



Dimensions of Early Childhood

Volume 46,
Number 3, 2018

**Educating and Caring
for the Youngest Children from
Culturally and Linguistically
Diverse Backgrounds**

**Educación y Cuidado
para los más Pequeños de Diversos
Orígenes Culturales y Lingüísticos**

**Using Informational Text
for Read-Alouds**

**The Use of Sign Language
as a Tool to Support
Children's Participation in
the Classroom**

**Increasing Student Communication
through Board Games**

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Volume 46, Number 3, 2018



Southern Early Childhood Association

Editor: Mari Riojas-Cortez, PhD
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 (800) 305-7322. Members receive a one-year digital subscription to *Dimensions of Early Childhood*.

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SECA Continues Working Hard for Continuum of Members Needs

JO CARROLL, SHREVEPORT, LOUISIANA

The SECA organization continues to amaze me in the dedication of a wide array of people who have the heart and knowledge to work with the young children in our southern states. There are commonalities that are shared and yet uniqueness of individual programs and classrooms. I think we can all agree that there is not one right way to guide or teach young children. There are many things to take into consideration when working with young children and their families.

Just as programs and classrooms have their own personalities, we as individuals

have our own beliefs and needs. One of the things I love about being a part of the early childhood profession is our attempt to meet individual needs of the children in our care.

The SECA organization is working to meet the needs of a wide variety of people from students studying to become early childhood professionals to those who have been in the field for many years. It is my desire that more of our members become more involved in the work of the organization. I started my affiliation with SECA as a college student because I had a professor who became a mentor and was insistent that

I become involved as a student and beyond.

I would encourage each of you as members to do three things to continue your growth as an early childhood professional. One, find a way to get involved within your state affiliate and/or serve on a committee within the SECA organization. If you need assistance in doing so, reach out to your state president and/or your SECA board member. Two, if you have been in the field of early childhood education for more than one year, consider mentoring someone new in the field. Lastly, find a core of fellow professionals with whom to share your experiences. Be sure this is a group who can lift each other up and have the desire to continue to grow as professionals.

If you have never attended a SECA conference, please consider coming to join us February 28th through March 2nd in Orlando at the Double Tree at Sea World. There will be many events and sessions to assist you in growing as a professional and in networking with others in the field. We are celebrating SECA being 70 years strong. I look forward to meeting many of you there!

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The Importance of Adult-Child Interactions

DR. MARI CORTEZ, EDITOR

Recently I had the privilege of visiting a Head Start Center in a large metropolitan city in Texas. The center's population is mostly Latino with the majority of the children of Mexican decent. As I walked in the center I saw a father dropping off his daughter a bit late. One of the paraprofessionals who went to pick up the young child at the office gave the father and his daughter time to say goodbye. The daughter wanted her father to visit her classroom but he explained that he needed to go to work. After a long embrace the father left and the daughter happily went to her classroom.

What I found most interesting was the time that the paraprofessional gave this family to say goodbye, even though they were a bit late. It was apparent that she understood the importance of the parent-child relationship, as they were not hurried to say goodbye. I noticed that this paraprofessional

had a smile on her face and was very polite to the father. Her demeanor was positive and professional. It was evident to me that both adults cared for the child because of the interactions they had with her as well as the interactions (verbal and nonverbal) they had with each other.

In this issue of *Dimensions* we see the importance of adult-child interactions and how such interactions help children in their development. I hope you find the articles helpful in your practice and I encourage you to share with us any ideas, strategies or research that you are doing with young children and families by submitting your work to *Dimensions of Early Childhood* at editor@southernearlychildhood.org.

Nota del Editor: Recientemente tuve el privilegio de visitar un Centro de Head Start en una ciudad metropolitana en Texas. La población del centro es latina con la mayoría de los niños de

ascendencia Mexicana. Un día al entrar en el centro, pude ver como un padre dejaba a su hija un poquito tarde. Uno de los paraprofesionales que fue a recoger a la niña a la oficina le dio tiempo al padre y a su hija para despedirse. La niña quería que su padre visitara su aula, pero él le explicó que se tenía que ir a trabajar. Después de un largo abrazo, el padre se fue y la niña se fue feliz a su salón de clases. Lo que me pareció más interesante fue el tiempo que la paraprofesional le dio a esta familia para despedirse.

Era evidente que ella entendía la importancia de la relación padre-hijo, ya que no les apresuró para despedirse. Noté que esta paraprofesional tenía una sonrisa en su rostro y fue muy amable con el padre. Su comportamiento era positivo y profesional. Para mí era evidente que ambos adultos tenían cuidado de la niña debido a las interacciones que tenían con ella, así como a las interacciones (verbales y no verbales) que tenían entre ellos.

En este número de Dimensions, compartimos artículos que hablan acerca de la importancia de las interacciones entre adultos y niños y cómo dichas interacciones ayudan a los niños en su desarrollo. Espero que encuentren útiles los artículos en su práctica y los aliento a que compartan con nosotros cualquier idea, estrategia o investigación que estén realizando con niños pequeños y sus familias y envíen su trabajo a nuestra revista académica de Dimensions a editor@southernearlychildhood.org.

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SECA Moves Forward with New Strategic Plan

JEFFREY LEFFLER, INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA) is committed to improving the quality of care and education for young children and their families through advocacy and professional development. To accomplish this mission, the SECA board set seven goals at its board meeting in July of 2018. These include:

Goal 1: SECA will develop new committee structures that serve under the each of the board commissions including leadership, membership, and professional development. This will include identifying members for committees outside of the current board of directors as well as identifying responsibilities with timelines.

Goal 2: Identify focus areas and audiences to direct the efforts of the association.

FOCUS AREAS: The board identified three focus areas. These include (1) appropriate social-emotional development, (2) value of play for learning in PreK and kindergarten, and (3) supporting Power to the Profession efforts as they relate to the SECA states.

FOCUS GROUPS: SECA has always been a resource to the practitioner in the classroom, but we feel that our state affiliates do the best job meeting the needs of these target groups. In recent years, SECA expanded its focus to new groups including home visitors and the faith-based community (FY 2018). In the coming years, SECA will expand efforts directed toward new groups (FY 2019 & 2020) including higher education instructors/researchers in early childhood and leaders/directors of programs.

Goal 3: SECA will update its communications and technology. This includes the establishment of a social media committee (FY 2018) and expanded efforts in the use of social media to include Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and Pinterest (FY 2019). SECA will also plans to update the website (ongoing) and switch to a better membership management software (FY 2019).

Goal 4: SECA will expand modalities of professional development to add one new modality per year including webinars, podcasts, and specialized training events.

Goal 5: SECA will implement a market-

ing plan to include strategic partnerships.

Goal 6: SECA will review and update web materials to reflect our identified focus areas.

Goal 7: SECA will continue to review and revise this strategic plan to maintain a

three to five year outlook.

A more detailed outline of this plan can be found on the SECA website at www.southernearlychildhood.org.



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Respectful Practices with Infants and Toddlers: EDUCATING AND CARING FOR THE YOUNGEST CHILDREN FROM CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE BACKGROUNDS

BY JENNIFER J. CHEN & JOSEPHINE AHMADEIN



Positive caregiver-child relationship requires respect for cultural background while meeting socioemotional needs.

linguistic background while meeting his/her socio-emotional needs. By her warm greetings and positive interactions with Ben, the caregiver provides him the opportunity to learn to reciprocate in kind and develop appropriate social skills. The caregiver further helps to increase Ben's comfort and confidence assuring his mother's return. Through all of these various exhibitions of genuine caring behavior, the caregiver has begun to facilitate Ben's development of socio-emotional competence, which is critical for him to survive and thrive as a human being.

Families Need Child Care

In the United States, the demand for childcare is soaring, driven particularly by growing rates of maternal participation in the labor force, various changes in the family structure (e.g., separation, divorce), and the increased desire to secure high-quality early educational experiences for young children (Laughlin, 2013). For instance, the number of infants (less than one-year old) participating in childcare programs grew from just under one million (985,320) in 2005 (Iruka & Carver, 2006), to more than one million (1,102,620) in 2012 (Mamedova & Redford, 2015). Furthermore, nationwide, as of 2014, about 10% of the households had at least one child under age three, coming from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse backgrounds (approximately 12% from Asian families, 11% from Black families, 14% from Hispanic families, and 9% from non-Hispanic White families) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

On the basis of these statistics, we may conjecture that infants and toddlers in the United States, who are exposed to other

It's dropping-off time in the morning for families. Ben, a 15-month-old boy from a Chinese family, arrives to his toddler classroom that he just joined three weeks ago. His mom, Mrs. Liang, signs him in. Anticipating her leave, Ben clings tightly to his mom while starting to cry. Mrs. Liang gently holds Ben up and hugs him. Just then, a warm greeting of "Zǎoshang hǎo!" in Mandarin Chinese ("Good morning!" in English) from the caregiver is heard, followed by "Hi, Ben! I'm so happy you are here!" The caregiver lets out the biggest smile, as she is approaching Ben with her arms extended. Upon seeing his caregiver, Ben stops crying. He leaps forward from his mom's arms toward those of his caregiver. Appearing relieved, Mrs. Liang assures Ben by saying softly, "I love you. I will come back later." Meanwhile, the caregiver follows up by starting to sing part of

Ben's favorite song, "My Mommy Comes Back," that she has been singing to him since his first day there whenever he misses his mom:

"And my mommy comes back

She always comes back

She always comes back to get me..."

Upon hearing the caregiver's singing of his familiar song, Ben starts to relax in her arms.

The above scenario demonstrates that positive, caring relationships are a key driving force that connects everyday human emotions to the vital need of young children to feel belonged and thrive happily and confidently in a group childcare environment. In essence, establishing a strong, positive caregiver-child relationship requires the caregiver to respect the child's cultural and



languages and cultures at home, will require developmentally, culturally, and linguistically appropriate support from their caregivers in the childcare setting. It is, thus, all the more important that caregivers are equipped with specialized professional competencies to educate and care for the youngest children from diverse backgrounds, as well as build strong professional partnerships with their families. Although some states have started to professionalize the infant/toddler workforce with requisite, specialized knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work with infants/toddlers as well as their families are highly needed. Notably by offering a state-specific Infant/Toddler Credential as part of a national endeavor to elevate the professionalism and competence of caregivers (Chen, Martin, & Erdosi-Mehaffey, 2017) is of extreme importance, although such efforts are rather scarce due to a number of factors.

First of all, although early childhood education refers to the education of age groups in the birth-to-eight continuum, many early childhood teacher programs across the United States have been traditionally and singularly focusing on preparing teachers for the preschool-third grade workforce (Horm, Hyson, & Winton, 2013), with only a cursory emphasis on the infant/toddler population in coursework and/or fieldwork (Kipnis, Whitebook, Austin, & Sakai, 2013). Second, since many states do not require infant/toddler caregivers to possess a relevant teaching credential (Austin, Whitebook, & Amanta, 2015) or a college degree (Norris, 2010), the educational ex-

pectations of infant/toddler caregivers are rather low. Third, except for a few empirical studies (e.g., Chen et al., 2017; Lee, Shin, & Recchia, 2015; Recchia, Lee, & Shin, 2015), there is scant research investigating what best practices look like in infant/toddler programs to provide much-needed guidance and models of high-quality caregiving for caregivers to follow, implement, and even emulate. Consequently, faced with limited opportunities for learning, infant/toddler caregivers struggle to acquire specialized professional competencies, especially appropriate knowledge of child development, essential skills to interact respectfully with infants/toddlers and their families, and positive dispositions to respond to these young children's diverse needs, all of which often lead to their application of developmentally inappropriate practices (Chen et al., 2017).

Since the 2000s, compelling research evidence has established that the first three years are a critical period of rapid development and learning for young children, and that the quality of their early development can significantly affect their later developmental outcomes (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007; Schore, 2005; Shonkoff & Phillips 2000). Caregivers are recognized as playing a critical role in educating and caring for infants and toddlers (the nation's most developmentally vulnerable and youngest population). Attending to these young children's diverse needs during the earliest years of their development is of utmost importance so that they can be better positioned to succeed in

There are essential skills to interact respectfully with infants and toddlers.

formal schooling and later in life. One of the many essential needs of infants and toddlers is their development of socio-emotional competence. In this article, we endeavor to connect research to practice of respectful, relationship-based caregiving as a context for facilitating the attainment of socio-emotional wellbeing among infants and toddlers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. We do so by: (1) proposing five research-informed principles to guide practice, and (2) illustrating practices in action through examples that exemplify each principle.

Socio-Emotional Development in Infants and Toddlers

From research and experience, we know that socio-emotional development is a lifelong endeavor, which begins at birth and unfolds throughout life. In the process, healthy socio-emotional wellbeing is a critical building block of a strong foundation that contributes positively to all aspects of a child's development and learning (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005; Raver, 2002; Shonkoff, 2004). It is clear that an essential process by which infants and toddlers achieve positive developmental outcomes, especially socio-emotional competence, occurs in the context of nurturing, consistent, and responsive relationships with caring adults (Butterfield, Martin, & Prairie, 2003; Chen et al., 2017). That is, these young children thrive on nurturing and respectful relationships with others, an interpersonal context that provides them with the opportunity to develop socio-emotional wellbeing (e.g., establishing secure attachment with caregivers). As the quality of relationships tends to evolve over time in the context of caregivers' social interactions with infants and toddlers in the childcare setting, forming and maintaining respectful, positive connections with these young children should be an utmost, vital caregiving strategy (Chen et al., 2017; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005).

Relationship-based caregiving, as an essential aspect of best practices and a framework for professional growth, has been well substantiated by research. For instance, Rec-

chia et al. conducted a qualitative, multi-case study (2015) of three pre-service student caregivers' engagement in authentic, positive relationships with infants served as an essential context for caregivers to develop professional knowledge. Specifically, these researchers found that the student caregivers were able to better interpret and understand the infants' cues, attend to their unique needs, follow their leads in play and ways of communication, and engage in activities with them naturally and respectfully. Other research evidence has further documented that quality caregiver-child relationships facilitate the caregivers' efforts to engage the infants socially, including developing joint attention and meaningful interactions (Jung, 2013; Recchia & Shin, 2012).

Taken together, these research studies suggest that relationship building provides an optimal strategy for caregivers to engage infants/toddlers in quality daily interactions, thereby contributing to these young children's achievement of socio-emotional competence. Equally critical is for caregivers to cultivate strong, positive partnerships with these young children's families by ways such as respecting their cultural and linguistic differences and valuing them as experts with knowledge and resources to contribute (Chen, 2016).

Infusing the Ingredient of Respect into the Recipe of Relationship-Based Caregiving

As respect is at the heart of all positive interactions and learning (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998), it needs to serve as a critical engine that drives relationship-based best practices (Chen, 2016). The question is: How can caregivers infuse the ingredient of respect into the recipe of best practices of relationship-based caregiving for infants and toddlers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds? Cople and Bredekamp (2009) advocated that intentionality is key to establishing and implementing developmentally appropriate practice. To make "respect" the center of all caregiver-child interactions, it is imperative that caregivers are intentional in incorporating respectful, relationship-based caregiving. For instance, the caregiver engages in respectful practices by communicating with infants and toddlers from culturally and linguistically diverse families in ways that intentionally acknowl-

edge their home cultures and languages.

Informed by the early childhood literature (some of which were reviewed in this article) and drawing from our respective experiences of mentoring, educating, and collaborating with caregivers and practitioners alike in advocating for best practices, we propose the following five essential principles for guiding practices of respectful, relationship-based caregiving that are intentionally orchestrated to achieve the curriculum goal of facilitating the socio-emotional development of infants and toddlers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds:

1. Establish positive interactions as a context for the child to develop secure attachment.
2. Validate and incorporate the child's cultural experience and knowledge.
3. Support the child's bilingual development and socio-emotional wellbeing.
4. Promote the child's respect for and awareness of other cultures and languages.
5. Respect families as contributing partners in the child's learning and development.

Throughout the day in the caregiving setting, there are plenty of opportunities for caregivers to put the aforementioned guiding principles into practice, especially during dedicated daily routines (e.g., diaper changing, greeting/goodbye, mealtime, naptime, playtime, toilet training), whether it involves an individual child or a small group of children. In this article, we provide a concrete example illustrating each of the guiding principles in action during an authentic daily caregiving routine. Each scenario demonstrates explicitly how the caregiver intentionally models respectful interactions with infants/toddlers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Establish Positive Interactions as a Context for the Child to Develop Secure Attachment

Example: *Walid, a quiet, 3-year-old boy, has just joined the older toddler program. Walid's family has recently arrived to the U.S. from Alexandria, Egypt, on a job transfer for his father. Since Walid has never experienced any group care and has only now exposed to English, he is having a challenging time transitioning into this new, English-speaking group environment. For instance, Walid is afraid to interact with anyone there. His caregivers are trying different ways to get Walid acclimated, feel comfortable, and establish*

positive interactions with him. As an effort to learn about Walid's linguistic and cultural characteristics, his caregiver works closely with his family and seeks assistance from the Egyptian community. The caregiver makes an extra effort to learn a few phrases in Arabic (the language spoken in Egypt) from Walid's parents to help him feel more welcomed and secure in his new learning setting. For instance, she welcomes Walid to the classroom with a cheerful "Sabah al-khair!" in Arabic ("good morning!" in English) every morning and "shukran!" in Arabic ("thank you!" in English) whenever appropriate. Walid always reacts to such linguistic familiarity with a big smile.

During a period of three months, the caregiver has consistently engaged in establishing positive interactions with Walid by showing respect for and considering his Egyptian culture and the Arabic language. In response, Walid has begun to develop a strong, secure attachment to the caregiver by showing positive reactions to their various interactions as well as seeking her out for assistance and reassurance during times of distress.

Validate and Incorporate the Child's Cultural Experience and Knowledge

Example: *Miguel, a 4-month-old infant, is from a Spanish-speaking family. His caregiver learns from Miguel's parents that "You Are My Sunshine" in Spanish is his favorite song with which his parents often sing him to sleep. The English-monolingual caregiver only knows a few essential words in Spanish that she uses to communicate with Miguel and other Spanish-speaking infants/toddlers and their families. Given that she's familiar with the "You Are My Sunshine" song in English, the caregiver now finds it also imperative to learn it in Spanish from Spanish-speaking families so that she can communicate with Miguel during naptime. During this particular naptime, Miguel appears extra tired, but is struggling to fall asleep. Gently holding Miguel in her arms, the caregiver gradually sits down on a rocking chair. She rocks as softly as she sings the song in Spanish:*

*"Eres mi sol,
Mi único sol,
Cuando es nublado, me haces feliz.
Nunca sabras,
Cuanto te amo.
No te llevas mi sol de aquí..."*

Miguel's caregiver patiently and softly repeats the tune a few times, paying attention to changes



in his behavior. Soon, her intentional effort pays off as Miguel gradually falls asleep cuddled up in her arms.

To facilitate an optimal cultural and linguistic experience for Miguel, his caregiver actively incorporates a familiar song in his native language. In so doing, she also helps to increase his comfort level and promotes his socio-emotional wellbeing. She even expands the utility of this strategy in other ways, including singing the song to help soothe Miguel whenever needed (e.g., during times of distress) and applying it similarly with other Spanish-speaking children.

Support the Child's Bilingual Development and Socio-Emotional Wellbeing

Example: Sofia, an 8-month-old girl from a Spanish-speaking household, is lying on her stomach and hoisting her head up in front of a floor mirror. Looking into the mirror, she seems mesmerized by her own reflection. Her English-Spanish bilingual caregiver quietly observes the intervals of Sofia's sudden smiles, full body excitement, and prolonged pauses. Showing respect for and interest in what Sofia is doing and experiencing, the caregiver intentionally joins in by gently lowering herself down to also lie on her stomach next to Sofia's so that they are now at the same level. Smiling, the teacher points to the mirror and then asks excitedly first in Spanish,

"¿Quién ves en ese espejo?" and then in English "Who is that in the mirror?" Smiling back and looking at the caregiver, Sofia lets out a wonderful cooing sound as she returns her attention to the mirror. Pointing to the reflection of Sofia in the mirror, her caregiver adds, "¡Qué linda!" "How beautiful!" Sofia smiles as she reaches toward the mirror. The caregiver continues to interact with Sofia by saying first in Spanish "¿Cómo te gusta ese espejo!" and then in English "You love that mirror!" Sofia's caregiver intentionally engages in a conversational dance as she patiently waits for cues from Sofia to continue participating in play.

By engaging Sofia in play and speaking with her in both English and Spanish, the caregiver does not only encourage Sofia to foster a secure attachment with her, but also provides the opportunity for Sofia to acquire two languages simultaneously. Furthermore, the caregiver shows respect for Sofia's cultural and linguistic background by supporting and encouraging the use of her home language in social interaction.

Promote the Child's Respect for and Awareness of Other Cultures and Languages

Example: It is a beautiful sunny morning. The caregiver has set up a large activity blanket outdoor. She invites the older toddlers in her classroom to bring along their individual "My Family Book"- the one that they all have been working on with their parents at home as a special

Caregivers should create trusting social interactions.

project inspired by Eric Carle's book "Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?" Following the caregiver, the children slowly walk outside and quietly sit around the blanket. Seeing that everyone is ready for the sharing activity, the caregiver asks, "Is Marco here?" Marco proudly lifts his book up and excitedly responds, "Yes!" Marco stands up and "reads" his family story one page at a time (with the caregiver's assistance): "Marco, Marco, what do you see? I see Papa looking at me. Papa, Papa, what do you see? I see Mama looking at me..." The caregiver invites as many children to share as their attention span allows. During this particular sharing time, the caregiver also encourages all children to repeat the different terms (e.g., for "Daddy" in English, a child says "Papa" in Spanish and another says "Bàba" in Mandarin Chinese) in the home language of each "reader."

The afore-described group learning activity exemplifies how the caregiver intentionally encourages the children to not only embrace and share their own native culture and language, but also develop the ability to respect and appreciate other cultures and languages around them. Furthermore, taking a respectful approach to involve the families in working with their child to develop their unique "Family Book," the caregiver seeks to engage them in a collaborative endeavor to promote their child's language development and multicultural learning.

Respect Families as Contributing Partners in the Child's Learning and Development

Example: Mr. Yang brings his 28-month-old son, Julian, to the toddler program. Julian, who is the only Chinese child in the classroom, has been participating in the program for a month now. Every time before leaving, Mr. Yang kneels down to Julian's level and gives him a hug as he says in a loving, soft voice, "Wǒ ài nǐ! Zài jiàn." in Mandarin Chinese ("I love you! See you later/good bye." in English). Julian beams with joy as he repeats the same phrases back in Chinese while hugging his father. The caregiver observes and learns to also say "Zài jiàn" to Mr. Yang and Julian, and "Wǒ ài nǐ!" to Julian, whenever appropriate. The other toddlers in the room often watch the interaction and listen to the foreign language with

amazement. Some even attempt to imitate saying the Chinese words heard. Noticing the toddlers' interest and wishing to involve Mr. Yang in a classroom activity to demonstrate respect for his home culture and language, the caregiver invites him to the classroom during Chinese New Year to teach the toddlers some simple New Year greeting words in Mandarin Chinese and describe how his family celebrates this significant traditional holiday, while showing related photos. The caregiver believes that this activity will provide a unique learning opportunity to enrich the children's direct exposure to another culture and language.

By intentionally greeting Julian and his father in their home language, the caregiver is able to create trusting social interactions and a positive relationship with the Yang family. By inviting Mr. Yang to share some knowledge of his Chinese culture, the caregiver does not only facilitate the children's multicultural learning, she also demonstrates her respect for the Yang family as a valuable contributing partner. In all, the afore-described scenario shows that the caregiver is planting the seed to further nurture her professional partnership with the Yang family as much as she is providing a teachable moment for all of the children in the classroom.

Conclusion

Believing that respectful, relationship-based caregiving is a fundamental and foundational ingredient in all best practices with young children, in this article, we proposed five guiding principles accompanied by corresponding practical examples of how such an ingredient was concretely permeated in various caregiving contexts. The activities described in the examples were intentionally designed to facilitate the socio-emotional development of infants and toddlers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The examples described share the common element of cultural and linguistic validation with the intentionality of demonstrating respect for diverse families on the part of caregivers. Importantly, by incorporating the native cultures and languages of infants and toddlers into their authentic daily routines and activities, the caregivers naturally help to create necessary continuity and familiarity between the home and the childcare setting for these young children, a process that further promotes their socio-emotional development.

There are many ways in which caregiv-

ers can engage in respectful practices with infants and toddlers (Chen, 2016), notably learning about their cultural and linguistic peculiarities – especially communication styles and pragmatic discourse (e.g., greeting, showing affection, verbal and non-verbal behavior) – by seeking knowledge and assistance from resources, such as places of workshop, local education institutions, and ethnic organizations. In this article, we described examples of how caregivers respected and celebrated the young children's unique linguistic and cultural assets by ways, such as learning phrases in their native language and then used them to greet and communicate with them and their families.

Concurring with other early childhood educators and researchers (e.g., Lee, 2006; Raikes, 1993; Recchia, 2012), we also believe that while building positive relationships with young children and their families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds is an essential aspect of best practices, such a process takes time, commitment, thought, and care on the part of caregivers. Over time, however, caregivers will reap the reward of their consistent, intentional efforts in their vital work with young children and their families from diverse backgrounds. Considering the five guiding principles proposed in this article, we believe that respectful practices are fundamentally good and developmentally appropriate for advancing the development and learning of all children and in all educational contexts (with appropriate modifications as necessary).

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Prácticas respetuosas con bebés y niños pequeños:

EDUCACIÓN Y CUIDADO PARA LOS MÁS PEQUEÑOS DE DIVERSOS ORÍGENES CULTURALES Y LINGÜÍSTICOS

BY JENNIFER J. CHEN & JOSEPHINE AHMADEIN



La relación positiva entre cuidadores y niños requiere respeto por los antecedentes culturales al mismo tiempo que satisface las necesidades socioemocionales.

prosperidad con felicidad y confianza dentro de un entorno de cuidado infantil. En esencia, establecer un vínculo sólido y positivo entre cuidadora y niño requiere que la cuidadora respete los antecedentes culturales y lingüísticos del niño mientras cumple con sus necesidades socio-emocionales. A través de su cálida bienvenida e interacciones positivas con Ben, la cuidadora le proporciona la oportunidad de aprender a retribuir la amabilidad y desarrollar habilidades sociales adecuadas. La cuidadora contribuye además a aumentar la comodidad y confianza garantizando el regreso de su madre. A través de todas estas diversas exhibiciones de una conducta afectiva genuina, la cuidadora ha comenzado a facilitar el desarrollo de la competencia socio-emocional de Ben, la cual es fundamental para que sobreviva y prospere como ser humano.

Las familias necesitan la cuidado infantil

En los Estados Unidos, la demanda por cuidado infantil va en aumento, particularmente motivada por los índices crecientes de participación materna en la población laboral, diversos cambios en la estructura familiar (por ej., separación, divorcio), y el deseo mayor de garantizar experiencias educativas tempranas de alta calidad para los menores (Laughlin, 2013). Por ejemplo, el número de bebés (menores de un año) que participan de programas de cuidado infantil creció de apenas por debajo de un millón (985,320) en 2005 (Iruka & Carver, 2006), a más de un millón (1,102,620) en

Es momento para que las familias pasen a dejar a sus niños por la mañana. Ben, un niño de 15 meses proveniente de una familia china, llega a su salón de clases al cual se unió hace tan solo tres semanas. Su madre, la Sra Liang, lo inscribió. Anticipándose a su ida, Ben se aferra con fuerza a su madre mientras comienza a llorar. La Sra. Liang sostiene a Ben con cuidado y lo abraza. Justo entonces, se escucha un cálido saludo “¡Zāoshang hǎo!” en chino mandarín (“¡buenos días!” en español) por parte de la cuidadora, seguido de un “¡Hola, Ben! ¡Estoy muy feliz de que estés aquí!” La cuidadora desliza su más grande sonrisa, mientras se acerca a Ben con sus brazos abiertos. Tras ver a su cuidadora, Ben deja de llorar. Salta de los brazos de su madre hacia los de su cuidadora. Evidentemente aliviada, la Sra. Lang se despide de Ben en voz

baja diciendo, “te amo. Volveré más tarde.” Entre tanto, la cuidadora comienza a cantar parte de la canción favorita de Ben, “Mi mamá regresó,” aquella que le canta desde el primer día cuando extrañaba a su madre:

“Y mi mamá vuelve
Ella siempre regresa
Ella siempre regresa a buscarme...”

Tras escuchar a la cuidadora cantar la canción que le resultaba familiar, Ben comienza a relajarse en sus brazos.

La situación antes descrita demuestra que las relaciones positivas y afectivas representan un factor clave que conecta las emociones humanas cotidianas con la necesidad fundamental de los niños pequeños en lo que respecta a su sentimiento de pertenencia y

2012 (Mamedova & Redford, 2015). Es más, a nivel nacional, a partir del 2014, cerca del 10% de los hogares tienen al menos a un niño menor de tres años, de un origen racial, cultural y lingüístico diverso (aproximadamente 12% de familias asiáticas, 11% de familias negras, 14% de familias hispanas, y 9% de familias blancas no hispanas) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2014).

Sobre la base de tales estadísticas, se puede conjeturar que los bebés y niños pequeños en los Estados Unidos, que están expuestos a otros idiomas y culturas en casa, requerirán de un apoyo adecuado a nivel de desarrollo, cultura y lenguaje por parte de sus cuidadoras en un entorno de cuidado infantil. En este sentido, es fundamental que las cuidadoras cuenten con las competencias profesionales especializadas para educar y atender a los niños más pequeños que provienen de distintos orígenes, así como también para desarrollar sociedades profesionales sólidas con sus familiares. A pesar de que algunos estados han comenzado a profesionalizar que es de suma importancia que el personal orientado a trabajar con bebés/niños pequeños cuente con requisitos, conocimiento especializado, habilidades y las disposiciones para trabajar con tales infantes, así como también con sus familias. Principalmente, la oferta de una Credencial de Trabajo con Bebés/Niños Pequeños específica de cada estado como parte de una iniciativa laboral para elevar el nivel de profesionalismo y competencia de las cuidadoras (Chen, Martin, & Erdosi-Mehaffey, 2017) reviste una importancia significativa, a pesar de que tales esfuerzos sean en parte limitados por causa de diferentes factores.

En primer lugar, aunque la educación de primera infancia se refiere a la educación que reciben los grupos de edades entre el nacimiento a los ocho años, muchos de los programas para maestros de formación temprana a lo largo de los Estados Unidos se han enfocado particular y convencionalmente en la preparación de los maestros para el trabajo a nivel preescolar a tercer grado (Horm, Hyson, & Winton, 2013), con solo un breve hincapié en la población menor de un año/de niños pequeños en el trabajo académico y/o en trabajo de campo (Kipnis, Whitebook, Austin, & Sakai, 2013). En segundo lugar, dado que son varios los estados que no requieren que las cuidadoras de bebés/niños pequeños posean una credencial de enseñanza importante (Austin,

Whitebook, & Amanta, 2015) o un grado de licenciatura (Norris, 2010), las expectativas educativas de las cuidadoras de infantes son relativamente bajas. Tercero, salvo por algunos estudios empíricos (por ej., Chen et al., 2017; Lee, Shin, & Recchia, 2015; Recchia, Lee, & Shin, 2015), existe poca investigación que profundice en el aspecto de las mejores prácticas en programas para bebés/niños pequeños que proporcionen la tan ansiada orientación y modelos de cuidado de alta calidad que puedan seguir, implementar e incluso emular las cuidadoras. En consecuencia, al enfrentarse a las oportunidades limitadas de aprendizaje, las cuidadoras de bebés/niños pequeños se debaten para adquirir las competencias profesionales especializadas, en especial para obtener el conocimiento apropiado en el desarrollo infantil, habilidades fundamentales para referirse con respeto a infantes/niños pequeños y sus familias, y la disposición positiva para responder a las diversas necesidades de estos niños, todas las cuales a menudo conducen a su aplicación de prácticas inadecuadas a nivel de desarrollo (Chen et al., 2017).

Desde el año 2000, la evidencia investigativa convincente ha determinado que los primeros tres años conforman un período crucial de desarrollo y aprendizaje rápido de los niños pequeños, y que la calidad de su desarrollo temprano puede incidir significativamente sobre sus resultados ulteriores en el desarrollo (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007; Schore, 2005; Shonkoff & Phillips 2000). Se reconoce que las cuidadoras interpretan un papel fundamental en la educación y cuidado de los infantes y niños pequeños (la población más joven y vulnerable a nivel de desarrollo en el país). Atender las distintas necesidades de estos niños pequeños durante los primeros años de su desarrollo es de suma importancia para que puedan estar en mejores condiciones de triunfar en la educación formal y en etapas posteriores de la vida. Una de las muchas necesidades fundamentales de los bebés y niños pequeños es el desarrollo de su competencia socio-emocional. En este artículo, procuramos conectar la investigación con la práctica de un cuidado respetuoso basado en las relaciones como contexto para facilitar la consecución del bienestar socio-emocional entre bebés y niños pequeños de distintos orígenes culturales y lingüísticos. Logramos

esto mediante: (1) la propuesta de cinco principios basados en la investigación para guiar la práctica e (2) ilustrar prácticas en acción a través de ejemplos que explican cada principio.

Desarrollo socio-emocional en bebés y niños pequeños

Desde la investigación y la experiencia, se sabe que el desarrollo socio-emocional es un esfuerzo permanente, este comienza desde el momento del nacimiento y transcurre con el pasar de la vida. En el proceso, el bienestar socio-emocional saludable es un factor fundamental para la creación de una base sólida que contribuya de forma positiva a todos los aspectos del desarrollo y aprendizaje del niño (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005; Raver, 2002; Shonkoff, 2004). Está claro que un proceso vital mediante el cual los bebés y niños pequeños alcanzan resultados positivos en el desarrollo, especialmente en lo que respecta a la competencia socio-emocional, transcurre en el contexto de una relación cercana, constante y receptiva con adultos dedicados (Butterfield, Martin, & Prairie, 2003; Chen et al., 2017). Es decir, estos niños pequeños prosperan mediante relaciones cercanas y respetuosas con otros; un contexto interpersonal que les permite la oportunidad de desarrollar su bienestar socio-emocional (por ej., establecer un apego seguro con sus cuidadoras). Ya que la calidad de las relaciones tienden a evolucionar con el transcurso del tiempo en el contexto de las interacciones sociales de los cuidadores con los bebés y niños pequeños en un entorno de cuidado infantil, formar y mantener conexiones positivas y respetuosas con estos niños pequeños debe transformarse en una estrategia de cuidado primordial y crucial (Chen et al., 2017; NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2005).

El cuidado basado en las relaciones, como aspecto fundamental de las mejores prácticas y estructura para el crecimiento profesional, ha sido debidamente justificado a través de la investigación. Por ejemplo, Recchia et al. realizó un estudio cualitativo multicaso de tres cuidadoras estudiantes (2015) acerca del compromiso previo de la prestación de servicios con respecto a las relaciones positivas y auténticas con bebés como base de un contexto fundamental para la adquisición de conocimiento profesional por parte de las cuidadoras. De manera concreta, estos

Existen habilidades esenciales para interactuar respetuosamente con bebés y niños pequeños.

investigadores hallaron que las cuidadoras estudiantes fueron capaces de interpretar y comprender de mejor forma las señales de los bebés, ocuparse de sus necesidades particulares, seguir sus pistas de juego y formas de comunicación, y participar en actividades con ellos de manera natural y respetuosa. Otras evidencias investigativas han documentado adicionalmente que la calidad de las relaciones entre la cuidadora y el menor facilitan los esfuerzos de esta por conectar con los bebés socialmente, incluido el desarrollo de la atención conjunta e interacciones significativas (Jung, 2013; Recchia & Shin, 2012).

Tomados en conjunto, los presentes trabajos de investigación sugieren que el desarrollo de las relaciones proporciona una estrategia óptima para que la cuidadora involucre a los bebés/niños pequeños en interacciones diarias de calidad, y por consiguiente contribuya a la adquisición de la competencia socio-emocional de estos niños pequeños. Es igualmente decisivo que las cuidadoras fomenten sociedades positivas y sólidas con las familias de estos niños pequeños mediante formas tales como el respeto por sus diferencias culturales y lingüísticas y la valorización de estos como expertos con conocimiento y recursos para aportar (Che, 2016).

Inculcar el ingrediente del respeto en la receta del cuidado basado en las relaciones

Ya que el respeto es la clave de todas las interacciones positivas y aprendizaje (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998), este debe servir como un motor crítico que impulse las mejores prácticas con fundamento en las relaciones (Chen, 2016). La pregunta es: ¿De qué forma pueden las cuidadoras inculcar el ingrediente del respeto en la receta de las mejores prácticas del cuidado basado en las relaciones para bebés y niños pequeños con orígenes culturales y lingüísticos distintos? Coppole y Bredekamp (2009) defendían que la intencionalidad es la clave para establecer e implementar una práctica de desarrollo adecuada. Para lograr que el “respeto” sea el centro de todas las interacciones entre la cuidadora y el niño, resulta imperativo



que las cuidadoras tengan la intención de integrar un cuidado respetuoso basado en las relaciones. Por ejemplo, la cuidadora incurre en prácticas respetuosas comunicándose con bebés y niños pequeños que provienen de familias con distintos orígenes culturales y lingüísticos de una forma en la que se reconoce intencionalmente sus culturas e idiomas nativos.

Informados por la literatura la primera infancia (algunos de los cuales fueron revisados en este artículo apartados) extrayendo de nuestras experiencias respectivas de tutoría, educación y colaboración con cuidadoras y practicantes similares en la defensa de las mejores prácticas, se proponen los siguientes cinco principios esenciales para guiar las prácticas de cuidado respetuoso y basado en las relaciones que se orquestan intencionalmente para lograr el objetivo curricular de facilitar el desarrollo socioemocional en bebés y niños pequeños de diversas raíces culturales y lingüísticas:

1. Establecer interacciones positivas como un contexto para que el menor desarrolle un apego seguro.
2. Validar e incorporar la experiencia y conocimiento cultural del niño.
3. Apoyar el desarrollo bilingüe y bien-estar socio-emocional del menor.
4. Fomentar el respeto y la conciencia del

menor por otras culturas e idiomas.

5. Respetar a las familias como partes contribuyentes en el aprendizaje y desarrollo del menor.

A lo largo del día en el entorno de cuidado, son diversas las oportunidades para que las cuidadoras pongan en práctica los principios esenciales antes mencionados, especialmente durante las rutinas cotidianas específicas (por ejemplo, cambio de pañales, saludo/despedita, hora de comer, hora de la siesta, hora de juego, entrenamiento para usar el baño), independientemente de si involucran la participación de un niño por separado o de un grupo pequeño de niños. En este artículo, proporcionamos un ejemplo concreto que ilustra cada uno de los principios esenciales en acción durante una rutina de cuidado diario auténtica. Cada situación demuestra explícitamente cómo la cuidadora modela intencionalmente interacciones respetuosas con los bebés/niños pequeños con raíces culturales y lingüísticas distintas.

Establecer interacciones positivas como un contexto para que el niño desarrolle un apego seguro

Ejemplo: Walid, un niño tranquilo de tres años, acaba de unirse al programa de niños pequeños mayores. La familia de Walid llegó recientemente



a los Estados Unidos desde Alejandría, Egipto, debido a un traslado laboral de su padre. Debido a que Walid jamás ha experimentado con algún cuidado de grupo y actualmente se le ha expuesto únicamente al idioma inglés, atraviesa un momento difícil por causa de la transición a este nuevo entorno grupal de habla inglesa. Por ejemplo, Walid tiene miedo de interactuar con alguien más en el lugar. Sus cuidadoras han intentado de diferentes maneras para que Walid se sienta a gusto, cómodo y de esta forma lograr establecer interacciones positivas con él. En un esfuerzo por aprender las características culturales y lingüísticas de Walid, su cuidadora trabaja de cerca con su familia y pide ayuda a la comunidad egipcia. La cuidadora realiza un esfuerzo extra por aprender algunas frases en árabe (el idioma que se habla en Egipto) de los padres de Walid para ayudarle a sentirse más acogido y seguro en su nuevo entorno de aprendizaje. Por ejemplo, le da la bienvenida a Walid al salón de clase con un alegre “¡Sabah al-khair!” en árabe (“¡buenos días!” en español) cada mañana y le agradece con un “¡shukran!” en árabe (“¡gracias!” en español) cada vez que es oportuno. Walid siempre reacciona a tal familiaridad lingüística con una gran sonrisa.

Durante un período de tres meses, la cuidadora ha buscado sistemáticamente el establecimiento de interacciones positivas con Walid, enseñando respeto y teniendo en cuenta su cultura e idioma árabe. En respuesta, Walid ha comenzado a desarrollar un apego seguro y sólido con la cuidadora mostrando reacciones positivas a las diversas interacciones, así como también buscándola para pedir ayuda y obtener consuelo durante momentos de adversidad.

Validar e incorporar la experiencia y conocimiento cultural del niño

Ejemplo: Miguel, un bebé de cuatro meses, proviene de una familia de habla hispana. Su cuidadora aprendió de los padres de Miguel que “You Are My Sunshine” en español es su canción favorita con la cual sus padres lo hacen dormir. La cuidadora monolingüe de habla inglesa solo conoce unas pocas palabras clave en español, que utiliza para comunicarse con Miguel y otros bebés/niños pequeños hispano parlantes y sus familias. Dado que ella conoce la canción “You Are My Sunshine” en inglés, la cuidadora cree que es imperativo aprenderla en español de las familias hispano parlantes para que pueda comunicarse con Miguel durante los períodos de siesta. Durante esta especial siesta, Miguel parece estar más cansado, pero tiene problemas para quedarse dormido. Levantando cuidadosamente a Miguel en sus brazos, la cuidadora se sienta poco a poco en una mecedora. Se mece suavemente mientras canta la canción en español:

*“Eres mi sol,
Mi único sol,
Cuando es nublado, me haces feliz.
Nunca sabrás,
Cuanto te amo.
No te llesves mi sol de aquí...”*

La cuidadora de Miguel repite con paciencia y ternura la canción unas pocas veces, prestando atención a los cambios en su conducta. Pronto, su deliberado esfuerzo rinde frutos ya que Miguel se queda paulatinamente dormido acurrucado entre sus brazos.

Para facilitar una experiencia cultural y lingüística óptima para Miguel, su cuidadora integra activamente una canción familiar a su

Los cuidadores deben crear interacciones sociales de confianza.

idioma nativo. Al hacerlo, también le ayuda a aumentar su nivel de comodidad y fomenta su bienestar socio-emocional. Incluso amplía la utilidad de esta estrategia de otras maneras, lo que contempla cantar la canción para calmar a Miguel siempre que sea necesario (por ej., durante momentos de estrés) y aplicarla de forma similar con otros niños hispano-parlantes.

Apoyar el desarrollo bilingüe y el bienestar socio-emocional del menor

Ejemplo: Sofia, una niña de ocho meses que proviene de un hogar de habla hispana, está recostada sobre su estómago y levanta su cabeza frente a un espejo en el suelo. Al observar el espejo, pareciera hipnotizada por su propio reflejo. Su cuidadora bilingüe que habla español e inglés observa en silencio los intervalos en que Sofia ríe repentinamente, mueve todo su cuerpo de emoción y las pausas prolongadas. Al demostrar interés por aquello que Sofia hace y experimenta, la cuidadora intencionalmente participa recostándose ella misma suavemente sobre su estómago junto a Sofia de tal modo que ahora se encuentran al mismo nivel. Al reír, la profesora señala el espejo y luego pregunta con entusiasmo en español, “¿Quién ves en ese espejo?” y luego en inglés “Who is that in the mirror?” Sonriendo y observando a la cuidadora, Sofia deja salir un maravilloso sonido y devuelve su atención al espejo. Señalando el reflejo de Sofia en el espejo, su cuidadora añade, “¡Qué linda!” “How beautiful!” Sofia sonríe mientras se aproxima hacia el espejo. La cuidadora sigue interactuando con Sofia diciendo primero en español “¿Cómo te gusta ese espejo!” y luego en inglés “You love that mirror!” La cuidadora de Sofia intencionalmente realiza una danza conversacional mientras espera pacientemente por las señales de Sofia para seguir participando del juego.

Al jugar con Sofia y hablarle tanto en inglés como en español, la cuidadora no solo alienta a Sofia a formar un apego seguro con ella, sino también le brinda la oportunidad a Sofia de adquirir dos idiomas en simultáneo. Es más, la cuidadora muestra respeto por los antecedentes culturales y lingüísticos de Sofia apoyando y fomentando el uso de su lengua materna en una interacción social.

Fomentar el respeto y la conciencia del menor hacia otras culturas e idiomas

Ejemplo: Es una hermosa mañana soleada.

La cuidadora ha colocado una gran manta para actividades al aire libre. Invita a los niños pequeños de mayor edad en su salón a llevar su material personal "My Family Book," aquel en el que han estado trabajando con sus padres en casa como un proyecto especial inspirado por el libro de Eric Carle "Oso café, oso café, ¿qué es lo que ves?" Siguiendo a la cuidadora, los niños caminan lentamente hacia afuera y se sientan en silencio alrededor de la cobija. Al ver que todos están listos para la actividad colectiva, la cuidadora pregunta, "¿Está Marco por aquí?" Marco levanta con orgullo su libro y responde enérgicamente, "¡Sí!" Marco se pone de pie y "lee" su historia familiar en la página al mismo tiempo (con la ayuda de su cuidadora): "Marco, Marco, ¿qué es lo que ves? Veo a Papá observándome. Papá, Papá, ¿qué es lo que ves? Veo a Mamá observándome..." "La cuidadora invita a tantos niños como es posible para que compartan según lo permita su capacidad de atención. Durante este particular momento para compartir, la cuidadora también alienta a todos los niños a repetir diferentes términos (por ej., por "Daddy" en inglés, un niño dice "Papá" en español y otro dice "Bàba" en chino mandarín) en el idioma nativo de cada "lector".

La actividad de aprendizaje grupal antes descrita ejemplifica cómo la cuidadora deliberadamente alienta a los niños a no solo adoptar y compartir su propia cultura y lenguaje, sino también a desarrollar la capacidad de respetar y apreciar las diferentes culturas e idiomas a su alrededor. Además, mediante un enfoque respetuoso para involucrar a las familias en el trabajo con sus hijos para desarrollar su material único "Family Book", la cuidadora busca hacerlos partícipes de un esfuerzo colaborativo para fomentar el desarrollo lingüístico y aprendizaje multicultural de los niños.

Respetar a las familias como partes contribuyentes en el aprendizaje y desarrollo del niño

Ejemplo: El Sr. Yang trae a su hijo de 28 meses, Julian, al programa de niños pequeños. Julian, quien es el único niño chino en la clase, ha participado del programa desde hace un mes. Cada vez antes de marcharse, el Sr. Yang se arrodilla al nivel de Julian y le da un abrazo mientras dice con un tono de voz dulce y amoroso, "¡Wō ài nǐ! Zài jiàn." en chino mandarín ("¡Te amo! Nos vemos pronto/adiós" en español). Julian resplandece de alegría mientras repite la misma frase en chino y abraza a su padre.

La cuidadora observa y aprende a decir también "Zài jiàn" al Sr. Yang y a Julian, y "Wō ài nǐ" a Julian, cuando es pertinente. Los demás niños pequeños en la sala a menudo prestan atención a la interacción y escuchan el idioma extranjero con asombro. Algunos incluso intentan imitar diciendo las palabras en chino que escucharon. Al advertir el interés de los niños pequeños y con el deseo de permitir la participación del Sr. Yang en una actividad de la clase para demostrar respeto por su cultura e idioma nativo, la cuidadora lo invita a la sala durante la celebración del Año Nuevo Chino para enseñar a los niños pequeños algunas palabras simples para saludar en Año Nuevo en chino mandarín y describir cómo su familia celebra este importante y tradicional día festivo, mientras exhibe algunas fotos asociadas. La cuidadora cree que esta actividad brindará una oportunidad de aprendizaje única para enriquecer la exposición directa de los niños a otra cultura e idioma.

Al saludar deliberadamente a Julian y a su padre en su idioma nativo, la cuidadora es capaz de crear interacciones sociales de confianza y una relación positiva con la familia Yang. Al invitar al Sr. Yang a compartir algo de su conocimiento de la cultura china, la cuidadora no solo facilita el aprendizaje multicultural de los niños, sino también demuestra su respeto por la familia Yang como un socio contribuyente. Resumiendo, la situación antes descrita demuestra que la cuidadora planta una semilla para luego nutrir su relación profesional con la familia Yang, mientras proporciona un momento de enseñanza a todos los niños en el salón de clase.

Conclusión

Bajo la creencia de que un cuidado respetuoso basado en las relaciones representa un ingrediente fundamental y esencial en todas las mejores prácticas con niños pequeños, en el presente artículo, se plantearon cinco principios esenciales acompañados de sus respectivos ejemplos prácticos respecto a cómo tal ingrediente se impregnaba concretamente en los diversos contextos de cuidado. Esto se diseñó intencionalmente para fomentar el desarrollo socio-emocional de los bebés y niños pequeños provenientes de orígenes culturales y lingüísticamente diversos. Los ejemplos descritos comparten el factor común de la validación cultural y lingüística con la intencionalidad de demostrar respeto por las distintas familias por parte de los cuidadores. Reconociendo la

importancia de incorporar las culturas e idiomas nativos de los bebés y niños pequeños en sus rutinas y actividades cotidianas auténticas, los cuidadores ayudan a crear la continuidad y familiaridad necesarias entre el hogar y el entorno de cuidado infantil para estos niños pequeños, un proceso que promueve además su desarrollo socio-emocional.

Existen varias formas mediante las cuales los cuidadores pueden incurrir en prácticas respetuosas con bebés y niños pequeños (Chen, 2016), principalmente aprendiendo acerca de sus particularidades culturales y lingüísticas, en especial los estilos de comunicación y discurso pragmático (por ej., saludos, muestras de afecto, conducta verbal y no verbal); buscando conocimiento y asistencia de recursos, como talleres, instituciones de educación local y organizaciones de ética. En el presente artículo, se describen ejemplos de cómo las cuidadoras respetaban y celebraban el patrimonio cultural e idiomático único de los pequeños mediante formas tales como el aprendizaje de frases en su idioma nativo para luego utilizarlas en saludos y la posterior comunicación con ellos y sus familias.

De acuerdo con otros formadores e investigadores de primera infancia (por ej., Lee, 2006; Raikes, 1993; Recchia, 2012), también se tiene la creencia de que estructurar relaciones positivas con los niños pequeños y sus familias, quienes provienen de diversas raíces culturales y lingüísticas es un aspecto fundamental de las prácticas óptimas, y tal proceso conlleva tiempo, compromiso, reflexión y cuidado por parte de las cuidadoras. Con el paso del tiempo, no obstante, las cuidadoras cosecharán los frutos de sus constantes y deliberados esfuerzos en su trabajo crucial con los niños y familias provenientes de diversos orígenes. Teniendo en cuenta los cinco principios esenciales propuestos en este artículo, creemos que las prácticas respetuosas son fundamentalmente buenas y apropiadas para el nivel de desarrollo en pos de promover el desarrollo mismo y el aprendizaje de todos los niños en todos los contextos educativos (con las debidas modificaciones, según sea necesario).

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You Don't Have to Teach Everything:

USING INFORMATIONAL TEXT FOR READ-ALOUDS

BY BETH BESCHORNER, ANNA H. HALL, AND JILL CATON JOHNSON



Many teachers spend considerable amount of time in read alouds as an instructional practice.

instruction has benefits for children's literacy learning. For example, reading informational text teaches children about the world around them (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003) and helps develop young children's content knowledge (Duke & Kays, 1998). Informational text also supports vocabulary learning (Duke & Bennett-Armistead, 2003) and "reading aloud non-fiction books tends to result in a more extended dialogue" than reading narrative text (Barclay, 2009, p. 79). Further, informational text can be a motivating entry point into literacy for children who are not motivated by narrative text (Caswell & Duke, 1998). Thus, early childhood educators should consider embedding informational text into their instruction. This can be done by including informational texts in a classroom library, providing informational text that supports thematic units in centers, or by using informational text for read-alouds. While many opportunities for using informational text in early childhood classrooms, the purpose of this article is to describe considerations for conducting read-alouds with informational text.

Guiding Principles

You don't have to teach everything

An informational text can be used as the foundation for teaching multiple concepts and ideas (e.g. content, vocabulary, text features, etc.). However, it is not feasible to teach all of these in one interactive read-aloud lesson. In the book about monkeys that Mrs. Winter read to her class, she could have focused her instruction on the facts about monkeys, specific vocabulary like "primates" and "opposable thumbs," or text features like headings, bold words, and captions. Yet, she could not teach all of these ideas in one 10-15 minute read-aloud. In or-

Scenario

Mrs. Winter's kindergartners loved learning about animals, so when she was planning a read-aloud to model determining main ideas and supporting details, she decided to read an informational text about monkeys. She set the purpose at the beginning of the lesson by explaining that the main idea of the book was to teach the reader about monkeys. Next, she had the children consider their prior knowledge about monkeys by asking them what they knew about monkeys and then modeled her own thinking by explaining, "I just read that monkeys like to eat mangos and other fruit. Now I know that monkeys eat more than just bananas." Finally, after discussing the supporting details throughout the read-aloud, she asked children to turn to a partner and share a new fact about monkeys that they had learned from the text.

Many teachers, like Mrs. Winter, spend considerable time engaged in read-alouds as an instructional practice (Teale, 2003). Perhaps this is due, in part, to the fact that reading aloud "invites children into the world of books" (Dollins, 2014, p. 9) and,

further, it has been cited as the most important activity for preparing children to be independent readers (Anderson, Hiebert, Scott, & Wilkinson, 1985). Interactive read-alouds support young children's development of vocabulary (e.g. Santoro, Chard, Howard, & Baker, 2008), comprehension (e.g. Smolkin & Donovan, 2001), concepts about print (Mol, Bus, & DeJong, 2009), and overall literacy development (e.g. Morrow, O'Connor, & Smith, 1990). Thus, utilizing interactive read-alouds have many benefits for young children.

However, teachers often believe that informational text is too difficult for young children, there are not enough high-quality informational texts available for young children, and children prefer narrative text (Correia, 2011). Yet, there is significant evidence that young children can read and write informational text (Duke and Kays, 1998), that high-quality informational text is now widely available (Gallo & Ness, 2013), and that many children actually prefer informational text (Caswell & Duke, 1998).

Moreover, using informational text for



der to keep the lesson to a developmentally appropriate length, it is crucial that teachers like Mrs. Winter set a specific purpose for reading prior to the lesson.

Like shared reading, when the teacher selects an engaging book that children are interested in hearing, the same text can be read multiple times. Each reading of the text can have a different specific purpose (e.g. to learn content, to notice diagram and labels, to identify main ideas, etc.). As you set the purpose for each day's lesson, you can decide which parts of the text to share with the class and how to help children make connections between the words that they hear and the text features they see. Then, if the children enjoyed the text and more interaction would be valuable, you can read the text again during another lesson with a different purpose.

Setting a purpose for reading

Once you have determined the instructional purpose for your read-aloud, you can share it with the children as you introduce the text. Communicating your purpose for reading helps children key in on the important aspects of the text and helps them understand how the focus of the read-aloud fits in with other learning activities occurring throughout the day. For example, if Mrs. Winter's class was conducting a thematic study on "Monkeys around the World," reading about the different locations that monkeys live would make sense prior to making a class map. Setting an authentic and focused purpose for reading will increase student engagement and help determine the

instructional emphasis for the read-aloud.

Connecting to prior knowledge

Before sharing new ideas from the text with young children, it is important to help them connect their prior knowledge with the new learning that will occur. Making connections to prior knowledge can occur through conversation, responses to pictures or photographs in the book, or through revisiting other previously read texts. Although this step in the read-aloud process is critical for piquing children's interest and helping them make meaningful connections, it does not have to take a lot of time. A couple of questions from the teacher about the topic or a quick picture walk through the book is sufficient for helping students to think about what they know about the topic.

Facilitating the read-aloud

When planning your read-aloud, you should consider how you might model your own thinking for children as a skilled reader of informational text. For instance, if Mrs. Winter (from the introductory example) chose to focus on bold words as a text feature, she might model her own thinking by saying:

I see in this sentence that the author has written the word "swinging" in large dark print. This is called a bold word. Authors use bold words to tell readers that words are important. I know I should really pay attention to this word!

Further, you should plan how you will al-

Informational text is an exciting and motivating genre for many children.

low children to talk with one another before, during, and after the reading. For example, children might talk about the text with a partner, respond chorally by completing a line of predictable text, or take turns sharing their ideas with the whole group. Providing opportunities for children to talk is essential, because it allows children to actively make connections and build on one another's understandings during the reading experience.

Choosing Informational Text Length

Informational texts vary greatly in length, some with 1-2 sentences per page and some with multiple paragraphs and several sections. The length of text should not determine what book you select, because unlike narrative texts, you do not have to read every word on every page during an informational read-aloud. When reading a longer informational text, select sections of the book, ahead of time, that are most related to your instructional focus and that will fit well within your 10-15 minute timeframe for the lesson.

Visuals

Select texts that include photographs and/or illustrations that are easily visible for all children. Diagrams, pictures, tables, and other visuals can be used as the focus for the read-aloud by reading labels and captions, or focusing on the content in the images. Specifically, visuals can be used to teach vocabulary, content, and/or text features. For example, Mrs. Winter could focus on the photograph of the rainforest in the monkey book to help children focus on important aspects of the monkey's habitat. She could ask children to share their ideas about why the monkey would enjoy living in this type of environment.

Text features

When you are selecting a text, identify the features that are used in the text. Certain texts are better than others for teaching specific features. For example, the book about monkeys that Mrs. Winter selected included many bold words and labels. Thus, this book would be useful for teaching these features. However, the book did not include

any captions, so Mrs. Winter would want to select a different book on the same topic to teach about this text feature.

Variety of content

As you select text, consider how the read-aloud might support and reinforce topics being taught in other content areas like math, social studies, and science. Additionally, you should also consider the interests of the children in your class. For example, before a field trip to a local fire station, you might read aloud a book about firefighters to teach concepts, vocabulary, and spark children's interest in the topic. Similarly, if children are collecting ladybugs and ants during recess, reading a book about insects might interest the children and teach them associated vocabulary.

One approach to supporting an equal balance of informational and narrative text in the classroom is using high-quality informational text for interactive read-alouds that have a specific instructional purpose. When you begin to use more informational text for read-alouds, children have opportunities to expand their understandings about literacy and the world around them.

When you select high-quality informational text to use in your classroom, the children can reap the benefits. If you are not sure how often you currently read informational text, start tracking your read-alouds by genre on a calendar to ensure an equal balance. Then, make an effort to seek out a variety of informational text. Select books about many different topics and concepts and that expose children to different text features that they will likely use in their own independent reading and writing. Remember to keep it simple and once you have determined your purpose, stick to it. Finally, as you plan your read-aloud, be certain to include an opportunity for kids to connect to prior knowledge, modeling, and discussion. Informational text is an exciting and motivating genre for many children.

It makes sense to include this important reading category during your interactive read-alouds to engage and expand children's knowledge of reading and the world around them.

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Destin's Story:

THE USE OF SIGN LANGUAGE AS A TOOL TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE CLASSROOM

BY AMY BRERETON, PAMELA PETERSON AND CAROLYN SEWARD



The research described in this article is the result of a year-long teacher researcher project conducted by three classroom teachers who sought to describe how the use of sign language affected children's participation in one preschool classroom at the Palmetto School (the names of the school, and participants in this study have been changed to assure anonymity). The Palmetto School is home to two preschool classes in Westchase, South Carolina. During this project, the classroom teachers, Cindy, Katherine and Amy, taught a morning and an afternoon preschool class at the school. Each class met for two and a half hours Monday through Friday. The teachers collected observation data using anecdotal notes. They met monthly to conduct data analysis, striving to identify emergent themes relating to children's participation and their use of sign language.

Cindy, the lead teacher, used a combination of Signing Exact English and spoken English in her classroom. Signing Exact English is a term used for a sign language

system that represents the morphology and syntax of English but is not the same as American Sign Language (ASL) (National Institute on Deafness, 2015). While Signing Exact English uses ASL vocabulary, the word ordering of ASL is different. Cindy introduced vocabulary using both spoken English and ASL signs. For example, as children learned the English words for various shapes, colors, numbers and letters they also learned how to sign those words. Cindy tended to sign as she spoke and encouraged her students to do likewise. As classroom teachers, we were confident that the combination of spoken English and ASL supported children's vocabulary acquisition. We were curious about how this whole class communication strategy impacted on this diverse group of children's participation, socially, in the learning community.

The sections that follow explore the relationship between the community's use of sign language and social participation through the experiences of one child—Destin. We accept that no child is just like

Social interaction and the building of friendships are important for young learners.

Destin; however, teachers may discover that Destin reminds them of some of their own students. Lawrence-Lightfoot (1998) asserted that in the particular resides the general. The exploration of the single case yields themes that are relevant to other cases. As such, Destin's story offers lessons about teaching and learning that will prove helpful in many classrooms.

Destin

Destin entered the Palmetto School's preschool program at the start of the school year at age four. During the first week of school, Destin sat quietly on the fringes of classroom activities, turning his whole body away from people who approached him. We initially believed that Destin was going through separation anxiety. Destin's mother shared with us that Destin "talked non-stop" at home. Destin and his 6-year-old brother lived with their mother. Their mother's sister lived in the same housing complex. Destin's mother explained that while he did play with his brother and three cousins (ages one, four and six), he "had a harder time than [his brother] playing with other children." She explained that his brother had to help him enter play and that Destin often chose to leave the play and his mother was not able to determine why. Cindy suggested that we honour Destin's right to "space" and time, giving him opportunities to observe the other children and how they entered and sustained play with one another. She hoped that "when he was ready," he would join in. After the first month of school, Destin still struggled to participate more fully in the classroom. He sat against the wall, playing with the Velcro on his shoes, turning away from anyone who approached him. His inclusion in the learning community seemed

to be limited to his physical presence there. While we were sensitive to Destin's need for time and space to adjust, we were worried about him. He was evaluated at school by the speech and language pathologist who did not believe that speech therapy was necessary. His mother agreed, reminding us that he spoke easily and constantly at home.

Destin, sign language and interaction with peers

We were especially concerned about Destin's social development. One purpose of the publically-funded preschool program in this community is to give children opportunities to develop social skills through interactions with their peers. Destin avoided interactions with the other children and they seemed frustrated by their failed attempts to interact with Destin. They voiced these frustrations saying, "Why don't he talk to me?" "Why he making that face? I don't do nothing to him!" and "Just talk Destin!" We wondered if the children's responses to Destin reinforced his fears of interaction, causing him to withdraw further.

Social interaction and the building of friendships are immensely important for young learners. According to Vygotsky (1993) our cognitive functions are rooted in our social relationships. Similarly, Moss (1999) insists that, "what children learn emerges in the process of self and social construction" (p. 5). Vlachou (1997) explains that until children make friends they cannot participate in the joint sphere of children's culture. She goes on to caution that, "the fearfulness of this aloneness, the possibility of being outside children's culture, should not be underestimated" (p. 142).

Cindy believes that learning sign language throughout the year with his peers helped Destin to develop the confidence he needed to engage socially and develop the important peer connections described above. Confidence is an important foundation for social participation (Sommer, 2012). In November, David, an 11-year-old deaf student, visited the preschool children during meeting time to show them how to sign "happy harvest." After David repeated the sign twice an unfamiliar voice called out, "I do it!" The voice belonged to Destin. He signed "happy harvest" over and over again. Up until this point Destin occasionally sat with the other children during meeting time and attempted signs demonstrated by Cindy but he had

never before spoken or offered to contribute information. His participation during meetings increased significantly in the months that followed. He began to answer the teacher and children's questions as long as he could provide an answer using signs.

Destin's participation in social activities continued to increase as he mastered more signs. As the school year progressed, prior to January he engaged more in parallel play than in interactive play. In the dramatic play corner, for example, he did not follow the story line set out by his peers nor would he put forth his own story line for them to follow. When Chantel declared that Destin would be the daddy and that she would be the mommy, he did not protest but he did not do as she directed (i.e. go to work, play basketball, drive the car, rock the baby). When she insisted that he take a more active role in imaginative play, he left the dramatic play corner. Destin's teachers identified many reasons why he might have chosen not to engage in dramatic play. Dramatic play offers children a fertile space to practice and develop new vocabulary. It is, often, a highly verbal activity. Perhaps Destin found the verbal aspect of dramatic play overwhelming. It is also possible that he did not yet feel confident in his ability to identify and follow through with the story lines being passed to him by his peers. Perhaps he was still developing the essential social emotional skills to interpret the behavior of his peers. We cannot know for certain why he chose not to engage in dramatic play. What we do know is that he seemed interested in the activity of his classmates, choosing to observe and stay in close proximity to these children. He eventually played beside his peers when invited to join them but he did not engage them further in their play.

As Destin's signed vocabulary increased, he gradually moved beyond the parallel play described above. Destin's confidence as he interacted with others seemed to grow as he attempted and achieved successful interactions with his peers. By mid-January he was no longer just responding to questions, he offered direction to peers as is apparent in the excerpt from anecdotal notes below.

Quentin and Destin are in the block corner. They build silently and then simultaneously begin to put the blocks away.

Destin: In here. [points to the tub where the blocks go]

Quentin: One there! [points to a block under

Destin's leg]

Destin: [puts the tub away and takes down the threading cards]

Both boys take out cards and begin threading yarn through the holes along the perimeter of the cards. The bell rings, indicating that it is time to tidy up.

Destin: [puts his card back in the box and finds a spot on the carpet]

Quentin: [keeps threading his card]

Destin: [returns to Quentin and signs 'sit down'] [L]eave it.

We were impressed with how confident Destin had become. In the example above he initiated interactions with Quentin. What impressed us the most, however, was that Destin took on a leadership role as he interacted with Quentin. Destin directed Quentin as they put the blocks away and encouraged Quentin to follow Cindy's instructions to clean up and sit down on the carpet.

As we reviewed the observation notes for February we noticed that while Destin could still be described as a "quiet child" he was embracing leadership roles in the classroom, assisting and guiding his peers during the day. He could sign, "Time to be quiet," "Stop jumping near me," "Don't touch me," "Sit down," "Time for snack," "Time to clean up," "Meeting Time," or "Wait to talk." Destin was an expert on classroom rights and responsibilities and no longer hesitated to remind classroom members of his rights and their responsibilities, usually using sign language.

By March, Destin was participating in interactive play with the other students in the classroom. Using a combination of signs, gestures and speech, Destin added his own imaginative story lines as he engaged in creative play with his peers. The following observation took place in late March and provides an example of Destin's interactions with peers during play.

Destin, Alana, Chantel and Valerie enter the home corner.

Destin: I daddy, I daddy!

Alana: [I'm the] mamma.

Chantel: [I'm the] mamma too.

Valerie: [I'm the] mamma.

Chantel: We [will] all be [the] mamma.

Destin: Hey! Abebeall! Abebeall!

Valerie: A what?

Destin: Da bebe all [signs baby and points to the baby in the bed].



Valerie: [Picks up the baby]
 Destin: [Brings Amy a plate of plastic eggs]
 Amy: Mmmm! I like eggs!
 Destin: [Returns to the home corner] [Miss]
 Amy [likes] [signs eggs]!
 Destin and Chantel bring Amy a large bowl of eggs.
 Amy: Tell me about this.
 Destin: [Signs eggs]
 Chantel: Eggs! [Sees Destin signing eggs. Signs eggs]

While recording these observation notes Amy was struck by how full Destin's participation was in comparison to earlier in the year when he seemed interested in the other children's play but chose not to engage beyond parallel play, even when invited to do so by peers. Destin asserted his desire to be the daddy, directed the imaginary play of his peers (calling their attention to the baby) and initiated interactions (bringing Amy eggs). He no longer sat on the fringes of classroom activity. He was an active participant in classroom life.

Destin, sign language and communication

Why Destin did not speak at the beginning of the year remains unknown. We do know that he was among the first of the students in the class to use signs to communicate with others. Initially his signed communication was in response to questions asked by peers or teachers. For example, if Cindy asked the children what day of the

week it was, Destin would make the sign for one of the days of the week. When Katherine asked the children if they wanted more to drink at snack, Destin would often sign "more." When Jeremy offered to throw out Destin's napkin after snack, Destin signed "no" and shook his head.

Destin's communication skills continued to develop as the year progressed. In December he was responding to questions using gestures or one-word responses as the following example illustrates.

Destin: [Stands in front of Cindy]
 Cindy: Yes?
 Destin: Um...
 There is a long pause. Destin looks at the floor.
 Cindy waits.
 Cindy: Did something happen?
 Destin: [Nods]
 Cindy: What?
 Destin: Um...
 Cindy: Did someone do something?
 Destin: Nods.
 Cindy: Who?
 Destin: [Points at Jeremy]
 Cindy: What did he do?
 Destin: Took.
 Cindy: Did he take something you were working with?
 Destin: Nods.
 Cindy: Tell him not to do that.
 Destin: [Goes to Jeremy and signs 'no'].
 Jeremy: What? I didn't do nothin'!
 Destin: [Walks away].
 On the day this exchange took place Amy had been observing Destin and could

Play allows children to be active participants in classroom life.

confirm that Jeremy had not taken anything from Destin. We wondered if Destin was simply nodding yes to Cindy's leading questions; "Did something happen?," "Did someone do something?" We do not know what Destin initially intended to communicate to Cindy. What is significant about this conversation is that Destin was communicating with her. He approached her, answered her questions and followed her instruction to tell Jeremy "not to do that," Destin could have walked away but he chose to respond when she spoke to him.

By March Destin relied less on nodding and other gestures. While he still used gestures, he used spoken and signed words more frequently. The following exchanges that took place in late March illustrates the progress Destin had made in three months. In both interactions Destin approaches a teacher and another student's behavior towards Destin is discussed.

Destin: [To Amy] Mrs. Pierce?
 Amy: I'm Miss Amy. I'm glad to talk with you Destin.
 Destin: [Nods]
 Amy: What do you want me to know?
 Destin: Um [looks in the direction of the Legos where Luke, Quentin and Jacob are building] took.
 Amy: I want to know more about what happened.
 Destin: Um... [signs "truck" and then signs "big truck"]
 Amy: Took and the big truck? Can you tell me more?
 Destin: [Points to Luke, Quentin and Jacob]
 Amy: Your face looks upset. Can you tell me the name of the person who you and I should work with to make it right?
 Destin: Jacob.
 Amy: Okay well if you go and ask him to please give you the truck he might. I will watch and am here to help more if you want me to.
 Destin: [Approaches Jacob, signs "truck" and points at the truck]
 Jacob: I didn't take it. I told you to share with Luke.
 Luke: [Hands Destin a different car]
 Destin: I use boo car [signs "blue" and points to Luke's blue car]
 Jacob: Use that one [points to another car]. It's good.



The ability to communicate increases confidence in children.

Curtis gives the car to Destin and Destin fixes it quickly

Curtis: [Signs "thank you"] Thank you.

Destin: [Signs "you're welcome"]

In this example, Destin knew that he could fix the car. Curtis was not as confident. Earlier in the year Destin's abilities were unknown to the class. Perhaps Curtis imagined Destin to be unable. During the exchange above, Destin demonstrated that he was able and Curtis showed his appreciation by thanking Destin. A week later, Curtis was not as quick to limit Destin's abilities. During a beanbag activity in which the children were throwing and catching beanbags, Destin was unsuccessful at catching the beanbag. The next day Kathryn led the beanbag activity again. This time Destin was able to catch the beanbag. Curtis was the first to applaud Destin saying, "You can catch now Destin! I knew you could. We can learn to make them fly. Let's do it. We can give them powers. Come on!"

Destin's increased participation in his class was the result of many factors, including his own courage and perseverance as he settled into an environment that he initially seemed to find overwhelming. Certainly Destin's biological growth was closely tied to his physical and cognitive development, both of which impact on the acquisition of the communication and social skills necessary for full participation in classroom life.

We believe that the groups' shared use of sign language was an important tool for Destin as he worked to participate more extensively in the learning community. As Destin learned sign language he emerged as an expert signer. He used his signing skills to demonstrate to teachers and peers what he knew, to communicate his needs and opinions and to engage in social interactions with members of the learning community. Similarly, Destin's mother observed this higher level of confidence at home as well. She did not notice Destin attempting to sign with his brother or cousins but noticed that he was initiating interactions with the other children in his family and engaged in more sustained play with them.

It is possible that a different alternative to spoken communication would have been

Destin: [Picks up the car Jacob pointed to and plays with Luke, Jacob and Quentin]

During the conversation between Destin and Cindy that took place in December Destin responded to Cindy's questions with nods and pointing. Cindy found it difficult to understand what Destin wanted to communicate to her. When Destin signed "no" to Jeremy, Jeremy seemed confused, asking "What?" The interactions described above are more dynamic. Amy was able to get a clearer idea of what Destin wanted to communicate to her. His spoken and signed words guided her to understand what he wanted her to know. When Amy encouraged him to confront Jacob, he did, showing and telling (through signs) Jacob what he wanted. Jacob, Luke and Destin then negotiated who would play with which automobile. All of the boys involved had opportunities to communicate their thoughts on the matter and seemed content with the final allocation of cars and trucks.

By the end of the school year in May, Destin readily communicated with his teachers and peers. He rarely used one mode of communication (i.e. sign only or speech only). He combined his signed and spoken vocabularies. He would often sign his responses to teachers' questions. For example when Amy asked him, "How are you today Destin?" he responded by signing "fine." When Cindy asked him to tell her about his drawing he signed the names of the colors he used. He also used signs to clarify his speech. When a peer did not understand his speech he signed what

he had just said. He always used signs when the classroom rules involved soft voices (i.e. in the Media Centre, the hall way, during the morning announcements) and usually responded to signed questions with signs. For example, one morning when Destin looked upset Cindy signed, "What's wrong?" Destin responded by signing, "My shoe is untied. I can't tie it".

What can we learn from Destin?

As the year progressed Destin's participation in classroom activities became more dynamic. Cindy attributes the rise in Destin's participation to an increase in confidence. She believes that his ability to learn and use signs gave him the confidence he needed to respond to and eventually initiate interactions with other classroom members. She theorizes that each time he was successful at communicating through sign language he became more confident in his ability to communicate and was therefore more willing to do so. She also believes that mastering signs helped him to view himself as a capable individual who could master other skills. The following observation, recorded in April, illustrates Destin's image of himself as able even when others doubted his abilities.

Curtis: I can't put the top on [this] car. Miss Amy [signs "help"] help.

Destin: I [can] do it.

Curtis: No. You been cryin'. Miss Amy, you fix [this]? [holds up the car]

Destin: I [can].

Amy: Maybe he can Curtis.

just as helpful for Destin. Other possible alternative visual-physical communication tools include: dance, gestures, and mime, among others. We are not suggesting that sign language is the only communication tool that has the potential to increase the participation of children identified as being “quiet and withdrawn.” It is, however, a powerful option. Sign language continues to be the primary language tool for a diverse group of students identified as having special educational needs (Heslinga & Nevenglosky, 2012). Children who are deaf, children identified as being on the autism spectrum or having Down syndrome and children who are non-verbal are some groups of children who use American Sign Language as their primary means of communication in the United States (Kumin, 2015; Edelson, 2015; Heslinga & Nevenglosky, 2012). Learning sign language has the potential to increase children’s participation with the many people whose primary means of communication is through sign language. Therefore, it seems as though the use of sign language in diverse classrooms has the potential to be a powerful tool in breaking down barriers to participation for many children.

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Carolyn Seward has been investing in children her entire adult life. She served as an assistant teacher in Oakland Elementary School’s child development program for 13 years and is now a teacher for Carolina Bay Daycare Center.

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Let’s Read! / ¡Vamos a Leer!



Looking for a great book to read to your students about families? Look no further than renowned author Yuyi Morales’ picture book titled *Dreamers*. This story is about family. It is a story that describes the assets that migrants bring with them including their dreams. This book is appropriate for children 4-8 years old.



¿Estás buscando un gran libro para leer a tus estudiantes acerca de las familias? No busques más allá del libro de cuento ilustrado escrito por la renombrada autora Yuyi Morales titulado *Soñadores*. Este cuento se trata acerca de la familia. Es un cuento que describe los bienes que los migrantes traen con ellos incluyendo sus sueños. Este libro es apropiado para niños de 4 a 8 años de edad.

All in the Game:

INCREASING STUDENT COMMUNICATION THROUGH BOARD GAMES

BY ERICA RUTHERFORD

The use of board and card games, such as Uno, invites students to engage in meaningful conversations with adults and peers.

opportunity for students to develop communication and interpersonal skills, but they also reinforce math skills including: one to one correspondence, rote counting, memorization, and color and shape recognition (Collins et al., 2011; Wu et al., 2014). The use of board games also provides the opportunity for strategic questioning from adults. This type of questioning develops both literacy and communication skills in young students (Britt, Wilkins, Davis, & Bowlin, 2016). The ability to speak and listen effectively plays an important role in early literacy (Pollard-Durodola, 2015). By encouraging young students to speak in meaningful ways, adults provide opportunities to build their language skills. Board games provide a fun and meaningful way to foster these types of conversations.

A Study of Board Games in Action

Cullman City Primary School (CCPS) is a K-1 school located in the rural city of Cullman, Alabama. CCPS serves 437 kindergarten and first grade students in 27 classrooms. CCPS is a Title One school with a student population of 83% Caucasian, 10% Hispanic, 4% two or more races, 2% Asian or Pacific Islander, and 1% African American. During the 2015-2016 academic year, teachers and administrators began to notice a lack of proficiency in kindergarten and first grade students' verbal literacy. An increased number of speech referrals, lower scores on beginning of the year screeners, and teacher observation indicated this lack of proficiency. Challenges in students' speech skills began to negatively impact academic work. For example, incoming kindergartners displayed needed assistance with phonemic awareness skills as well as



All photos courtesy of Erica Rutherford

Traditionally, many educators have viewed the primary grades as a time for the development of interpersonal and communication skills (Wu, Chen, & Huang, 2014). However, the increased rigor of kindergarten and first grade has left many teachers with less time to provide students with instruction in these vital areas (Pollard-Durodola, 2015). Some students today are entering the primary grades with a substantial challenge in communication skills (Pollard-Durodola, 2015). Research indicates that our increasingly digital society has decreased the likelihood of children to develop communicative skills during the pivotal ages of birth through five (Collins, Griess, Carithers & Castillo, 2011).

Research acknowledges the increased need for formal instruction on interpersonal and communicative skills within the primary grades (Wu et al., 2014; Collins et al., 2011). All children require expressive language, or the ability to accurately verbal-

ize their wants, needs, and feelings (Kaiser & Grimm, 2005) in order to successfully communicate. These skills are also vital to literacy development (Dawson, et. al., 2012). One way to increase students' expressive language skills is through the exposure to oral language. Similarly, reading aloud to children has a long been a favored way of increasing students' vocabulary and language skills (Britt, Wilkins, Davis, & Bowlin, 2016; Pollard-Durodola, 2015). While reading aloud to students is an excellent way to build language and literacy skills, there are also other ways oral language can be incorporated into the classroom environment. According to Collins et. al. (2011), this can be achieved through the use of traditional board games.

Using Board Games to Increase Students' Communication Skills

Not only do board games increase the



with asking and answering questions during class discussions. The school administrator and teacher leaders quickly began to recognize the need for increased professional development for all faculty and staff members at CCPS in building verbal literacy for children. The school's speech teacher provided professional development sessions focused on increasing teachers' understanding of expressive language. These sessions also provided teachers with instructional strategies to build these skills. Many of these strategies encouraged incorporating basic conversation into daily lessons.

Following this professional development, a team of six teacher leaders and the school administrator began to discuss ways to enhance students' conversational communication skills at school. During these conversations, the team discussed using traditional board games to enhance causal conversation and, ultimately, increase students' language skills. As a result, the team decided to develop a school-wide board game initiative. Teachers were instructed by the school's speech teacher on ways to foster communication during board game play. Techniques to increase communication included: speaking in complete sentences, asking and answering questions, and listening to a speaker and taking turns when speaking.

Over the course of the spring of 2016,

the CCPS Parent Teacher Organization provided board games for each classroom. Teacher leaders for both kindergarten and first grade developed a list of developmentally appropriate board games for students. These games were deemed developmentally appropriate based on the games' recommended age range, as well as the incorporation of skills such as problem solving, counting, and number and color recognition. The list of board games included: Hi Ho Cheerio, Headbandz, Uno, Go Fish, Memory Jr., Candy Land, Connect Four and Trouble. The speech teacher and school administrator approved the list, and over the summer each class was furnished with a set of board games to use the following year.

During the 2016-2017 academic year, all kindergarten and first grade classrooms participated in the monthly board game day. During this time, parents and community members led students in playing different developmentally appropriate board games. Before the implementation of board game day, classroom teachers instructed adult participants on how to effectively increase students' communication skills while playing board games. This training was based on the training teachers received from the school speech teacher and took place during the school's annual parent picnic.

Board game days were held once a month from September until May. In order to

During the annual school picnic, parents and other adult volunteers were trained in how to appropriately foster communication skills through board game play.

determine the efficacy of board games, a kindergarten teacher who was also a graduate student at the University of Alabama designed an action research study. This study incorporated the use of teacher surveys and teacher interviews to determine the degree to which board game day affected students' communication skills. All kindergarten and first grade teachers at CCPS were invited to take part in this study. The teacher participants consisted of twenty-two Caucasian females between the ages of 25 and 50.

Data was initially collected through the use of pre and post teacher surveys administered through The University of Alabama's Qualtrics system. The survey consisted of eight questions and asked teachers to rate their students' language abilities on a likert scale (Tull & Albaum, 1973). The survey ratings consisted of the following: strongly agree, agree, neither agree or disagree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The researcher worked with the school's speech teacher to develop these questions. The questions were purposefully chosen to report on students' expressive language abilities and the specific skills targeted by the board game initiative. A total of 24 teachers responded to the pre-survey and a total of 22 teachers responded to the post survey. Following the completion of the post survey, results for each question were averaged to determine an increase or decrease in teachers' observation of students' speech abilities.

Following the final board game day in May, a group of two first grade teachers and two kindergarten teachers were chosen using a random number generator to be interviewed. Interview participants were selected randomly in order to prevent bias. Teachers were given the option to decline being interviewed; however, all of the teachers accepted the invitation. One first grade teacher was in her eighth year of teaching and the other was in her twentieth year. The kindergarten teachers were in their second and ninth years of teaching.

These interviews were designed to gather more information about the impact of board games on students' communication. During the group interview, teachers were asked

Both grandparents and parents volunteered to facilitate board game stations in classrooms.

to give accounts of their personal experiences with the board game initiative and the impact monthly board games had on student communication skills. The researcher transcribed the group interview and began process coding the transcription to identify teachers' words or phrases relating to student communication (Saldana, 2013). A second round of coding was then conducted. In this round, the process codes were thematically coded to determine commonalities among student communication associated with board game initiative (Saldana, 2013).

Findings

The post survey indicated that students' communication skills benefitted from playing board games. Seventy-eight percent of teachers indicated that students' ability to listen and take turns when speaking were stronger as a result of playing board games on a monthly basis and 67% of teachers said that regularly playing board games increased students' ability to speak in complete sentences and 40% percent of teachers reported students' increased ability to ask and answer questions. These percentages were determined by averaging the change in teachers who responded agree or strongly agree to corresponding questions.

Group teacher interviews revealed major themes in teachers' board game day experiences. These common themes that emerged from the interviews included students' increased ability to communicate effectively with peers, increased student motivation, and an increase in the home-school connections. Teachers remarked that students were able to participate in conversations with peers with greater ease after the several months of board game play. Both kindergarten and first grade teachers also discussed the positive impact the board game initiative had on the home-school connection. Many parents visit each month during board game day and even purchased the games to play at home with their children. While increased motivation and home-school connections were an unintended result of this study, they are nonetheless evidence of positive impact associated with the board game day initiative.



The Lasting Impact of Board Game Play

Both the survey and interview data support the incorporation of board game day as a monthly initiative at CCPS. Teachers, parents, and students were overwhelmingly involved and supportive of the initiative. The positive impact board games have on students' interpersonal and communication skills certainly justify the cost and time expenditures involved in establishing a board game program.

Board Game Day has become a fixture at CCPS. Since the completion of this study, an increased number of community volunteers have joined with teachers and students to participate in Board Game Day. Students look forward to the monthly day and many parents

(L to R) Teachers, Anna Anderson and Erica Rutherford; Principal Tricia Culpepper; Superintendent Dr. Susan Patterson; and State School Board Representative Dr. Cynthia McCarty accept the CLAS School of Distinction award in March 2018.

have notified the school of their intent to purchase these board games to play with their children at home. CCPS was honored as an Alabama CLAS Banner School of Distinction as a result of this program.

Teachers continue to report increased student communication skills and family engagement as a result of board game play. Students at CCPS are proof that developing

communication skills through board games is all in the game!

Erica Rutherford is the curriculum coach at Cullman City Primary School in Cullman, Alabama. She recently successfully defended her dissertation at the University of Alabama. Ms. Rutherford's research interests include literacy in the early grades and student discourse.

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CALL FOR MANUSCRIPTS

Special Issue 2019 *Dimensions of Early Childhood*

High quality early childhood experiences are indicative of our commitment to children. In order to provide high quality early childhood experiences, we encourage educators to joyfully embrace young children and their families through developmentally, culturally and inclusive relevant practices. As such, manuscript submissions are invited for a special issue of *Dimensions of Early Childhood* that focuses on Embracing the Joy. Authors are encouraged to submit original research as well as practitioner ideas following our submission guidelines. Topics may include (but not limited to) the following:

Embracing the Joy

- Bringing joy back to the classroom through the use of play-based, developmentally appropriate practices that focus on intentional teaching.
- Creating enriched and joyful lives through the promotion of optimal social-emotional development of young children.
- Supporting the joy of early childhood professionals through the implementation of a career ladder and tools to help them with work/life balance.
- Adding joy to learning through arts integration and STEAM activities in early childhood classrooms
- Innovative strategies for joyful learning in the higher education early childhood education program.
- Facilitating joy in families through innovative supports and advocacy.
- Strategies for inclusive practices for children of special abilities.
- Developing joyful environments for dual language learners and their families.
- Nurturing joy in the care of infants and toddlers.

Authors are asked to follow the guidelines for submission <https://www.southernearlychildhood.org/store/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Manuscript-Guidelines-dimensions-2014.pdf>.

Submitted manuscripts will follow the same review process.

Manuscripts must be submitted by **January 15, 2019**. Special issue will be published **March 2019**.

We have a guest editor for this special issue, **Diane Bales, Ph.D.** from the University of Georgia.

If you have any questions, please contact us at editor@southernearlychildhood.org.

Thank you, *Mari Riojas-Cortez, Ph.D., Editor*

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