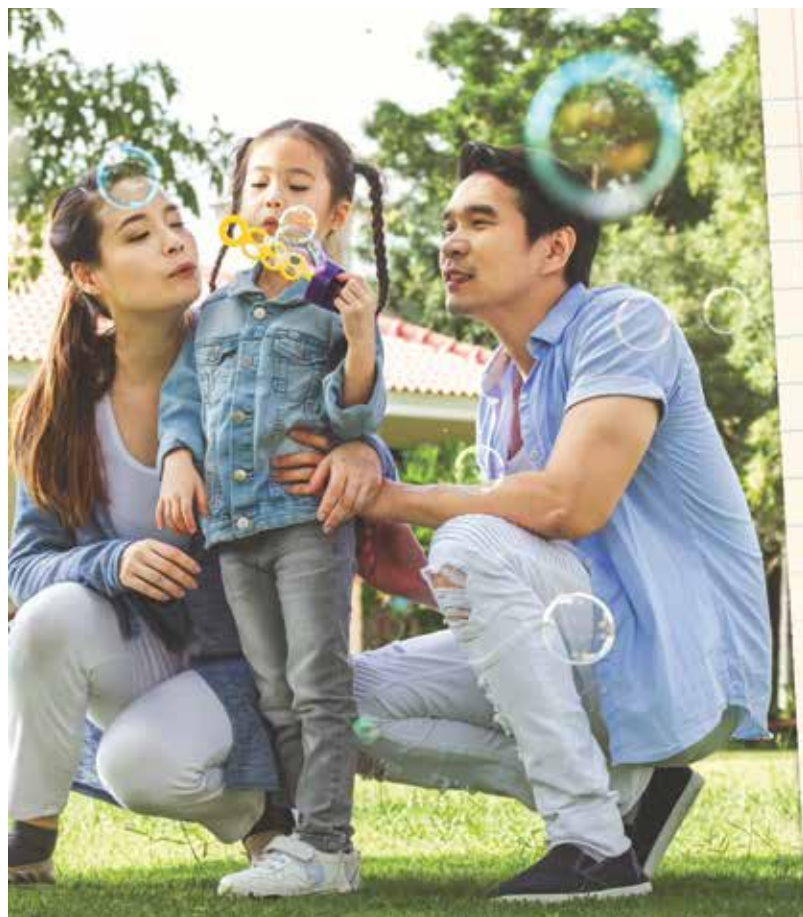
For my families and kiddos from San Antonio’s westside, we have the added richness of learning in two languages. Every child in my classroom is acquiring a second language. I have observed tremendous efforts on the part of parents to continue to support their child’s learning in both languages, regardless of the dominant language of the household. I feel that the parents have gained very useful insight into their child’s process of language acquisition and how they can support it.

Likewise, I have recently had very rewarding conversations with parents—perhaps some of the most cherished gifts I take away from my career—where parents have expressed great thankfulness for educators, for the up-close model of teaching and positive encouragement and ways of communicating with young children that this situation has provided for them. I began my career as an early childhood educator in Mexico. I experienced

a very special form of parent engagement with teachers in the education of the young child there. I called it “cómplices,” or accomplices. I certainly have found this type of collaboration every year with many parents on the westside of San Antonio. It is this relationship with parents in large part – especially parents who face great challenges and adversity in their daily lives – that has kept me going back to the classroom for so many years. This year, my last year of teaching, I am deeply thankful to the parents of my students for showing me in full force their courageous complicity with me in their child’s academic success. I know that their future interactions with their children, their schools, and their teachers will be strengthened forever.

Andrea Greimel has an M.A. in Bilingual-Bicultural Education and has been a bilingual early childhood educator for 36 years, primarily in Edgewood ISD and San Antonio ISD, on the westside of San Antonio.

In 2018 she was a finalist for the Texas Teacher of the Year Award. In 2019 she was named Toyota Family Teacher of the Year (national runner-up), she received the Trinity Prize for Excellence in Teaching from Trinity University, as well as the HEB Excellence in Education Lifetime Achievement Award. In 2020 she received an NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence.



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Reflexión sobre la participación de los padres durante el cierre de las escuelas debido a la Pandemia

Por Andrea Greimel

He sido maestra bilingüe de primera infancia en el lado oeste de San Antonio, Texas durante 32 años. Antes de eso, enseñé a jóvenes estudiantes bilingües en México durante 4 años. Este mes me retiro. Me ha dolido el hecho de que mi último grupo de pequeños no podrá reunirse en nuestro salón de clases para aprender, y que yo termino mi carrera frente a las pantallas en la sala de mi casa en lugar de bailar, cantar, construir, pintar, reír y todas esas cosas maravillosas, prácticas, espontáneas e impredecibles que han sido mi vida durante tanto tiempo. Normalmente, nuestro tiempo juntos después de las vacaciones de primavera en la primera infancia es un momento maravilloso en el que los niños realmente se conocen y conocen a sus maestros. Conocen las rutinas y expectativas. Tienen algunas estrategias para resolver problemas y resolver conflictos. Esto brinda una sensación de seguridad que permite un nivel de comunicación mucho más sofisticado, más chistes y diversión, creatividad y grandes ganancias de aprendizaje. Normalmente no creo que los niños pequeños deban estar mucho en las pantallas, por lo que el nuevo imperativo fue aleccionador y lleno de dudas para mí. No obstante, seguí adelante y comencé a tratar de involucrar a los estudiantes a través de la plataforma de Seesaw.

Inicialmente, hubo un período de interrupción cuando las familias tuvieron que hacer un gran cambio en cada área de sus vidas. Muchas de las familias perdieron sus empleos, de repente pasan en casa todo el día con sus hijos, muchos sufrieron escasez de alimentos y todos operaban en el contexto del miedo al contagio, especialmente aquellas familias con varias generaciones bajo un mismo techo o con miembros de la familia que tienen condiciones subyacentes que los ponen en mayor riesgo. Muchas de mis familias no tenían servicio de Internet. Si bien nuestro distrito escolar proporcionó a todos los niños una tableta, no era un dispositivo familiar para muchos y teníamos que solucionar muchos problemas. Finalmente, todas mis familias obtuvieron acceso a Seesaw y mis estudiantes comenzaron a responder diariamente a las lecciones y actividades que estaba publicando. Mientras que algunas familias incursionaron y luego participaron de manera intermitente, otras se convirtieron en mi núcleo dedicado de estudiantes comprometidos.

Hay una ironía en esta experiencia que me ha hecho reflexionar. Si bien el coronavirus me ha separado físicamente de mis alumnos y sus familias, también ha servido para unirnos de una manera nueva y poderosa. Los maestros de la primera infancia



La maestra Andrea con sus las familias en un evento de alfabetización.

han reconocido durante mucho tiempo el hecho de que los padres son los primeros maestros del niño. En el contexto actual, he adquirido una perspectiva completamente nueva e inspiradora sobre los padres de mis alumnos como educadores. Además, los padres se están comunicando conmigo sobre la comprensión de los maestros y la enseñanza que han estado obteniendo durante el cierre de la escuela.

La pandemia ha requerido un gran cambio en el lugar de responsabilidad para el compromiso continuo de los niños (especialmente los niños pequeños y los niños con necesidades especiales) con el proceso educativo. Los padres ahora comparten con los maestros, en una división del trabajo bastante equitativa, la responsabilidad de mantener a los niños interesados en el aprendizaje. Por supuesto, existe una gran diversidad entre los padres en su capacidad de participar en estas nuevas y repentinas condiciones de escolarización dada la amplia gama de situaciones de la vida. Estoy muy preocupada por las formas en que este virus ha puesto al descubierto y exacerbado muchas de las disparidades en nuestro país, especialmente en términos de acceso a una educación de alta calidad. Pero también estoy profundamente conmovida y llena de esperanza al observar directamente la gran dedicación, paciencia y amor que ha car-

acterizado el compromiso diario de tantos padres con sus hijos pequeños en el aprendizaje continuo en el hogar.

En circunstancias normales, me considero bastante fuerte en el área de participación de padres y familiares. Saludo e interactuo diariamente con los padres a las horas de la entrada y salida de clases. Visito las casas de todos los estudiantes dos veces al año y me encuentro con todos los padres en la escuela para conferencias dos veces también. Invito a las familias al aula tres veces al año para compartir sus historias y cultura con los estudiantes. También participo en todos los eventos familiares a nivel de escuela. Estas experiencias me han dado conocimiento sobre mis familias que me ha ayudado a incorporar su cultura en mi salón de clases.

Mi experiencia actual de proporcionar actividades y recibir respuestas diarias de las familias, interactuando con niños y sus padres a distancia sobre el aprendizaje, me ha permitido vislumbrar deliciosamente las interacciones reales entre padres e hijos a medida que participan en el aprendizaje juntos. He visto a madres y padres muy ocupados, con varios niños en el hogar, convertirse en educadores creativos, alegres, ingeniosos y alentadores de sus propios hijos. En estas familias, no puedo evitar imaginar que esta experiencia difícil ha descubierto o reforzado una forma muy enriquecedora de interacción familiar que servirá bien a sus hijos durante toda la vida.

Para mis familias y niños del lado oeste de San Antonio, tenemos la riqueza adicional de aprender en dos idiomas. Cada

niño en mi clase está adquiriendo un segundo idioma. He observado enormes esfuerzos por parte de los padres para continuar apoyando el aprendizaje de sus hijos en ambos idiomas, independientemente del idioma dominante del hogar. Siento que los padres han adquirido información muy útil sobre el proceso de adquisición del lenguaje de sus hijos y cómo pueden apoyarlo.

Del mismo modo, recientemente he tenido conversaciones muy gratificantes con los padres, quizás algunos de los regalos más preciados que me llevo de mi carrera, donde los padres han expresado un gran agradecimiento por los maestros, por el modelo cercano de enseñanza y el estímulo positivo y las formas de comunicarse con niños pequeños que esta situación les ha proporcionado. Comencé mi carrera como maestra de la primera infancia en México. Experimenté una forma muy especial de participación de los padres con los maestros en la educación del niño pequeño allí. A esta forma la llamo "complices." Ciertamente, he encontrado este tipo de colaboración cada año con muchos padres en el lado oeste de San Antonio. Es esta relación con los padres en gran parte lo que me ha llevado a regresar al aula durante tantos años. Este año, mi último año de enseñanza, estoy profundamente agradecida con los padres de mis alumnos por mostrarme con toda su fuerza su valiente "complicidad" conmigo en el éxito académico de sus hijos. Sé que sus futuras interacciones con sus hijos, sus escuelas y sus maestros se fortalecerán para siempre.



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Building Competence and Promoting Quality Social Studies by Engaging Families

By Kristine Calo



Through culturally responsive practices children learn about other cultures

famous individuals from the past, or looking at how technology has changed over time (National Council for Social Studies, 2009). This is done through social studies.

While the need for social studies in the primary grades is clear, the amount of time dedicated to social studies has clearly diminished over the past two decades (National Council for Social Studies, 2009; Heafner & Groce, 2007). Educators have found innovative ways to incorporate social studies into the curriculum by integrating social studies content through

For early childhood educators, social studies help young children learn what it means to be contributing, productive members of their family, as well as of their classroom, school, neighborhood, community, and the world. In PreK-grade 3 classrooms, children learn about rules—at home, in school, and in the community. They explore not only what the rules are, but also how rules promote ideals such as fairness, safety, and order. Through classroom activities and culturally responsive practices (Dora & Fraser, 2009), young children learn about and begin to accept cultures that are different from their own. Children find out about people and places that make up our communities, nation and world.

Children learn about problems and issues in our communities and begin to see that they, too, can think critically and creatively to find solutions and solve problems. As they learn that they can have a voice in our society, they learn how to form opinions, find reasons to support their opinions, and listen to perspectives that may differ from their own. Young children also begin to understand the differences between past, present and future as they start to explore the past—whether it be through past events,

literacy and other subject areas. Teaching children to access social studies content through informational texts supports not only important social studies learning but also the development of key literacy skills and strategies (Brozo & Calo, 2006).

Another way that educators infuse social studies learning into children's everyday lives is by promoting family engagement to support children's understanding of key social studies concepts. In this article we present activities to promote quality social studies learning and knowledge while building essential early literacy skills. Not only do the activities in this article extend children's learning beyond the classroom, but they also promote purposefully partnering with families to enhance children's learning and development across learning domains. Along with promoting social studies competence and active literacy learning, intentional family engagement yields strong social-emotional benefits by supporting strong, reciprocal family partnerships with the school and positive caregiver/child relationships (Halgunseth, 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Social Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Educators promote family engagement through social studies

Engaging Families to Support Social Studies Learning

Exploring the World Around Us: Geography

The C3 (College, Career, and Civic Life) Framework states, "Geographic inquiry helps people understand and appreciate their own place in the world, and fosters curiosity about Earth's wide diversity of environments and cultures" (National Council of Social Studies, 2013). Young children are naturally curious about the world around them.

Helping children explore their own culture, as well as other cultures, can build appreciation for the diversity of communities, our nation and the world. To explore their own culture, educators such as second grade educator, Ms. Kanz, asks families to engage in a conversation about their own family histories. Using a Family History Graphic Organizer, children note the members of their families (including pets), the country(ies) their families originally came from (if they are immigrants), a favorite family tradition, and something about their family that the child believes makes them special.

Ms. Kanz also asks families to send in pictures or have children draw pictures to accompany the text on the graphic organizer. Children then use this information to share about their families by making a mobile, a collage, or even cover a cereal box to make a "book" cover about their families. All of the diverse projects are then displayed around the classroom to help establish a caring, inclusive classroom.

A basic way to learn about other cultures, is through a Food Journey (Gaines-Buchler, 2015). To take the journey, families "travel" the international food aisle at the grocery store. They talk about the food from different countries, noticing the many different types of foods from all over the world. Each time they go on a journey they choose a new food from another country to take home and try. For example, they may devour some hum-



mus from Greece or whip up corned beef and cabbage from Ireland. Families look at a map or globe to see where the food they are trying comes from and come up with adjectives to describe the food using their five senses. Children capture their food journeys in a *Journey Journal* where they note from which country the food came and the adjectives they use to describe the food. Periodically students share their food journey adventures with others in the classroom. Of importance is to note the culinary contributions that immigrants have brought to the U.S. over time and as such many of the foods we eat are more familiar than we think. This contribution helps children understand part of the identity of individuals in the U.S.

To support children's development of geographic knowledge, educators encourage families to create maps of their home and their communities and explore online resources from the United States Geological Survey (USGS.org) and National Geographic (<https://kids.nationalgeographic.com/>) to find games, activities and projects to foster children's curiosity about the natural world. For example, educators encourage children to learn

Figure A. My Family History Graphic Organizer

Name: _____

My family includes:	My family originally came from:
One of my family's traditions is:	My family is special because:
Family pictures!	

about issues facing animal populations by engaging in activities like the Big Cat Initiative through National Geographic Education. Nonfiction classroom magazines such as *National Geographic Explorer* or *Time for Kids* are sent home and families are encouraged to read the articles together, find topics that are of interest to the family, and do further exploration online. These magazines support students' abilities to read and comprehend informational text, while also encouraging them to learn about the world around them.

Making a Difference: Civics

Educators and families play an important role in helping children see the value in taking an active role as citizens in their school or community. When educators encourage families to explore the ideas of volunteerism, random acts of kindness, and being helpful, they reinforce classroom ideals and encourage civic engagement. To encourage volunteerism, educators such as Ms. Holt, a first-grade educator, suggests that families create cards for service members or the elderly. Cards made at home are sent to service member organizations such as the Red Cross or Operation Gratitude. Local nursing homes are appreciative of cards created for residents. When writing cards, Ms. Holt reminds families to have children only use their first names. Additionally, Ms. Holt sends home information about random acts of kindness and encourages families to talk with their young children about what kindness is, what it looks like, what it sounds like, and why it is important for their family and for society as a whole.

Ms. Holt's families use the Helping Hands activity to draw their hands and write about what they each do to help around the home and in their neighborhood. An extension of this activity is to have each family member cut out handprints and have everyone leave one of their handprints any time they do something helpful for another member of the family (Gaines-Bucheler, 2015). At the end of each week the family talks about what they did that was helpful, and what it felt like not only to help others but to be helped by others too.

Another aspect of Civics that educators can encourage families to build on at home is the concept of rules. At school, before collaboratively establishing class rules, educators such as Ms. Kanz and Ms. Holt read books such as *Rules Help, What If Everybody Did That?* or *Officer Buckle & Gloria*. Educators encourage families to build on the idea of rules using a modified Goldilocks Rule, asking questions such as How many are too few? Too many? Just right? Encourage families to have fun thinking about what their home (or neighborhood or classroom) would be like with too many rules. What would it be like to have too few rules or no rules whatsoever? Talk about what it would look like, sound like, and feel like. Encourage families to be creative. Have children create their own books and illustrate the books with their families. The books can be placed in the class library for all to enjoy.

Families also support children's learning about community helpers. Ms. Beckwith, a preschool educator, encourages family members to come in as guest speakers to talk about their jobs—what they do, what the job is like, and the tools they use

to do their jobs. Families are encouraged to visit local police or fire stations, talk with family doctors and nurses and be aware of other helpers in their community. Sending home questions to consider helps support the dialogue between caregivers and children about who their community helpers are. Families are encouraged to have their children write notes to say thank you to community helpers who keep them safe such as crossing guards, police officers, and others.

Exploring the Past: History

While educators engage young children in learning about concepts of past, present, and future and begin to develop children's historical thinking skills, families can support investigations at home as well. Encourage families to take a trip to the library to learn about famous Americans. Together with their children, families read about a famous person, talk about what he/she did and why, and also think about why that person still is important today. Families create a My Famous American page by drawing a picture of the person and writing about what he/she did and why. For younger children, they can write a label for their picture or dictate a sentence to be written down by a family member, such as an older sibling or a parent. Children bring their completed page to the classroom to be bound together with the pages from their classmates. The educator puts a cover on the book and titles it *Our Famous Americans* by <class name>. The bound class book then goes into the class library to be available for children to read during independent reading time.

Another way that families can support children's social studies learning is by creating a timeline of the child's life. The educator can place the timelines on a bulletin board and have conversations with the class about the ways that class members are all similar and different. Children then set goals for themselves for the future to think about what they want to be when they grow up. Jasmine, a preservice early childhood educator, created a process called a "Dream Board" where she asks students to write goals (or dreams) on big clouds and steps to take to achieve those goals (or dreams) on smaller, connected clouds. She then posts the clouds on a Dream Board.

Additionally, children in classrooms where social studies is embedded in their everyday activities talk with their families about items from the past that they can bring in for show-and-tell. This technique, called Antiques Roadshow: Show and Tell and created by Mr. Michaud, a kindergarten educator, helps children understand concepts of past and present, while also looking at people, events, and technology across time. Families send in photographs, old technology or any item that comes from the past. Mr. Michaud also sends home a worksheet for the children to complete with their families. It includes the child's name, the name of their object, a place to draw a picture of the object, and the question, "What does your object teach us about the past?" In class, the children present their objects and the class has a rich discussion about what the object shows about the past.

Money Matters: Economics

Educators build young children's understanding of economics by developing children's economic knowledge and decision-making

skills. Families support their child's study of economics by using the academic vocabulary taught at school, while at home and in the community. Educators share with families the goals of their economics lessons along with the words and definitions that they are using to teach the core concepts. Encourage families to look for real-world examples of economic decision making. When families are shopping, they can talk about goods. When they are at the doctor's office, they can talk about jobs and services. Encourage families to explore the production process. After teaching about the production process, educators such as Ms. Holt have children create books based on their research such as *From Farm to Table* or *From the Cow to Ice Cream in My Belly* to share with their families at home.

Ms Holt also encourages families to set up a savings accounts at a local bank or to save money in a piggy bank. She asks families to talk about the reasons that people in their family save money. Ms. Holt also has families explore the U.S. Mint's H.I.P. (history in your pocket) Pocket Change website to learn about different coins. Children bring in a coin from home and explore the different characteristics of the coins. State coins provide a window into state history. If families have coins or bills from another country, she encourages them bring those in too.

Building Competence by Building Connections

Educators of young children have a tremendous impact on the lives of the children in their classrooms. By purposefully connecting to families and providing them with easy-to-follow, engaging and purposeful activities, educators build and extend children's social studies knowledge in meaningful ways. Not only will activities such as the ones shared in this article engage families in their child's learning at home and in the community, but this collaborative effort will also help build a solid civic foundation for school and life.

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Calling All Teachers and Administrators

SPECIAL DIMENSIONS MANUSCRIPT

Due Date: September 1, 2020

We are inviting teachers and administrators to write a one-page manuscript regarding their experiences about COVID-19. There is no need to include references. We are looking for manuscripts that provide examples and suggestions of any aspects of teaching and learning, working with families, health, nutrition, and stress during the pandemic.

The manuscripts will be reviewed by the editor and the selected manuscript will be featured in the Fall Issue of Dimensions of Early Childhood.

Please send your manuscript to **editor@seca.info** by **September 1, 2020**.

Thank you!

Mari Riojas-Cortez, Ph.D., Editor
Dimensions of Early Childhood

Little Hands, Little Feet, Little Moments:

Effective Classroom Practices to Create Impactful Caregiver Interactions

By Alicia Deaver, Lindsay E. Wright & Brittany Herrington



ly significant for children with special needs (Shire, Gulsrud, & Kasari, 2016; Test, Cunningham, & Lee, 2010). These relationships are bidirectional, as the ways caregivers respond to the child change as a child grows from an infant through the preschool years, and how the child responds to caregivers and their developmental needs can influence the caregiver's response.

An increase in intentionality on behalf of the caregiver to cue into a child's non-verbal and verbal communication is important. In addition, attempting and responding accurately to the situation and the child's emotional state is

especially important when a child's communication development may be atypical due to a delay. (Shire et al., 2016) Caregivers can use responsive interactions, which means caregivers are tuned into the child and join in the play, communications, and actions in the present moment to provide individualized support to promote social and emotional competence (Leifield & Sanders, 2007). Responsive interactions during play and daily activities are essential for development as children acquire and apply new information through them (Landry et al., 2012).

"Ring, ring. Ring, ring," Pamela, a 3-year-old, says as she picks up the toy telephone.

"Hello?" asks Frank, a 2-year-old, who picks up a block and puts it to his ear.

"Hello, who is on the phone?" says Justina, Pamela and Frank's caregiver.

"Heyo! It's me Pama." Pamela says.

"Me too. I Frank!"

"Hello, Pamela and Frank. I am so glad we could be on the phone together. It makes me happy."

Talking on the telephone is a common form of play in early childhood that builds children's social and emotional capacities. Since social and emotional development in early childhood is so significant for success later in life and the foundation of the capacity for learning, it is essential for caregivers to build these capacities in young children through everyday moments (Russell, Lee, Spieker, & Oxford, 2016; Turculet & Tulbure, 2014).

Caregivers who provide the child with choices, discuss the child's experiences, and are sensitive to the child's emotional states promote the development of empathy and social and emotional competence (Roopnarine & Davidson, 2015). Caregivers who respond to the child's actions and emotions and talk about those of others provide those learning opportunities, which is especial-

Importance of Consistent Routines: Infants

Chris picks up Stephanie, a 10-month-old child in his class, and sits in the rocking chair.

Chris says, "Stephanie, we ate lunch, washed your face, and brushed your tooth. Now, it is time to read one book and lay down and take a nap. Which book should we read today? How about this one? I'll read the story and you can turn the pages!"

Chris then starts reading Mama, Do You Love Me by Barbara Joosse. With each page he reads, he highlights the emotions in the story by emphasizing the different emotional tones. Stephanie slaps the pages of the book as they read. Each time, Chris comments on the action. "Yes, I see the mom in her blue kuspuk. You are also wearing blue. See, you have blue dots on your shirt here and here."

Developing and maintaining schedules and routines build predictability and security

Developing and maintaining schedules and routines in early childhood is an essential way for caregivers to build predictability and security in infancy. These social and emotional developmental foundations help infants to know what to expect and what is expected of them. In the example, Chris is supporting Stephanie's social and emotional skill development in multiple ways including: having a predictable lunch and nap routine; discussing the routine with Stephanie to promote understanding; discussing emotion words and applications to real world situations; helping Stephanie to develop self-regulation skills through a calm, nurturing environment; promoting shared attention by reading together; and when Chris puts words to Stephanie's non-verbal communications, he is engaging in contingent responding (Landry et al., 2012). In these little moments, a caregiver helps build a strong attachment and teaches the child that she is important, valued, and worthy of love (Turculet & Tulbure, 2014).

In infancy, when a caregiver engages with the child in play without interruption, he can cue into the child's intentions, communications, and emotional state to provide context, vocabulary, and new understanding (Reed, Hirsh-Pasek, & Golinkoff, 2017). Talking with the infant about her schedule and routine engages the child in interactive communication, "First we will get the diaper and wipes, then we will change your diaper." Preparing an infant for what is going to happen to him, "I am going to pick you up now," also furthers this development.

Labeling and identifying an infant's feelings, as she is experiencing them, is another way to promote social and emotional skill development. For example, "I know you are frustrated, you are having to wait for the bottle to warm up, and you are hungry now. Let's sing a song while we wait."

Utilization of Intentional Communication

Other ways caregivers can engage infants is by having discussions about what the infant is experiencing through his senses. Conversations based on what the infant is hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching puts experiences into context. Caregivers can build these conversations into play times, meal times, bath time, during outside play or on walks, when running errands, and when meeting new people or in new situations. Those little moments in the daily schedule and routines make



long-lasting impacts on infants (Russell et al., 2016).

Caregivers can increase their mindfulness of children's communication attempts when a cognitive, language, or physical delay prevents a child from engaging in social interactions or normative communications. Through play and interaction, subtle communications and gestures become easier to interpret and develop greater meaning between both the caregiver and the child (Fusaro, Vallotton, & Harris, 2014; Vallotton, 2012). As infants grow into toddlers, these communications expand as toddlers begin to more actively explore their environments and demonstrate increased inquisitiveness about the world around them.

Naturally Occurring Extended Conversations: Toddlers

Henry, a 2-year-old, and his teacher, Samuel, are walking around the playground.

Henry says "ee". Samuel replies, "Yes, Henry, that is a tree. A tall, tall tree. Let's sing our tree song! Are you ready?" "Ye" says Henry. "Okay, one tall, two tall, three tall pine trees. Four tall, five tall, six tall pine trees. Seven tall, eight tall, nine tall pine trees. Ten tall pine trees along the side of the road. Wow! Ten tall pine trees!" sang Samuel and Henry. Henry who is still clapping, says, "ee" Samuel replies, "Oh. Now you want to sing about you?" "Ye" says Henry.

Henry and his teacher walking around the playground illustrates a common occurrence for caregiver-child interactions as many teachers and children spend a lot of time outside. Engaging children in conversations about what they are seeing is a natural way to make those moments count. Samuel and Henry turn what they are seeing into a song. Using the same basic structure

for the song, Samuel is reinforcing emotions, actions related to emotions, and their emotional states.

As Samuel and Henry sing and engage in play together, they are increasing their emotional competence, being creative, building vocabulary, and generally having fun. Exploring social and emotional skills through songs helps toddlers to examine a wide variety of prosocial actions, feelings, and ideas.

Responsivity in Playful Interactions

Progressing from peek-a-boo in infancy and early toddlerhood, many older toddlers enjoy playing hide-and-seek with themselves and objects. This type of play builds social and emotional skills, such as following directions, confidence, managing emotions (excitement), and persistence at tasks. A toddler who hides her shoes around the house or repeatedly hides behind the shower curtain is setting the stage for playful interactions. She may find the situation amusing as she watches the caregiver's reaction. When caregivers respond to the "game" with a playful approach, eager toddlers are often quick to reveal their secrets and chuckle with delight.

Cleaning up and getting dressed are also times where caregivers can support these games. Cleaning up with a timer set, to see if the clean-up can occur faster than the timer goes off, is a way to make the routine task more engaging. While getting dressed the caregiver can make false statements about the clothing, such as, "This is a shirt. It goes on our feet." These statements are meant to be playful and elicit involvement in getting dressed, engagement with the caregiver, and reinforce the child's knowledge.

Toddlers seek autonomy yet need intensive emotional supports from their caregivers. Caregivers are their models for how to handle their range of emotions and help to lay the social and emotional foundations for managing emotions. Toddlers need repeated practice to lay the foundation, which is why turning everyday tasks, requests, schedule, and routines into fun and engaging moments, as opposed to arduous chores, is crucial. Responsive interactions through play further this, as the caregiver builds upon the child's prior knowledge and promotes different types of learning and engagement (Marjanovic-Umek & Fekonja-Peklaj, 2017). Additionally, children are susceptible to playing in different ways, based on their gender, and caregiver responses often adjust to meet the actions of the child (Marjanovic-Umek & Fekonja-Peklaj, 2017).

Curiosity and Interactions: Preschoolers

Tejas, a 4-year-old, is walking on a trail with his teacher, Peta. As they walk across the bridge, Tejas stops, points to a spider web, and says, "Look, a spider web." His teacher says, "Keep walking, we have to keep up with our friends." Tejas immediately falls to the ground, crying and yelling, "No!" This causes his glasses to fall off and land near the edge of the bridge. Peta stops, takes a deep breath, squats down to Tejas's level and says, "Tejas, you wanted to stop and look at the spider web, and I did not. You didn't like it when I told you to keep going. Would you like to stop and look at the web together?" Tejas, through his sobs, says, "Y-e-s."

Peta hands him his glasses and says, "Let's take three deep breaths together, then we can look."

The story of Tejas helps to illustrate common interactions between caregivers and children. The child is curious and wants to explore something and create his own agenda, which conflicts with the agenda that the adult has set forth. Some situations do not allow for the adult to stop and meet the child at his level; however, many times a caregiver can refocus her attention to the awe-inspiring, captivating situation the child is drawn to. In those little moments, caregivers may be role-modeling patience, self-regulation, tuning in (paying attention), and shared interest, all things caregivers often expect of children.

Role modeling and engaging preschoolers in conversations about what they are naturally curious about helps children practice many social and emotional skills. Through back-and-forth reciprocal interactions, deep breathing, and joint engagement, Tejas worked on relating with others, self-regulation, and sustained attention skills. Peta even tied the conversation back to other types of knowledge to expand his learning.

Social Emotional Supports Through Literacy

Storytelling is a great way for preschoolers and caregivers to engage in social and emotional conversation. When a caregiver reads books with the child, the caregiver can place focus on both the social and emotional themes of a book as well as the plot and additional pre-reading skill development (Russell et al., 2016). A caregiver can also encourage the child to "write" her own stories and/or draw pictures to promote conversation regarding problem-solving such as drawing an alternate way to solve a problem from a book or a better way to handle a prior conflict with a peer. A caregiver can also describe a make-believe situation where there is a real-life problem, and the child can dictate a story to describe how the situation can be resolved using prosocial techniques. When caregivers and children complete these literacy events together, caregivers are also promoting sustained attention. Throughout the process, a caregiver can reflect on the child's ideas and, as appropriate, provide ideas and suggestions for handling the problem in a new way.

Many times, children receive consequences such as redirection, time away from a friend or item, loss of a privilege, etc. when they display an inappropriate social emotional skill like pushing a child who is first in line, snatching a toy from another child, or breaking crayons when angry. The problem-solving ideas previously mentioned are meaningful because they require children to apply knowledge of the skill, practice the skill, to "try again," and fill the child's problem-solving tool bucket with additional ways future problems can be handled.

Fostering Development Through Routines

When involved in everyday routines, preschoolers expand their social and emotional competencies. For example, caregivers can allow preschoolers to make choices of which vegetable they are going to have for dinner or have them help with meal preparations. Caregivers support sustained interaction, by asking questions, having conversations about the cooking process, and

providing directions. Children practice following directions when they use a recipe to guide the cooking process. Obvious math and science principles are also learned as preschoolers engage in cooking, but one of the biggest emotional gains occurs as they participate in repeated interactions that allow for sustained attention on completing multi-step tasks. The repeated interactions also build competence and confidence as the children create and share their creations.

Caregiver approaches for responsive interactions with preschool-age children can include an emphasis on sustained interactions, emotion recognition, scaffolding, autonomy, and problem-solving. These types of interactions contribute to the development of self-regulation and provide the foundation for learning (Russell et al., 2016).

Conclusion

Responsive interactions support children's social and emotional development by providing individualized focus and support to children as they grow and develop. Caregivers can increase their responsive interactions by setting aside time for uninterrupted play and engagement in routines, especially when it comes to individual use of electronics (Reed et al., 2017). Interactions that follow the child's lead and outline the child's thought process, rather than interjecting the caregiver's intentions and disrupting the flow, maximize learning opportunities.

Infants are wired to cue into facial expressions of their caregivers and benefit from nurturing and consistent interactions that recognize the infant's emotional state, promote regulation, and are informative. Toddlers are growing more autonomous but still require intensive supports in managing and learning about their emotions. Caregivers can hold firm limits, set expectations, recognize and label emotions, and address the meaning beneath behaviors, rather than solely focusing on the behaviors observed. Caregivers support preschoolers by assigning responsibility in daily activities, talking through common situations and solutions during play, continuing to recognize and label emotions, and promoting problem solving.

When focusing on meeting the individualized needs of families, teachers and early interventionists can support caregivers in a variety of ways. Caregivers of children with developmental delays often adapt their interactions and play styles to meet the child's needs; however, support may be needed in understanding the meaning of non-verbal communications and actions of a child who has a special need (Childress, 2011; Cress, Grabast & Jerke, 2013). If a manifestation of a special need makes it difficult for a child to communicate in typical ways, intervention strategies that support connection and reinforce prosocial interactions can be utilized (Cress et al., 2013).

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A Misunderstood Fundamental: Developmentally Appropriate Strategies for Letter Formation in Preschool

By Kristi Cheyney-Collante, Vivian Gonsalves, Shaunté Duggins & Julie Bader

Miss Carmin, an experienced preschool teacher, has just created a new emergent writing center in her classroom. Her students represent an array of different backgrounds and abilities, as she is the lead teacher in a diverse and inclusive setting. A facilitator in the county's recent workshop series shared that explicit letter formation instruction is not developmentally appropriate for her young students. In fact, she was told not to use handwriting practice sheets or lined paper, and to refrain from pushing children to write "correctly." In response to instructions from her school director, Miss Carmin created a center where her students can explore writing at a pace that is comfortable for them and that aligns with their interests. During writing exploration in this new center, Miss Carmin has noticed some children holding the crayons in their fists, writing from right to left, backwards, or using all capital letters. Her director says she does not think this is a problem since "they're just preschoolers," and that they have plenty of years to "get it straight" in school. However, Miss Carmin began her career teaching kindergarten and she remembers how difficult it was to break children of these habits. Now she's not sure what to do! Should she teach them how to correctly form letters? Should she devote instructional time to this activity? If so, how can she help ALL of her students, including those who struggle, achieve this goal in a developmentally appropriate way?

Writing is an important part of learning across all content areas of school (Graham & Harris, 2011). Even very young children experience the symbols of written language all around them. Soon they begin to notice that written symbols stand for people, ideas, things, or events, and attempt their own marks (Aram & Levin, 2011). However, though language is a foundational human trait, reading and writing are not naturally occurring processes. These are learned skills that children acquire through explicit teaching, modeling, and meaningful practice in addition to exposure to literacy in their homes and schools (Neuman et al., 2000).

When children learn to form letters incorrectly at a young age, they are more likely to experience difficulties in written expression throughout their schooling (e.g. Fancher et al., 2018). However, while many teachers provide a plethora of writing materials for students in preschool classrooms, research suggests that teachers are far less likely to use these materials with students throughout the day or to offer explicit guidance and scaffolding

around writing (Gerde et al., 2012). Despite decades of research, there remains considerable disagreement in the educational community as to the merits of a natural view (where children "catch" the conventions of writing and spelling during informal school and home experiences) versus more explicit instructional strategies (e.g. Berninger, 2019).

Fortunately, naturalistic and explicit instructional strategies need not be seen as mutually exclusive (Gerde et al., 2012). Many talented teachers have refined their approaches to providing systematic and explicit instruction without compromising developmentally appropriate practices, play, exploration, and a whole-child philosophy. This article first explores critical research addressing the development of letter formation for children prior to kindergarten, and then highlights two strategies to skillfully guide children in acquiring age-appropriate letter formation habits in developmentally appropriate ways.

"They're Only Four. Who Cares About Handwriting?"

Writing is an important skill used for broad reaching academic and non-academic tasks. Older students use writing to organize and explore information, share with peers, and refine ideas. Writing is also used to communicate non-academic thoughts, feelings, and opinions. However, many children struggle to learn to write (Graham & Harris, 2011). The writing process requires students to integrate a complex system of skills that interact across many domains. Skilled writers not only employ all of the skills required for fluent comprehension in reading, but also an entire system of fine motor and higher order thinking and problem-solving skills (Gentry & Graham, 2010).

Educational philosophers as far back as Rousseau's "Unfoldment Theory" of the 18th century (Tracey & Morrow, 2012) have promoted the idea of waiting to teach writing until after children learn to read. However, a preponderance of literature points to the difficulties that can arise if this approach is taken, as well as the potential benefits of early and developmentally appropriate emergent writing experiences. Language, literacy, reading, and writing emergence begin at birth and continue throughout formal schooling (e.g. Tolchinsky, 2014; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). According to the joint position statement from The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)

and the International Reading Association (IRA): “Failing to give children literacy experiences until they are in school can severely limit the reading *and* writing levels they ultimately attain,” (emphasis added; Neuman et al., 2000, p. 3). All adults interested in ensuring a high quality of life for young children should care, not only that effective writing strategies are addressed, but that they are addressed early, responsibly, and with considerable attention directed towards individual children’s needs.

Research Tells Us Where to Begin: It’s All in A Name

Planning emergent writing experiences can be a challenge for teachers who have received conflicting messages from workshops, fluctuating standards, and well-meaning but similarly confused administrators. Fortunately, research has provided us not only with many reasons to engage students in developmentally appropriate writing, but also a road map of how.

Letter formation begins with experimentation (Tolchinsky, 2014). Typically developing children progress from the stage of drawing squiggles, which they do not associate as representations of speech, to a stage of drawing actual letters or letter-like forms (Cabell, Tortorelli, & Gerde, 2013). At this point, the teacher usually begins to see the child experimenting with writing letters found in their name, particularly the first letter. With continued and purposeful exposure to meaningful letters, children soon make an important shift: they begin to associate written letters and words with speech. These are important first steps along the path to fluent reading and writing (Dinehart, 2015).

A child’s name is a good place to begin teaching the alphabetic principle, which is the fundamental understanding that letters and sounds come together to make words (Adams, 1990; Tolchinsky, 2014). “Names constitute the first clearly meaningful text, resistant to being forgotten and stable in pronunciation,” (Tolchinsky, 2014, p. 150). The National Early Literacy Panel (NELP; Lonigan & Shanahan, 2009) reports that name writing plays a role in proficient spelling. Name writing ability at kindergarten entrance offers a window into a child’s overall literacy development and is a foundation for other literacy skills (e.g. Puranik et al., 2011). Moreover, a child’s ability to write their name is dependent on their print knowledge and letter writing skills. These skills are interconnected. Though current, systematic research into preschoolers’ name writing is sparse (Puranik et al., 2011), most experts suggest name writing as a starting point for writing instruction (e.g. Berninger, 2019).

Teachers can use a child’s natural curiosity about their name for more than just letter identification. A child’s name is also a great place to begin proper letter formation. Talented teachers do this in an abundance of creative, and interconnected ways (Guo et al., 2012). Literacy rich classrooms are filled with environmental print that teachers reference often and that is meaningful to children (Neumann et al., 2011). Literacy rich classrooms also provide children with opportunities to play with and practice writing letters during regular classroom routines and rituals such as co-writing the morning message, taking menu orders in the

dramatic play area, creating class books, or drafting and sending letters to friends in a classroom post office. Calling attention to children’s names in their preschool environment is particularly helpful: labeling students’ cubbies with their names, identifying their art projects and work samples, and adding their names to the classroom word wall (Guo et al., 2012).

Beyond these embedded strategies, teachers can and should introduce letter formation as an explicit skill once children show a readiness for instruction. The key to any name writing activity is that it must be *guided*. Children do not automatically know how to hold a pencil or where to begin writing a letter without an adult or more capable peer there to scaffold their attempts. Fortunately, when teachers are there to purposefully guide writing experimentation, they are able to both assess children’s readiness for formal letter formation instruction and teach these new skills explicitly. Plus, taking this approach will help prevent children from learning incorrect letter formation habits that will be difficult to change once they enter Kindergarten.

Setting the Stage with “Rainbow Writing” (A Pre-Writing Activity)

Though very few high-quality studies have investigated specific writing instructional techniques, many experts agree that young children should have ample opportunities to strengthen all of the competencies that will contribute to fluent written expression in school (e.g. Edmister et al., 2013). While simultaneously calling attention to children’s names displayed in the classroom, teachers can set the stage for name writing by first offering opportunities for children to become increasingly more comfortable with the motoric movements involved in writing (Huffman & Fortenberry, 2011). Long before the pre-kindergarten year, children as young as two and three can begin to internalize the motoric movements they will eventually use in fluent handwriting. In addition to the fine motor skills reinforced in common preschool activities (e.g. grasping, cutting, molding, tearing, pinching, lacing, etc.), motoric movements that reinforce left to right directionality can be helpful in building a firm foundation.

Figure 1
“Rainbow Writing”: A Pre-Writing Activity



Photo used courtesy of K. Cheyney-Collante

Figure 2
Hand Over Hand Modeling



Photo used courtesy of K. Cheyney-Collante

One strategy for practicing these movements is “Rainbow Writing” (see *Figure 1*).

To perform this activity, a teacher posts large paper on the wall and then coaches the child to use a chunky piece of colored chalk to draw big rainbow shapes (half-circles). The child is directed to start on the left and move to the right, then remove the chalk from the paper, and go back to the left to begin again. Multiple colors are used in the same process to create a rainbow. Lifting the chalk will usually feel unnatural in the beginning and the teacher will need to coach the child, hand over hand. This process should reinforce left-to-right directionality. The teacher stands behind the child to help him/her complete each stroke (as displayed in *Figure 2*), hand over hand. Repetition will help children internalize the large muscle movement. Once the movements become natural, teachers can play music with a strong, steady beat at a slow to moderate tempo (a walking pace), and have children complete each stroke in time to the beat.

While children enjoy the activity, teachers should carefully attend to each child and watch for signs that they are struggling. These students will need extra time practicing these large, left to right motor patterns. Children that have difficulty can get extra time practicing the “Rainbow Writing” motor pattern with paint on an easel, or water and brushes on the wall at playground time. The authors suggest that teachers think of this extra time as “cozy up” time. Keeping sessions fun and intimate will be more effective than setting a tone of seriousness or intensity (Graham & Harris, 2011).

As children become skilled at using these movements while standing up, the teacher can then introduce the same procedure while students are sitting at a table. Most children will need support in transitioning, and some more than others. Those that seem frustrated at this stage may need more practice standing up. Teachers should keep in mind that the goal is that children are given plenty of opportunities to experience large and small muscle group movements (e.g. left-to-right directionality, while holding a writing utensil that fits their hand, etc.), before they are expected to transfer these skills to the exceedingly integrat-

Figure 3
Peer Scaffolding of Rainbow Writing



Photo used courtesy of K. Cheyney-Collante

ed motor movements involved in forming letters. It is important to note that this should never be forced on children.

Teachers need not be alone in their efforts to scaffold children in this activity, as some children will be able to scaffold peers. Those that are more advanced can help those that are just beginning to practice this skill (*Figure 3*).

Teachers can make sure a child does not feel slighted when receiving extra help from a peer by simply reversing roles of tutor and tutee later in the day. The focus is on scaffolding their learning. In the example of the children represented in *figure 3*, during recess the teacher asked the child that received help in Rainbow Writing to teach his friend how to turn a cartwheel. Teachers will need to mindfully plan how to assist children in alternating roles of tutor and tutee.

File Folder Sign-In (A Name Writing Activity)

More experienced preschoolers will ideally have had lots of excellent exposure to meaningful print as well as the motoric practice needed for a smooth transition into letter formation. Additionally, daily routines, such as attendance procedures where children “sign-in,” provide an excellent opportunity to capitalize on the personal nature of a child’s name. The recurring nature of a daily sign-in also allows teachers to regularly watch for readiness for letter formation instruction and ensures it won’t get left out in the midst of busy days. The following outlines the process of using a file folder sign-in.

First, the teacher makes a file folder with each child’s picture and name on the front (*Figure 4*). The inside should have a teacher written example of the child’s name at the top but also provide a space for children to copy their name on their own once they become ready. One method involves using the two-line approach (*Figure 5*) for both the teacher-written example and the place where children will eventually write their name independently. Teachers should provide them with at least three two-lined spaces where they will eventually practice.

Figure 4
File Folder Sign-In (Front Cover)



Photo used courtesy of K. Cheyney-Collante

In *Figure 5*, the teacher color coded the bottom line in bright orange and used a red dot to indicate where the child should place the writing utensil to begin each letter. As teachers experiment with these types of supports, they generally will find that each child differs in the amount and type of scaffolding needed. The folders should be laminated so they can be re-used every day. Children can decorate the front to add a special personalized touch.

The first day the folder is introduced, we suggest that teachers work with children individually or in small groups at various times throughout the day. Though it may take a week or so to introduce the folders to everyone, the teacher will be better able to assess each child's readiness with this gradual release. The teacher draws the student's attention to the child's picture, name, and front cover illustrations. She then invites them to open the folder and write their name with a dry erase marker in a color they choose. Specific directions are avoided here so that the teacher can carefully observe the child's independent endeavors. In the very beginning stages, children's attempt to write their names may not resemble the teacher's sample. They may draw scribbles. They may or may not try to write on the lines provided or directly over the teacher-written example. The teacher stays close to students and gives them positive and specific feedback.

For example, the teacher may say, "You wrote a squiggle that went up like this, then down like that. Good for you! You're getting ready to write your name." Once everyone has been introduced to the procedure, the teacher can include it as a regular part of the morning routine.

Next, the teacher watches over the coming weeks or months to see when individual children begin to approximate the letters of their name. The teacher can then begin to coach the student in proper letter formation. At this point, the teacher directly calls the child's attention to the example at the top and invites them to trace it with a bright colored dry erase marker. For instance, she might say: "You are growing up so fast! It looks like you're ready to learn to write your name. From now on when you get

Figure 5
File Folder Sign-In (Inside Practice Area)



Photo used courtesy of K. Cheyney-Collante

your folder, take a marker and trace the letters of your name, just like this." She then models for them, hand over hand, exactly how to do it: (1) how to hold the marker; (2) where to put their other hand to hold the folder; and (3) exactly where to start and end on each letter. Typically, most children need the red colored dot (both on the name example and on the two-line practice areas) to reinforce where to start. After they have traced their name they can try to copy it in the spaces provided below the example.

For those that need extra support, teachers may also use a permanent black marker to include dotted lines on the first two-line space they've provided. Because teachers will be carefully watching the entire class during this activity, a few little supports like this will make it much easier to spread a teacher's guidance among all students since they are progressing at different rates. The teacher should continue to guide them as individually as possible.

Even with these explicit instructional strategies, teachers still need to embed additional name writing and letter formation experiences throughout the day. The folders can be kept available for later play and practice in the Writing Center. As children exhibit readiness, teachers can encourage them to write their name as often as possible but continue to be there to guide their efforts. Teachers will notice and praise as they see children correctly forming letters. When the teacher notices incorrect form, she can gently guide children back on track, again, hand over hand. In such instances, the teacher might say, "You're working so hard on writing your name. Here, try it over these dotted lines to make it easier. Good for you! You're doing it! Try it again right now on your own for practice."

Many teachers are concerned about how and when to use lines, guiding dots, and other support strategies, as different handwriting programs suggest different procedures. Whatever specific tools teachers use, make sure to follow the child's lead by continually assessing where they fall in the expected developmental progression and provide the necessary scaffold. Curricula that emphasize a one-size-fits-all approach should be avoided. The

goal is automaticity for all children, particularly those that might have risk factors in reading and writing acquisition. Therefore, any support tools a teacher uses should let the child's development set the pace but should also provide a structure where learning ineffective letter formation habits are avoided.

Tips for Teacher-Created Activities

Teachers can create many different types of name-writing activities similar to the ones that have been explored in this article. Here are some helpful tips that should be considered before deciding to adopt a new strategy or to modify an old one. With these guidelines in place, there are innumerable ways to begin the letter formation process through name writing.

Watch for readiness. The best time to begin letter formation activities with children is when they show a readiness to do so, and not before. Sometime around a child's third birthday teachers should observe very closely for signs of experimentation with forming letters. Assess children by observing them in a naturalistic environment first, perhaps during unstructured work-play time when writing materials are provided.

Begin at the child's level. A child that is still learning to hold a crayon may need extra fine motor experiences before a teacher begins a name writing protocol. Conversely, there is no need to require a proficient name writer to continue practicing their name over and over without a real purpose. The teacher can, however, guide them in writing their name at useful times throughout the day, and then eventually in writing words in meaningful contexts.

Remain at the child's pace. Pushing a child to conform to adult expectations of timing when s/he is unready will be futile. However, teachers can celebrate these individual differences. A struggling child has actually presented the teacher with an opportunity to slow down the pace and devote special attention to one child that needs support.

Plan ahead. Teachers should include guided, explicit letter formation activities in lesson plans several days a week. It is also important to think ahead about how to embed experimentation, play, and practice throughout the day. This can be as simple as remembering to allow children to write their own name on art projects and other learning artifacts once they show readiness to do so, or working with colleagues to rotate materials for emergent writing within centers.

Mistakes are opportunities to learn. All new skills need to be scaffolded. Mistakes are where the real learning happens *if teachers are there to provide immediate, supportive feedback*. Teachers can help children adopt the word "oops" and use it liberally so that they feel safe to attempt the new and difficult skills of writing.

Encourage children, especially those who struggle, with behavior specific praise. Showering children's attempts with praise is critical, particularly if the praise is immediate (at the mo-

ment the child is engaged in practicing the skill) and descriptive (noticing without opinion or judgment). For example, the teacher might say, "I notice you started that big letter 'O' right here at the top. That's exactly right. You did it!" Notice, the emphasis is on what the child did, not simply the teacher's approval of it ("YOU did it!" versus "I like the way you..."). This type of feedback, in and of itself, is a form of explicit instruction. Moreover, developing writers will be compelled to persevere when behavior specific praise acknowledges effort and process in addition to results.

Concluding Thoughts

Guided early writing experiences are critical in establishing a solid foundation for young learners, particularly for children who have not had the types of early experiences that map onto the literacies expected in formal schooling. In the opening scenario, Miss Carmin questioned how she would address correct letter formation without compromising developmentally appropriate practices and a child-centered philosophy. This article elaborated on how this goal can be accomplished. Though effective early writing instruction requires thoughtful planning and careful monitoring of students' progress, the activities and guidelines outlined here are appropriate for use with young learners of all backgrounds and abilities. Lao-Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher, is credited with saying, "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step." Teachers like Miss Carmin can start small, knowing that daily guiding children along the path to fluent writing holds innumerable rewards.

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Special Issue 2021

Guest Editors

Dina Costa Treff and Beverly Boals Gilbert

Adversity and high levels of stress in early childhood can have a negative impact throughout a person's life. Stress in the very young may affect a child's health, behavior, and ability to learn. In particular, high levels of toxic stress can have a negative impact on brain development (Sciaraffa, 2018). However, resilience allows young children the capacity to recover from significant challenges that threaten their stability, viability, or development (Masten, 2013.). The role of the adults in supporting resilience in young children is critical as it helps to cope with stress caused by challenging situations.

We are looking for manuscripts that focus on different aspects of resilience in early childhood. The following include possible topics but it is not an exclusive list:

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Masten, A. S. (2013). Risk and resilience in development. In P. D. Zelazo (Ed.), Oxford library of psychology. *The Oxford handbook of developmental psychology, Vol. 2. Self and other* (p. 579-607). Oxford University Press.

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Using Home Visits with a Family-Centered Approach

By Siobian J. Minish & Laura S. McCorkle



Home visits help to establish partnerships.

long educators. This perspective is important in having a family-centered approach because educators can understand and appreciate the wealth of experience and knowledge that a family has about their child that the educator does not (Dunst, 2002; Dunst & Espe-Sherwindt, 2016; Gonzalez, Moll, & Amanti, 2005; Tomasello, Manning, & Dulmus, 2010).

The roots of a family-centered approach can be traced to Bronfenbrenner (1979). We

As the beginning of the school year approaches, Grace, an early childcare teacher of an infant/toddler classroom, prepares to set the school year off on a good note. She understands that working with families is a priority and considers the use of home visits to deepen her understanding of their specific needs, as well as how to support their children's transition into her classroom. In her professional development opportunities as an early childcare teacher, she has learned about two tools in partnering with families, the Routines-Based Interview (RBI) and Reciprocal Approach. Grace believes that both may be useful and decides to implement them with two families of children enrolled in her classroom.

In the fields of early childhood education (ECE) and early childhood special education (ECSE), educators, such as Grace, must work to find ways to partner with parents and caregivers in an attempt to create a bridge between the student's school and home. Throughout the process of creating this partnership, families and childcare providers must work together to build upon each child's individual strengths and areas of need. Establishing partnerships with families enrolled in early childhood is important so that families view educators as positive collaborators from the onset of their child's education.

Moreover, families are the constant in a child's life and their life-

recognize the child as a part of a family rather than just a part of a classroom and school. In using this approach, the educator and/or program acknowledges each family has strengths (Rouse, 2012; Swafford, Wingate, Zagumny, & Richey, 2015), "supports the abilities of families to meet the needs of their children," (Allen, & Petr, 1998, p. 4) and makes adaptations within the classroom and/or program to reflect the values, goals, and culture of the family (Hamilton, Roach, & Riley, 2003). Although decades of research support the use of a family-centered approach (Hiebert-Murphy, Trute, & Wright, 2011; Rouse, 2012), the process of implementing a family-centered approach may sometimes be unclear for early childhood educators (Vilaseca et al., 2019).

Both the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and the Division for Early Childhood (DEC, 2014) support the use of a family-centered approach through its standards, position statements, and recommended practices. In their 2009 position statement on developmentally appropriate practice in early childhood programs for children birth to age 8, NAEYC emphasizes that "development and learning occur in and are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts" (p. 13) and that educators should view each child through the sociocultural context of the child's family. Additionally, one of the guidelines given for providing a developmentally appropriate classroom is that educators "establish reciprocal relationships with families" (p.22).

Similarly, the family strand of DEC's Recommended Practices (2014) states "family practices refer to ongoing activities that promote the active participation of families in decision-making related to their child... or support families in achieving the goals they hold for their child and the other family members" (p. 10). Further, DEC Recommended Practices identifies three themes: (a) family-centered practices, (b) family capacity-building practices, and (c) family and professional collaboration as essential for practitioners in partnering with families.

Educators are encouraged to form a collaborative partnership with the family as a way to learn about who the child is, work together to provide positive outcomes for the child, and to promote the capacity of the family to make decisions that work best for their child and the entire family. Though home visits are not explicitly stated as an avenue to form this relationship, visiting a family in their home provides a space where they are comfortable and "have the high ground," so to speak, as well as being more flexible for families that may have scheduling challenges.

As our professional standards encourage the use of home visits, and an increase in enthusiasm for the provision and quality of home-visits is rising (Hughes-Belding et al., 2019), understanding approaches to providing home-based visits is pertinent to the professional development of our field. Therefore, in this article we discuss the importance of home visits, particularly for professionals working with children under the age of five and their families, and ways to use supports such as the routine-based interview (McWilliam, Casey, & Sims, 2009) and reciprocal approach (Woods & Lindeman, 2008).

The Importance of Home Visits

In 2017, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a policy statement on the importance of early childhood home visiting and defined home visiting as "an evidence-based strategy in which a professional or paraprofessional renders a service in a community of private home setting" (Duffee et al., 2017, p. 1). Through the use of home visits, professionals may support families in a number of ways, including:

- (a) promoting overall child development,
- (b) monitoring for child abuse and neglect,
- (c) monitoring possible maternal depression, and
- (d) connecting families with social and economic support programs.

This policy statement proposed several benefits of home visiting programs such as laying a foundation for academic success, physical health, and economic stability for at-risk families.

In addition to the aforementioned benefits, home visits can give the family and the educator a chance to get to know one another and build a relationship around the child. Often, children enter a classroom having never been in out-of-home care or interacted with anyone other than their parents or caregiver. Home visits allow educators the opportunities to witness firsthand how children and families interact with one another during typical daily routines (Hughes-Belding et al., 2019).

Educators who have visited children in their homes have reported seeing their students in a more positive context and gaining empathetic feelings toward the families (Lin & Bates, 2010). In fact, the home visits allowed the educators to better "understand the struggles, prejudices, and stereotyping their children encounter in their daily lives" (Lin & Bates, 2010, p. 182) and to have more appreciation and understanding for families of diverse backgrounds and lifestyles. Having this positive viewpoint of the families they work with can help educators be more open to a family's needs and allow them to include parents in the planning for the classroom.

Scheduling and Practical Considerations

Often, one of the first questions that an educator has about completing home visits is "When will I have the time to do this?" Some programs, such as Head Start and early intervention programs funded through the federal or state government, require home visitation; therefore, educators and practitioners are provided time within their schedule to make these visits and are compensated. Educators in home child care centers or privately funded group child care centers typically do not have flexible work hours or paid time outside of the center hours to encourage them to make home visits. This can be a difficult hurdle to overcome, especially if a center is hesitant to allow for teachers to meet with families outside of the classroom. However, it is worthwhile to have a conversation with a center director or supervisor to see what accommodations can be made. Creative measures have been used, such as finding a substitute teacher to come in to the class to allow the educator to leave and meet with the family or allowing an educator to leave early one day to make up for time they spent doing a home visit after center hours.

Another consideration is how to schedule the home visits. At enrollment into the program, educators should determine the best method of contacting the family (i.e. email, text, phone call). Emails are often the easiest way of providing multiple options for timing and explanation of what the visit will entail. In composing emails to families, educators should state: (a) their availability to meet, (b) an explanation for why the classroom uses home visits, (c) what the family can expect, and (d) other options if the family chooses or cannot meet in their home. If a family is more comfortable using text communication, educators can use a handout to provide this information. Educators may also consider scheduling the first home visit through the use of a welcome letter to families prior to their child's entry into the program or school. *Figure 1* provides an example for educators to use when scheduling the first visit with a family.

Figure 1. Sample Letter

*Hello Ashley and Nathan,
I want to take a minute to welcome you to the CDL Infants 228 classroom! Rachel and I are so excited to have Preston in our class and cannot wait to meet your family! I know that you probably have a ton of questions to ask and many concerns you would like to discuss. In our classroom, we do voluntary home visits each year. This is not for us to check out your house and see how clean you keep things! We use this*

as a chance to meet with you in an environment that is most comfortable for Preston and for you. During this time, we discuss any questions or concerns that you have, discuss our Infant Program handbook (which details the specific guidelines and policies regarding the infant classrooms), and learn more about your family. We want this transition to be as smooth as possible for Preston and for you, so getting to know your individual needs is very helpful in allowing us to care for Preston in a way that is as close to home as we can get. Below is a list of dates and times that Rachel and I have set aside to meet with families. Please choose two times that would be most convenient for your schedule. I will schedule the visits as you reply and there is a high probability of us having your first choice open. If none of these times work, Rachel and I are happy to meet with you over the weekend or at another time. Also, if you would prefer for us to meet with you at the CDL or another venue, we can do that as well. These visits are completely voluntary, so please let us know if you would prefer not to have a home visit.

Thursday, July 20: 9:00-10:00 am
10:30-11:30 am
12:00-1:00 pm
1:30-2:30 pm
3:00-4:00 pm
4:30-5:30 pm
6:00-7:00 pm

Friday, July 21: 8:30-9:30 am
10:00-11:00 am
11:30-12:30 pm
1:00-2:00 pm
3:00-4:00 pm

Tuesday, Aug. 1: 12:00-1:00 pm
1:30-2:30 pm
3:00-4:00 pm

Rachel and I are looking forward to meeting your family!
Siobian

When scheduling a home visit, it is always important to stress that the purpose of the information gathering is to better partner with the family in caring for and educating their child. Educators should be mindful that some families may choose not to participate in home visits and should never be forced to comply. Therefore, educators should not make judgments or decisions about the family if they choose not to participate. In situations in which it is not possible to have a meeting in the family's home, the visit does not go as planned, families are reticent to share information and/or are less forthcoming than anticipated, there are a variety of other means of collecting information from and forming a relationship with the family. Some strategies an educator may use, include: (a) creating a questionnaire that allows families to answer similar questions to the home visit, (b) having a "Getting to Know You" time where the family visits the classroom for a specific activity, (c) sending home a blank "My Family" book where the family

writes down some of their favorite things about their home life, or (d) scheduling a phone call in place of a home visit. If these are not feasible, educators can utilize drop-off and pick-up times to informally share and gather information and form a relationship.

Beyond scheduling concerns, educators should consider their goals and outcomes for the home visit. During a home visit, the educator can use the allotted time to learn as much as they can about the child and their family through the use of family-centered practices as they engage in conversations with the family and observe children in their natural environment(s). While professionals should always gather information from families about their child's likes/dislikes, as well as information about the child's overall development, home visits may allow an educator to combine information gleaned from more formal parent reports with their own knowledge of child development for a more holistic picture of a child's development. Topics to discuss can include: (a) what a typical day for the child looks like, (b) activities that the family enjoys doing at home, and (c) any challenges the family faces in regards to daily routines. Learning about routines at home provides educators the opportunities to assess a child's language, academic skill, and social skill development (Spagnola & Fiese, 2007). The following approaches can be considered in structuring the format of the visit.

Routine-Based Interview

One approach that caregivers may consider in order to learn more about a family's typical day is the RBI. Although the term "routine-based interview" is the formal name used for this approach in gathering information from a family, a conversational approach should always be used in helping create a comfortable environment. Knowledge of child development across domains and good interpersonal skills are helpful in using the RBI (Boavida, Aguiar, & McWilliam, 2014). When implementing the RBI, educators must be cognizant of their non-verbal communication skills, while being attentive and responsive during interactions with the family.

Specifically, when facilitating the interview, the educator should remember that the focus is on the family and create a space where the family is comfortable sharing about their life. Sharing anecdotes about one's own family or other families one has partnered with takes the focus off of the family, and is not recommended; further, the educator should use discernment about making evaluative comments that reflect the educator's belief system. The goal of an instrument such as the RBI is to gain information and not evaluate the family.

Finally, a thoughtful interview may take one or two hours and should always be conducted in the family's native language. If the educator is not fluent in the family's native language, arrangements should be made to use a professional interpreter in conducting the interview.

In using the RBI, an educator or team member asks the family about their daily routines, what the family and child does during the routine, and the child's levels of engagement, inde-

pendence, and social relationship within the routine (McWilliam et al., 2011). For example, the educator may start by asking the family to describe what happens first in the morning and learn about their routines for getting their child dressed, fed, and any other interactions that may occur before moving on to other activities within the day such as community outings, naptime, and play activities.

During the interview, educators may find it helpful to follow the family's general sequence of routines as they typically occur throughout the day and ending when the child goes to bed. While asking about these routines, the educator should use open-ended questions in order to gather a more comprehensive understanding of what is happening during the routine. Specific questions could include, but are not limited to: (a) asking how the child is communicating during the routine, (b) how the child interacts with others present during this routine, and (c) who is present during the routine.

The family may also be asked about their level of satisfaction within the routine. It may also be helpful to ask the family to rank on a scale of one to five, how satisfied they are with the routine. By comparing rankings across routines, the family and educators may identify the routines that should be prioritized as needing the most support and address those immediately (McWilliam et al., 2009). See the sample below of an RBI interview.

Grace: Tell me about Emma's morning routine. When does she wake up and how do you know she is awake?

Brent: Emma typically wakes up around 6 or 6:15. I usually hear her because she likes to push her toy to make it play music. Some mornings she may be babbling and kind of talking to herself. I go into her room to get her out of her crib and change her diaper.

Through the use of the RBI, an educator or team member can assist the family in identifying routines that the family would like support in facilitating their child's level of development and participation within the routines. Moreover, the family selects functional goals or outcomes to address upon completing the interview (Boavida, Aguiar, McWilliam, & Correia, 2016; McWilliam, 2012). As a result of completing an RBI with a family, a classroom educator is also able to determine how a child generalizes developmental skills across different settings. The use of the RBI can create a context in which families and classroom educators can compare observations of how a child is functioning across environments and set goals accordingly.

Reciprocal Approach

Another approach for gathering information to work with families involves the use of a reciprocal approach, such as the framework put forth by Woods and Lindeman (2008). Within the context of using a reciprocal approach, educators or other team members provide information to a family on topics such as how to embed strategies within daily routines while also collecting information from the family about their concerns and the child's natural environment. This can be done in a similar way to completing an RBI (McWilliam, et al., 2009).

Three principles used in the Woods and Lindeman (2008) framework are: (a) the provision and collection of information in a concurrent manner, (b) the recognition of uniqueness in each family and child, and (c) the creation of an individualized plan for the provision and collection of information relevant to the family. Specifically, the reciprocal approach values that each family is different and what works for one, may not work for another. During the home visit, the educator will work with the individual family to problem solve and find ideas that can easily be embedded into their daily routine. Attention should be given to times of day or highly preferred activities of the child. Throughout the visit, the educator provides information about places in the community and different strategies for learning, all while carrying on a natural conversation with the family. For example, if a parent explains that they do not have an area where their child can practice gross motor movements, the educator may suggest the park that has already been discussed as a place that the child likes to go. Additionally, the educator can point out ways that the family has already been helping their child to learn. The key of the reciprocal approach is for both the educator and the family to be sharing information from their expert points of view.

Within this framework, there are five strategies that may be used during a reciprocal approach. The first is for educators to create a context for a conversation, though the educator can take notes for later reference. Many families may be uncomfortable with providing information in the formalized setting of an interview where the educator is viewed as the "expert" and the parent/caregiver is responding to their questions. In creating a level of comfort and establishing a rapport with the family, the educator could begin a conversation about the child and continue to ask questions and collect information. This approach is framed more as an informal conversation with both the parents and the educator providing and receiving information.

With the reciprocal approach, the educator is acknowledging that the parent is their child's expert and has the important role of being their child's only constant advocate (Graves & Graves, 2014). Additionally, rather than spending their time completing paperwork, which could lead to decreased interaction from the family and reduced individualization in planning (Woods & Lindeman, 2008), the educator is providing an opportunity for the family to feel that their input is important and they may provide more information about their child.

Educators may also use strategies such as questionnaires and checklists, such as Squires and Bricker's Ages and Stages Questionnaire (2009) or others used by the child care program, during the conversation. These questionnaires provide the dual context of providing the child care teacher with topics to discuss as well as providing information about the developmental norms. It should be noted, however, that these questionnaires and checklists do not take the place of a conversation with the family and should not take up the majority of the home visit.

Finally, the reciprocal approach suggests a "mapping strategy" (Woods & Lindeman, 2008, p. 280). During this time, the educator and family discusses opportunities for learning beyond

school and home. The goals that the family has for the child are reviewed and community resources to help achieve these goals are shared. This could be a local park where the child can practice gross motor skills on large play equipment or a grocery store where the child can practice using language. The example below highlights this interaction.

Grace: "What kinds of things do you like to do with Matteo while you're at home?"

Gloria "I like to take him to the park. He loves to go down the slide and watch the ducks. We also read before bed. Usually a book or two. Joseph plays chase with him."

Joseph has been very quiet during the visit and has only given one or two-word answers. In an attempt to draw him out, Grace says to him, "Tell me more about this chase game you guys play!"

Joseph: "Oh, it's just the usual. He crawls around the house and I chase after him on my hands and knees. When I catch him, I tickle him to make him laugh. Then, we do it again."

Home visits can easily turn into what looks like a traditional parent-teacher conference, with the educator giving information to the parent about what they "could" or "should" be doing (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Instead, through the giving and sharing of information that occurs when using a reciprocal approach, families and providers are able to identify simple strategies that can easily be embedded into everyday routines.

Educators can use home visits as an opportunity to allow themselves to shift into the role of a learner and gain as much information about the family and child as they can. These home visits can provide a glimpse into the family's everyday life. Using a reciprocal approach allows for more dialogue between the classroom educator and the family involved. When there is more dialogue, the educator understands more about the child and the family and has established the groundwork for a solid and respectful foundation (Brown, 2017).

Building Rapport Through Body Language

Using strong interpersonal skills is critical in demonstrating to the family that the educator is interested in what they have to say. Therefore, the consideration of non-verbal gestures and body language plays a key role in expressing this interest and conveying the educator's interest in creating a space where the family feels comfortable sharing details about their family's routines. By using these skills, family members understand that their concerns are a priority; thus, they feel respected and heard.

Creating this safe environment is done by thoughtful questioning techniques and awareness of one's body language. This involves asking open-ended and follow-up questions, as well as repeating and/or paraphrasing the family's comments back to them when documenting information to make sure that the educator has captured a true representation of the family's routine. In addition, when considering one's body language, the educator should establish and maintain eye contact, use

an open-body posture, lean forward to indicate interest in the speaker, use gestures such as nodding one's head, and be mindful of maintaining an interested expression on one's face throughout the home visit. Further, turning off and putting away technology such as a cell phone or other personal devices should occur automatically when interacting with young children and families.

Using Information Gathered to Support the Child

With the use of the RBI, reciprocal approach, or other intake methods, such as questionnaires, direct observation, and interviews (Spangola & Fiese, 2007), educators can use this opportunity to learn of the child's strengths and challenges. At this point, the educator and family can work to create an individual plan of care, or an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), based on the parents' preferences, requests, and needs. In developing a plan of care or IFSP, the family, educator(s), and other team members (e.g., speech-language pathologist, physical therapist, audiologist) create a blueprint for services to support both the child and family (Bailey, Raspa & Fox, 2012).

A large part of a plan of care or a family's educational plan is the use of goals created by the family and educator to support the child and family's needs. In creating these goals, a collaborative discussion should take place in which the parents and educators identify specific challenges to address (Salazar, 2012). Collaborative discussions about goals include an operational definition of the goal agreed upon by all team members, as well as the identification of opportunities and routines in which the child and caregiver use strategies to meet the specified goal. Additionally, discussing which services may be needed to meet the goal and where services will take place are included in the plan.

By working with families to create these specific definitions and plans for meeting a goal in advance, the likelihood that the goal will be accomplished increases. Families can see that the educator is making every effort to help their child meet goals set forth in the plan of care. During collaborative goal setting, using reflective listening skills is key to ensure that both parties feel heard. Through the implementation of these strategies for effective home visits, childcare providers are able to let families know they value this partnership.

Conclusion

There are many home visits models but the primary role of the educator is to establish a working partnership with the family which begins upon the child's referral or entry into a childcare program. Since the home visiting models vary, the authors recommend more research on the frequency and length of home visits. Routine-Based Interviews and the Reciprocal Approach are both methods that help build and maintain this family-educator relationship particularly during a home visit. Both tools, incorporated with strong non-verbal and reflective listening skills, may be effective and provide a context to gather information from a family and develop collaborative partnerships between families and childcare providers.

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An Invitation to Play: Pretend Play During the Toddler Years

By Wilma Robles-Melendez, PhD

The long scarf on the sofa caught 2-year-old Anita's attention. Pulling the colorful scarf, she wrapped herself and began to talk motioning to the stuffed dolls on the floor. From the kitchen, her mother watched, quickly recognizing some of her very own gestures as her young daughter continued to play. To herself, she said "It's me, she is pretending to be me."

For children, play happens everywhere. Like the child in the opening scenario, anything can trigger a young child into creating play. Intrinsic to children, play remains as a constant factor, an element integral to the child's development. Whether at home or in the preschool classroom, play continues to engage young children in active and imaginative ways. Play is an enjoyable experience common to children across cultures. Experts in child development recognize play as a tool for building knowledge particularly during the early years (Hopkins, Dore & Lillard 2015). Developmental benefits of play behaviors are seen across all the domains. Play is one of the activities supporting the child's cognitive, linguistic, physical, and social development.

Play activities happen in a variety of ways engaging children in many different roles. Among those especially observable during the early years, pretend play emerges during the toddler years (Van Hoorn, Nourot, Scales & Rodriguez, 2015). *Pretend play* is a form of play where using their imagination, the child transforms common objects to represent and reenact familiar situations. Through pretense, the child creates roles and situations and uses objects to represent previous experiences and interactions (Kauffman, 2012). They may pretend that they are parents or pretend to be like characters in stories. Observations, interactions with people, objects, and situations are brought back through their play. Therefore, it is not uncommon to see a young toddler child hugging a doll and pretend to be feeding it. Nor is it to see a child pretending to talk to another child using the same gestures as those of teachers or parents.

Pretend play is also referred as symbolic play. When pretending, items are used to symbolize or represent an object or circumstance. This capacity to use symbols denotes an important milestone about the child's cognitive development. Having objects available for children to engage in pretending prompts children to play (Figure 1). The dialogue and conversations typically observed during pretend play is another way to support the child's emerging language development. Vocabulary growth, learning how to participate in a conversation, and early writing are among the important literacy gains fostered as children pretend. Even as they engage in monologues, toddlers are practicing and acquiring important language skills.

Figure 1. Objects* to encourage toddler's pretend play

- Realia (objects and materials from every day life)
- Manipulatives
- Dress items
- Dolls
- Variety of household objects
- Writing materials (paper, crayons, fat pencils)
- Communication artifacts (phones, radios, etc.)

**To avoid spread of diseases, be sure to disinfect manipulatives daily. Also, remember to wash any dress up clothing items before and after these are used. If in the classroom, you may want to avoid use of clothing and dress up items as a preventive measure. With the recent pandemic, it is important to keep play objects clean and disinfected.*

Pretend play has been identified as an activity contributing to the child's social and emotional development. Pretending to be a family member or taking on a variety of roles, play provides children with opportunities to explore familiar situations and practice social actions and behaviors. In fact, pretend play is a window into some of the child's experiences, allowing us to see what captured their attention. How these are processed come alive as children pretend.

Play provides a way for children to express some of their feelings about common events and circumstances experienced in their environments. With the recent health emergency, play provides ways for children to express themselves. It also gives adults opportunities to learn about their impressions about a difficult situation and to identify ways to support and ease their feelings. Because of its multiple developmental benefits, children need to find supportive environments to encourage play. Observing and following along the script that the child creates encourages children to play and to learn. More importantly, they engage and promote young children's development.

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Doctor's Corner

Featuring Dr. Kimberly L. Webb

These are frightening times in the last few months with a global pandemic the topic of every news segment, conversations between neighbors, and multiple articles depicting the horrors of COVID-19. We, as a society, have been forced to give up our social commitments, professional and college sports, many forms of entertainment, but, perhaps, most remarkable is the absence of children in the halls of every school in the nation. Homeschooling by quarantined parents and online instruction by teachers have become our new normal. The majority of families have spent more time together with our "safer at home" regulations than ever before. As a family practice physician, I continue to work and see patients, but in a different way. Many physicians have been forced to see patients via virtual visits. Some doctors have chosen to work outside to minimize the risk of transmission to their office staff. We, as a community, have all been affected by this virus, COVID-19.

As a parent of two boys, ages six and seven, my main concern is their safety and protection against an enemy we, unfortunately, don't know enough about yet. A common question among parents is, "Will my children get the virus?" We do know that it is very contagious, and it is spread through respiratory droplets. So, avoiding close contact with other people who are sick, fre-

quently washing your hands with soap and water, and wearing a mask can reduce the likelihood of your children getting the virus. Parents, this is a wonderful time to reinforce good personal hygiene. Prevention is the key in this uncertain time. Children do seem to fight the virus somewhat easier than their adult counterparts, but there is simply not enough data to support a milder version in children. Parents, continue to treat every symptom or illness like you do with strep or flu. Seek advice from your pediatrician or family doctor on your next plan of action.

Another common question with parents is "Should my child be tested for coronavirus?" Unfortunately, in Mississippi and other southern states, we have not had an abundant number of testing supplies. But, if your child has fever of 100.4 or greater, and a cough, and has had exposure to COVID-19, then your child may need a nasal swab for the virus. Your doctor will determine the need for testing. The important thing is to communicate with your family doctor or pediatrician. This is our job to take care of your family during a crisis such as this. Please, don't hesitate to utilize local resources. There is no wrong question when it comes to your family's health. Remember, wear your masks, social distance six feet apart from others, and wash your hands. We are all in this TOGETHER.

CHILDREN'S BOOK REVIEW

A Tale of Two Beasts

By Dina Treff

A Tale of Two Beasts, written and illustrated by Fiona Robertson, is a playful, two-part tale involving a little girl and a beast in the "deep dark woods." The story begins with a little girl traveling through the woods as she returns home from her Grandma's. This is where the encounter with the strange beast occurs. A small, strange creature is peacefully hanging from the tree when little girl swoops in to "rescue" him. The little girl loves the beast. She cares for him by bathing him, feeding him and providing him with clothes, including a nice warm hat. This all appears strange to the beast, as he is troubled by the little girl's actions and attention. He was finally able to make a great escape out the window. He returned to the woods to realize that maybe being a "strange beast" wasn't so bad after all. Next, the tale is echoed by revealing the "terrible beast." *A Tale of Two Beasts* reminds readers that there are always two sides to every story. *A Tale of Two Beasts* is recommended for ages 3 to 8.

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A Tale of Two Beasts o *Un cuento de dos bestias*, escrito e ilustrado por Fiona Robertson, es un cuento juguetón de dos partes que involucra a una niña y una bestia en el "bosque oscuro y profundo". La historia comienza con una niña que viaja por el bosque cuando regresa a casa de la casa de su abuela. Aquí es donde ocurre el encuentro con la extraña bestia. Una criatura pequeña y extraña cuelga pacíficamente del árbol cuando la niña se precipita para "rescatarlo". La niña ama a la bestia. Ella se preocupa por él bañándolo, alimentándolo y proporcionándole ropa, incluido un bonito gorro. Todo esto parece extraño con la bestia, ya que está preocupado por las acciones y la atención de la niña. Finalmente pudo escapar por la ventana. Regresó al bosque para darse cuenta de que tal vez ser una "bestia extraña" no era tan malo después de todo. Luego, la historia se repite al revelar a la "terrible bestia". *A Tale of Two Beasts* recuerda a los lectores que siempre hay dos lados en cada historia. *A Tale of Two Beasts* se recomienda para niños de 3 a 8 años.



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