

Dimensions of Early Childhood

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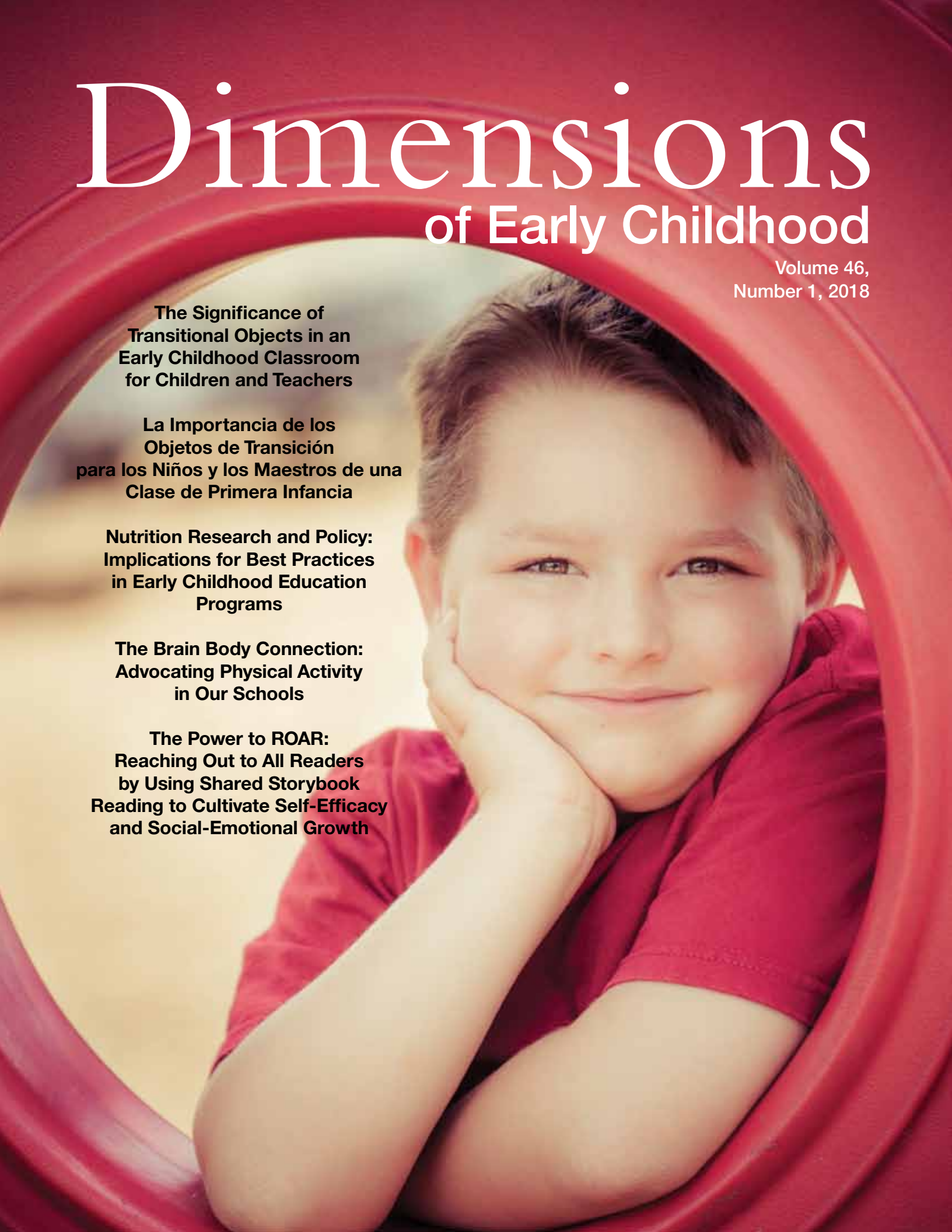
**The Significance of
Transitional Objects in an
Early Childhood Classroom
for Children and Teachers**

**La Importancia de los
Objetos de Transición
para los Niños y los Maestros de una
Clase de Primera Infancia**

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**The Brain Body Connection:
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**The Power to ROAR:
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Southern Early Childhood Association



Southern Early Childhood Association

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

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Southern Early Childhood Association

1123 S. University, Ste 255
Little Rock, AR 72204
(800) 305-7322
info@southernearlychildhood.org
www.southernearlychildhood.org

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Seasons of Change

JO CARROLL

Seasons. As I reflect on the seasons of weather, change happens continuously, sometimes expected, such as when the days slowly grow shorter in the winter, and sometimes weather changes very quickly, such as in a rain storm or a snow storm. It is curious that life happens much the same way. There are the changes we expect and those that come at us fast and unpredictably.

From the time a baby is born until it passes, life is constantly changing. The milestones we see young children achieve, such as learning to crawl, walk, and talk, are expected. There

are times in life where we are met with unexpected changes, such as the unexpected death of a loved one or an unexpected illness. No one goes from being a baby to being elderly overnight. No one feels the process of aging on a day-to-day basis, and yet we all know it is happening every day.

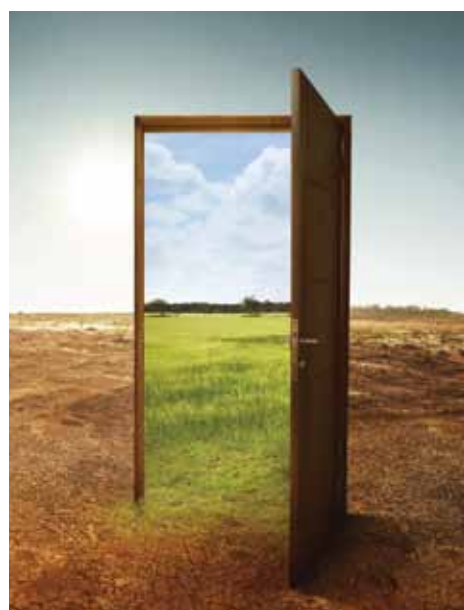
Change can be good or bad depending on one's perspective. SECA is going through a season of change in many ways, and yet the organization is striving to continue to provide our members with services they have grown to expect and cherish.

One of the seasons of change includes the ending of Carol Montealegre's presidential term and the beginning of my own. It seems to have happened so quickly, yet we knew this day would come. Carol has done an outstanding job as our president and has challenged us to grow as a professional organization and as professionals

individually. We have also had changes within our SECA office as our new Executive Director, Mark Polevoy, has begun to settle into heading our organization in the day-to-day operations. Other changes are apparent in some states and not seen in other states, as some of our states go through the uncoupling of membership with NAEYC. Members have choices in all of our southern states on whether to join SECA and the state affiliate, or NAEYC, or both organizations.

One thing that is not changing is that our young children nationwide need well trained and qualified adults to care for and teach them in a variety of settings. That is something that we will continue to advocate for in each of our states. Our organization is seeking members who want to become more involved in either your state organization and/or in the SECA organization. We want to hear from you! Please feel free to call the office and let us know you are willing to serve with and we will gladly match you to a task to help you grow as a professional. Your organization is only as good as the members allow it to be by pitching in and helping us move forward.

I am looking forward to serving our organization to the best of my ability as president. It is my desire for us to grow our membership and become even better known in the arena of Early Childhood. Let me encourage you to get to know your state presidents, board members and your state representatives on the SECA board. Take time to get to know your at-large members who serve on the SECA board. They are selected to serve our diverse membership. Be sure to follow us on Facebook and other social media!



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New Publication Look for a New Year

MARI RIOJAS-CORTEZ, PH.D.

Editor

Dimensions has a new look! With our new look comes the responsibility to continue sharing new and improved ideas in the field that help to promote children's healthy development from an interdisciplinary perspective. The four articles included in this issue do just that. For example, Colleen Goddard reminds us of the importance of transitional objects in

early childhood while Gonsalves, Cheyney, Badder and Duggins focus on the role of storybook reading for the development of self-efficacy and socioemotional growth. Both articles emphasize the importance of socioemotional development but each focuses on different strategies.

Similarly, Franxman and Gilbert emphasize

the importance of physical movement in the early years and its connection to cognitive development. Shabazian and Soga focus on best practices and policies for nutrition by sharing practical ideas for teachers and parents.

We hope you enjoy our new look and please share your ideas with us at editor@southernearlychildhood.org.

¡Dimensiones tiene un nuevo estilo! Con nuestro nuevo estilo, surge la responsabilidad de seguir compartiendo ideas nuevas y mejoradas en el campo que ayuden a promover el desarrollo saludable de los niños desde una perspectiva interdisciplinaria. Los cuatro artículos incluidos en este número hacen justamente eso. Por ejemplo, Colleen Goddard nos recuerda la importancia de los objetos

de transición en la primera infancia, mientras que Gonsalves, Cheyney, Badder y Duggins se centran en el papel de la lectura de libros de cuentos para el desarrollo de la autoeficacia y el crecimiento socioemocional. Ambos artículos enfatizan la importancia del desarrollo socioemocional, pero cada uno se enfoca en diferentes estrategias. Del mismo modo, Franxman y Gilbert enfatizan la importancia

del movimiento físico en los primeros años y su conexión con el desarrollo cognitivo. Shabazian y Soga se centran en las mejores prácticas y políticas de nutrición al compartir ideas prácticas para maestros y padres.

Esperamos que disfruten de nuestro nuevo estilo y esperamos que compartan sus ideas con nosotros en editor@southernearlychildhood.org.

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The Significance of Transitional Objects in an Early Childhood Classroom for Children and Teachers

BY COLLEEN GODDARD



When I first began to teach children 18 months to five years of age, I did not know what a transitional object truly was. I did recall, however, that my own son possessed a soft, tattered stuffed dog, with one ear missing, and a scratched marble eye. This dog's name was Muffy and my son carried Muffy close to him from toddlerhood to kindergarten. Muffy had a chair at the family dining table, a pillow to sit against on the couch, and a place in my son's arms at every social gathering – held, hugged, clutched and carried. Muffy was an instrumental part of my son's daily life, and upon my son's start of school, Muffy remained at home and "waited" for my son to return.

Upon my son's return, he and Muffy reunited daily in fierceness and fortitude, joy and happiness, and relief in the reunion. Until that one day when Muffy was not immediately retrieved or sought after, as my son had brought a friend home from school. Instead, Muffy was relegated to limbo, sitting in the threshold (both literally and metaphorically)

until my son's friend departed. After this social visit, Muffy became permanently positioned in the periphery, as further encounters between my son and his friends would ensue. Sometimes my son's friends would bring their own special toys from home, those objects that were meaningful to them, and Muffy would resurface. These objects, like Muffy, were held, hugged and hoisted in the air until finally one day they were ignored. Forgotten by the immediacy of the need to be used as an intimate security object, and instead these special objects (toys from home – transitional objects like Muffy), were used as signifying emotional self-regulation and social interconnectivity while also instilling a sense of identity and individuation for both my son and his friends.

As I reflect on my own son's experience, I realize that I had witnessed the use of a transitional object by my child as both an emotional stabilizer as well as a social connector. However, I did not fully comprehend the profound importance with regards

to signifying his development, until years later. As an early childhood educator, child development specialist, and professor of education, I explore transitional phenomena and object relations – examining both the use and accompanying meaning and significance of transitional objects at the beginning and end of life. In addition to my research, I have been privileged to observe teachers at work, in classrooms and early childhood centers, dedicated to celebrating the presence of transitional objects. These objects are used to ease the separation/attachment process at the beginning of the school year.

Transitional objects are items of attachment that are used to support social relatedness and evoke empathy as a child connects with the objects of others in very deep and meaningful ways. These objects are both representational of home and relational in terms of the role they play in social engagements, school experiences, and throughout the course of a child's overall development. Many of the theories presented in this article are seminal pieces that educators may use in their philosophical understanding of transitional objects.

The Psychology of Transitional Objects

The term transitional object was introduced in 1951 by British pediatrician, child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst D.W. Winnicott (1971) as:

A designation for any material to which an infant attributes a special value and by means of which the child is able to make the necessary shift from the earliest oral relationship with mother to genuine object-relationships procured by the self (p. 64).

According to the Argentine psychoanalyst Horacio Etchegoyen (as cited in Brenner, 2004, p. 7), a transitional object is a "relationship object," a "relational way of being with

an object,” which “originates in our earliest relationship, in the sensitive attunement of mother to child” (Viorst, 1986, pg. 51).

A transitional object provides an understanding of human development commencing with infancy and early childhood. Transitional objects are self-chosen, a child’s first “not-me possession” like a blanket, teddy bear, pacifier, or doll. The reliance on such objects is rooted in sensorial elements that lessen the stress of separation, while they soothe and comfort the child. Transitional objects for a child according to Winnicott (1971) are marked by specific attributes.

Brenner (2004) states the following:

The child assumes all rights over the object, the object is freely loved, the object must never be changed unless by the child, the object survives loving, hating and any aggression the child might show it, the object gives warmth that imbues a personality or reality of its own and the object’s fate must be gradually allowed to be disregarded, so that in the years ahead it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo and thereby allows for transition (p. 5).

The essential structure of transitional objects, the essence of this phenomenon, may then be considered descriptive of the aforementioned theory; but also defined via the personification and representations of the object in altered states – as these external objects activate memories from within which may act as an internal compass for navigating life transitions. Winnicott (1971) states that this perpetual motion of transition may include an “inner reality to that individual, an inner world that can be rich or poor and can be at peace or in a state of war...” (p. 64).

How Children Experience Transitional Objects

Transitional objects theoretically rooted in infancy and early childhood provide comfort and security, as they become the replacement for as well as a representation of, the maternal/paternal bond. They provide for and act as emotional and psychological stabilizers. Transitional objects symbolize home, the maternal/paternal bond and all things familiar such as smells, sounds, and textures that hold deep meaning and provide great comfort. Transitional objects are internalized as a multi-sensory

experience, as well as deeply embedded in the psyche. These objects are often tangible and concrete and composed of relational characteristics, resonant of Charles Schulz’s character Linus, from the comic strip *Peanuts* and his beloved blanket.

A transitional object allows for a child to cope alone, and apart from the mother and father, but at the same time, become part of the larger, social world. As a child moves away from their parent/caregiver and is able to self-comfort and self-soothe as well as socialize with their transitional object a child experiences a sense of self-assuredness, independence and autonomy. The relationship between a young child and their transitional object may be experienced as meaningful as an interpersonal relationship between two people. This speaks to the need for the child to be able to see, touch, feel, hold, cuddle with, suck on, pull at, detach from, revisit and reconnect with the object of attachment, whenever a transition occurs.

Transitional objects are often experienced by children as security objects that orient the child through the separation process at the start of school. These objects are a fundamental representation of the self and when shared, the object becomes an interlocutor for meaningful interactions and social/emotional connections.

According to Dr. Laura Kamptner, Professor and Director of The Parenting Center, Institute of Child Development and Family Relations in San Bernardino, California, the author of *Transitional Objects, Helpful for Parents, Too?* “the transitional object becomes a representation of the bond with the mother, reflective of the child’s inner world (the actual attachment with mother) and the outer world (the reality of having to cope without and separate from mother)” (Kamptner, 1991, 1994, p. 1).

Transitions are changes that occur throughout the course of our lives. Changes that move us from one stage of development to another, including but not limited to beginning school, graduating from school, getting married, moving from one home to another, even experiencing separation, loss and death. Some of the transitions that children experience involve birth itself, as well as transitioning from the breast to the bottle, crawling to walking, being fed to feeding themselves, crib to bed, diapers to being toilet trained, and going to school. All of these transitions present children with

challenges and struggles, uncertainty and unpredictability. However, the experience of moving through these development milestones with a transitional object in hand, affords a child the opportunity to utilize their transitional object in deep and meaningful ways, while the use of the object itself is also synonymously affirmed and supported by the adults in a child’s life.

As I continued to reflect on my experience regarding the importance of transitional objects for my own son, I have also contemplated the significance of transitional objects not only for the children who actively procure and use them. More importantly, how early childhood educators support the use of these objects in meaningful ways both theoretically and practically in their classrooms.

Transitional Objects with Parents and Teachers

In the earliest of preschool classrooms, transitions are experienced over and over. A parent says goodbye and the child responds in a cathartic release of emotion. It is in these moments where the healing power of transitional objects is fully realized. A Mother offers her son an old t-shirt she has worn, a Father shares a handkerchief from his pocket with his daughter, and the sensorial elements calm and support this child through the good-bye, as the child metaphorically and literally holds on to the promise of their parent’s return.

Transitional objects serve numerous functions for children, they provide not only a memory and a measure of security, but also a sense of autonomy and ownership, as the child enjoys having authority over his or her own personalized and intimate object. In addition, the ways in which children use transitional objects in moments of stress, change, separation and transition, supported by early childhood educators, affords children an opportunity to acquire coping skills that may not otherwise be possible. In fact, learning how to use a transitional object in deep and meaningful ways ensures emotional maturation and autonomous functioning when encouraged by teachers and families.

Once school begins, however, many families share that their child is “perfectly fine” and doesn’t “need” anything, and in some situations, transitional objects are hidden in cubbies, or backpacks by parents. In my numerous years of teaching, I have



been amazed by those children who apparently did not “need” anything [a transitional object] were actively procuring and utilizing self-chosen objects that they had discovered in the classroom. For example, if Mom had left her scarf unintentionally, it became a security blanket. Other children would carry pillows or stuffed animals they discovered in the classroom and hold on to them tenaciously until the parent returned. The transitional item would be flung in the air as the children ran to their mother or father upon their return.

This particular response gives way to the debatable aspects of the use of transitional objects. Why are transitional objects often perceived as socially unacceptable, and/or restricted to certain times and places? If taken in context as an instrumental component of child development – if the object thought to make one stronger and more resilient is refuted, removed or denied – it could actually create more anxiety and discourse. In addition, the usage, availability and consideration of such objects actually enhance emotional and social connectedness between child-teacher relationships and amongst the children themselves.

In one of my daily visits at the school where I work, I was delighted by the number of stuffed animals, rag dolls and teddy bears that were abundantly present and harmoniously integrated into the work and play of the children in the 4-year-old room. In a classroom where early educators might

expect objects of attachment to be mandated to bedrooms, back packs and family travels, I witnessed the integration of these beloved objects in numerous ways and in a variety of areas in the room.

I observed one child clutching her beloved toy dog while reading a book to her friend – both she and her dog were actively turning the pages – and with every page turned, she looked down at her dog, lovingly and with great appreciation and gratitude for his apparent contribution and cooperation. Another child was squishing, squeezing and stuffing his Snoopy inside a wooden block and alternatively opening the refrigerator door so his dear dog could “chill out”. I was struck by the level of self-awareness this particular child had for his own self-regulatory needs and how to meet them. On the rug, two children were constructing a magna tile rooftop for two animals – one floppy ear extended carefully up and out of the construction while a rainbow-colored bear covered in band-aids was laying on top. These children were deep in conversation about their “hospital” and how their loved creatures would get better. Across the room, sitting on the floor in front of her cubby, a young girl was combing her fingers through her raggedy doll’s hair, another child was sitting with her oversized gingerbread doll, holding a phone to her ear, and placing one next to her doll, as she nodded in agreement that Mommy would come back after lunch. Another child was sitting in the dramatic

play kitchen, feeding and clothing her bear holding it close to her heart.

These children were utilizing and integrating transitional objects into their work and play – self chosen, personified instruments of self expression that were synonymously supported, acknowledged and honored by their teachers. These transitional objects were being used not merely as security objects for the children to cling to and hold on to, but more importantly and distinctly, as tools for social interaction, rich in emotional nuance and the psychological comfort of ‘home’ coming to school.

How Educators can Support the Use of Transitional Objects in the Early Childhood Classroom

In the earliest of childhood classrooms, separations and attachments, as well as reunions, are experienced every day. This can be met with great uncertainty and discord. A child’s transitional object lessens the eruptive tension, the discomfort and doubt. The child’s transitional object offers certainty, security, comfort and solace. Especially when this very particular and intimate object is regarded in its importance, with deep respect and with great acceptance. The use of a transitional object should not be associated with shame or guilt, or any form of judgment. Educators should encourage parents not to insist that their child give up their transitional object, but rather advocate for its use in different ways. By doing so, educators work in partnership with parents to encourage a child’s emotional and social development, rooted in deeply meaningful peer-based interactions, wherein the attachment to the transitional object will shift in its usage, although certainly not in its importance.

The use of transitional objects should not be used in context of a punishment or reward, even as educators can set limits for how and when the object is used if the object distracts the child or others. At this point, the object is no longer fully internalized as an autonomous tool and has taken on a different purpose wherein the reallocation of the object may prove necessary. If the object is lost, educators should acknowledge the loss and allow the child to talk about it. Allow the child to choose another one if requested, but realize the object was/is deeply loved by the child.

Transitional Objects and Child Development

I believe that a great deal of a child's play comes from a desire to feel in control of the outside world and their inner self. When children create elaborate and complex dramatic play scenarios they are making decisions about their life, which is translated beautifully into the rich and meaningful context of their play. Being able to express themselves through play, children are able to identify their feelings and a holistic sense of self, wherein physical, social, emotional and cognitive development is fully actualized.

This can be fully realized via a child's use of transitional objects embodied in "the process of exploration, investigation and creation – where it goes and how it looks – results from the negotiating that occurs between teacher and children and between the children as well" (Jones, Evans & Rencken, 2001, p. 129) rooted in trust and intimacy, which provides the precipice for further growth and human development.

Human Development

Transitional objects are representative of every human developmental milestone, both for the individual self and the differential other. It is the "other" that is synonymous with the external source of identification, albeit mother/father. Transitional objects typify that which is rudimentary and sound. In essence, the object represents the process by which one can navigate life, experience a homeostatic inner balance, and cohesive sense of well-being at every developmental milestone.

According to Brenner (2004), transitional objects continue through the course of our lives, as "sacred keepsakes" which pull us back to "a place and time of great solace and memory" (p. 7). It is the dependence, identification and attachment to objects outside of the self, such as photographs, wedding bands, mementos, music, art and culture. These items can be defined as nostalgic memorials, but more importantly, and astutely, define a state of connection and presence in the adult world. However, if the cell phone, computer, watch, wallet or keys are left or forgotten-- the teddy, blanket or bottle misplaced or misbegotten -- one may feel disconnected, removed, displaced. It is the placement, allocation of and attendance to transitional objects, in the earliest of classrooms, which connects us to a secure base.

It is the secure base of human development that I am drawn to celebrating where transitional objects not only bridge the connection from home to school but allow for the emergence of a child's inherent sense of self. As such, supported, respected and honored by early childhood educators in the same context as psychologist Abraham Maslow (1971), one's transitional object "matters more than anything else in the world" ... or as a two year old recently exclaimed in one of the classrooms where I work, holding her stuffed animal tight to her heart, "I love it so much I can't ever let go of it!" which typifies the relevance, significance and embodiment of the object as permanent in its states of impermanence.

As early childhood educators we are called to observe how the children in our classrooms use transitional objects, as well as respect, honor and appreciate the use as a fundamental construct of human development. How might teachers shape and substantiate the use of transitional objects in their classrooms as they reflect on their own experience both as a child and as an adult? Also, how might this influence or negate their response to these objects of attachment in representational and relational ways? A classroom can encourage and implement a gathering time where children's objects of meaning and attachment are spoken about, shared in context of their uniqueness and significance, documented and reflected upon. Reflections may include an observational and interpretive lens, as well as from a parental and educational perspective.

How can we encourage the use of transitional objects in the classroom as instrumental in the course of the separation/attachment process? Perhaps early childhood educators can advocate for the use of such said objects during the active separation/attachment process as a means by which a child can find immediate comfort and control over a seemingly difficult transition. For example, separating from a deeply loved maternal/paternal presence and forming an attachment to a supportive and deeply caring teacher, while the transitional objects acts as a point of interconnectivity.

How can we promote the use of transitional objects as a social/familial connector as well as an emotional stabilizer? Possibly these objects can find a permanent place in the classroom and become an integral, familiar and familial source of individuation

and identity.

The nature of these objects provide for and evoke an emotional landscape of thought, feeling and expression as well as states of intimate relatedness and responsiveness. By supporting the relationship a child has with their transitional object, [rooted in empathy, comfort and understanding] both at home and in school, a child's sense of self, social interconnectivity and emotional maturation will be fundamentally experienced in deep and meaningful ways.

COLLEEN GODDARD, PHD, is the Educational Director at The Early Childhood Center at Brooklyn College. She also works as a Child Development Specialist/Consultant at early childhood schools and centers in Manhattan and Brooklyn. She has over 24 years of experience in early childhood education. Colleen received an Excellence in Teaching Award from the NYC Early Childhood Professional Development Institute in 2009, and holds a Master's Degree in Human Development with a Specialization in Early Childhood Studies from Pacific Oaks College. She earned an additional Master's Degree in Human & Organizational Studies from Fielding Graduate University where she also received her Ph.D. in Human/Child Development. Her dissertation explores the significance of transitional objects at the beginning and end of life. Colleen has also worked as an adjunct professor at The NYU School of Professional Studies, Hunter College, Touro College, The NYU Steinhardt School of Culture, Education and Human Development, and currently teaches at Brooklyn College.

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La importancia de los objetos de transición para los niños y los maestros de una clase de primera infancia

POR COLLEEN GODDARD



Cuando empecé a enseñar a niños de 18 meses a cinco años de edad por primera vez, no sabía realmente lo que era un objeto de transición. Sí recuerdo, sin embargo, que mi propio hijo tenía un perro harapiento de peluche suave, al que le faltaba una oreja y tenía un ojo de canica rayado. El nombre del perro era Muffy y mi hijo lo llevó abrazado desde que era bebé hasta que fue al jardín de niños. Muffy tenía una silla en la cena familiar, una almohada contra la cual apoyarse en el sofá y un lugar en los brazos de mi hijo en todas las reuniones sociales: sostenido, abrazado, apretado y transportado. Muffy era una parte importante de la vida diaria de mi hijo y al comienzo de su escuela, Muffy se quedaba en casa y “esperaba” a que regresara mi hijo.

Al regresar mi hijo, se reencontraban cada día con fuerza e intensidad, alegría y felicidad, y alivio por el reencuentro. Hasta que un día Muffy no fue buscado o recuperado

de inmediato, ya que mi hijo había traído a un amigo a casa de la escuela. En su lugar, fue relegado al limbo, a la espera (tanto literal como metafóricamente) hasta que se fuera el amigo de mi hijo. Luego de esta visita social, Muffy quedaba permanentemente en la periferia, a medida que se producían más encuentros entre mi hijo y sus amigos. A veces, los amigos de mis hijos traían a sus propios juguetes especiales de sus casas; los objetos que eran importantes para ellos; entonces, Muffy resurgía. Estos objetos, al igual que Muffy, eran sostenidos, abrazados y elevados en el aire hasta que, finalmente, un día, fueron ignorados. Olvidados por la inmediatez de la necesidad de ser usados como un objeto de seguridad íntimo, y en su lugar, estos objetos especiales (juguetes de casa, objetos de transición como Muffy) eran usados como autoregulación emocional e interconexión social, mientras que, a su vez, generaban un sentido de la identidad y

la individualidad, tanto para mi hijo como para sus amigos.

Cuando reflexiono en la experiencia de mi propio hijo, me doy cuenta de haber presenciado el uso de un objeto de transición, tanto como un estabilizador emocional como un conector social. No obstante, no comprendí por completo la profunda importancia con respecto a su desarrollo, sino años más tarde. Como educadora de la primera infancia, especialista en desarrollo infantil y Profesora de Educación, exploro los fenómenos transitivos y las relaciones con los objetos, mediante la examinación tanto del uso como del significado e importancia de los objetos de transición, al comienzo y al final de la vida. Además de mi investigación, he tenido el privilegio de observar a maestros en las aulas y en los centros de primera infancia; comprometidos a celebrar la presencia de objetos de transición en sus aulas. Estos objetos se utilizan para facilitar el proceso de separación/apego al comienzo del año escolar.

Los objetos de transición son elementos de apego que se usan para respaldar el vínculo social y evocar la empatía, a medida que un niño se conecta con los objetos de los demás, de formas muy profundas y significativas. Son tanto representativos del hogar como vinculantes en cuanto al papel que juegan en las interacciones sociales, experiencias escolares y durante todo el curso de desarrollo general de un niño. Muchas de las teorías presentadas en este artículo son piezas trascendentales que los educadores pueden usar en su comprensión filosófica de los objetos de transición.

La psicología de los objetos de transición

El término “objeto de transición” fue presentado en 1951, por D. W. Winnicott, Pediatra británico, Psiquiatra infantil y Psicoanalista (1971) como:

Designación de todo material al que un niño le atribuye un valor especial y por medio del cual puede realizar los cambios necesarios de una relación oral más temprana con su madre a relaciones genuinas con los objetos procurados por sí mismo (p. 64).

Según el psicoanalista argentino Horacio Etchegoyen (como se cita en Brenner, 2004, p. 7), un objeto de transición es un “objeto de relación”, una “forma relacional de estar con un objeto”, que se “origina en nuestra relación más temprana, en la sintonía sensible de madre a hijo” (Viorst, 1986, pág. 51).

Un objeto de transición proporciona la comprensión del desarrollo humano, comenzando con la infancia y la primera infancia. Los objetos de transición son autoelegidos, una primera “posesión externa de sí mismo” de un niño, como una manta, un osito de peluche, un chupetón o un muñeco. La dependencia de tales objetos se asienta en elementos sensoriales, que disminuyen el estrés de la separación, mientras tranquilizan y confortan al niño. Los objetos de transición de un niño, según Winnicott (1971) están marcados por atributos específicos. Brenner (2004) afirma lo siguiente:

El niño asume todos los derechos sobre el objeto; el objeto es amado libremente, nunca debe ser cambiado, es salvo por el niño; sobrevive al amor, al odio y a cualquier agresión que el niño pueda demostrarle; el objeto proporciona calidez y representa una personalidad o realidad propias; y cuanto al destino del objeto debe permitírsele ser descartado gradualmente, de modo que en los años futuros, no sea tan olvidado que se lo relegue al limbo y, en consecuencia, permita una transición (p. 5).

La estructura esencial de los objetos de transición, la esencia de este fenómeno, puede, entonces, considerarse descriptiva de la teoría antes mencionada. Pero, también, definida vía la personificación y las representaciones del objeto en estados alterados, ya que estos objetos externos activan memorias del interior, que pueden actuar como una brújula interna para navegar por las transiciones de la vida. Winnicott (1971) afirma que este movimiento perpetuo de transición puede incluir una “realidad interna para ese individuo, un mundo interior que puede ser enriquecedor o empobrecedor, y que puede estar en paz o en estado de guerra...” (p. 64)

Cómo los niños experimentan con los objetos de transición

Los objetos de transición, teóricamente enraizados en la niñez y en la primera infancia, proporcionan confort y seguridad, ya que se convierten en el reemplazo, además de la representación, del vínculo materno/paterno. Ofrecen estabilizadores emocionales y psicológicos, y actúan como tales. Los objetos de transición simbolizan el hogar, el vínculo materno/paterno y todas las cosas familiares, tales como olores, sonidos y texturas que retienen un significado profundo y proporcionan un gran confort. Son internalizados como una experiencia multisensorial, además de estar profundamente insertados en la psiquis. Con frecuencia, son tangibles y concretos, y se componen de características relacionales, del personaje Linus, de Charles Schulz, de la tira cómica “Peanuts” y su adorada manta.

Un objeto de transición le permite a un niño lidiar solo, lejos de la madre y del padre, pero, a la vez, ser parte del mundo social más amplio. A medida que un niño se aleja de sus padres/cuidadores y puede autocalmarse y autoconfortarse, además de socializar con sus objetos de transición, experimenta una sensación de seguridad en sí mismo, independencia y autonomía. La relación entre un niño y su objeto de transición puede experimentarse como una relación interpersonal igual de importante como la que se da entre dos personas. Esto habla de la necesidad del niño de poder ver, tocar, sentir, sostener, abrazar, chupar, tirar, separarse de, visitar y reconectarse con el objeto de apego, toda vez que se produzca una transición.

Con frecuencia, los objetos de transición son experimentados por los niños como objetos de seguridad, que los orientan a través del proceso de separación al comienzo de la escuela. Estos objetos son una representación fundamental de sí mismo y al ser compartidos, se convierten en interlocutores de interacciones importantes y conexiones sociales/emocionales.

Según la Dra. Laura Kamptner, Profesora y Directora de *The Parenting Center, Institute of Child Development and Family Relations* en San Bernardino, California, autora de *Transitional Objects, Helpful for Parents, Too?*: “El objeto de transición se vuelve una representación del vínculo con la madre, reflejo del mundo interior del niño (el apego real con la madre) y el mundo exterior (la realidad de tener que lidiar sin la madre y separarse de ella)” (Kamptner, 1991, 1994, p. 1)

Las transiciones son cambios que se producen a lo largo de todo el curso de nuestras vidas. Cambios que nos trasladan de una etapa de desarrollo a otra, incluidos, entre otros, comenzar la escuela, graduarse, casarse, mudarse de un hogar a otro, incluso experimentar una separación, una pérdida y una muerte. Algunas de las transiciones que experimentan los niños incluyen el nacimiento mismo, además de pasar del pecho al biberón, de gatear a caminar, de ser alimentados a alimentarse por sí mismos, de la cuna a la cama, de los pañales al entrenamiento en el uso del inodoro e ir a la escuela. Todas estas transiciones les presentan a los niños desafíos y luchas, falta de certeza y falta de predictibilidad. Sin embargo, la experiencia de pasar por estos hitos de desarrollo con un objeto de transición en mano, les da a los niños la oportunidad de utilizarlos de maneras profundas y significativas, mientras que el uso del objeto en sí mismo es, también, sinónicamente afirmado y respaldado por los adultos en la vida del niño.

Mientras seguía reflexionando sobre la experiencia en cuanto a la importancia de los objetos de transición para mi propio hijo, también contemplé la importancia de dichos objetos, no solo para los niños que los usan activamente. De manera más relevante, la forma en que los educadores de la primera infancia respaldan el uso de estos objetos de maneras significativas, tanto teórica como pragmáticamente en sus aulas.

Los objetos de transición con los padres y los maestros

En las primeras salas del preescolar, las transiciones son experimentadas una y otra vez. Un padre dice adiós y el niño responde con una liberación emocional catártica. Es en estos momentos cuando el poder curativo de los objetos de transición se realiza por completo. Una “madre” le ofrece a su hijo una camiseta vieja que ha usado; un “padre” comparte un pañuelo de su bolsillo con su hija y los elementos sensoriales calman y respaldan a este niño a través del adiós, a medida que el niño, literal y metafóricamente, se aferra a la promesa del regreso de su padre.

Los objetos de transición sirven incontables funciones para los niños. Proporcionan no solo un recuerdo, sino una medida de seguridad, pero también un sentido de la autonomía y la posesión, ya que el niño disfruta de tener autoridad sobre su objeto íntimo y personalizado. Además, las

formas en que los niños usan los objetos de transición en momentos de estrés, cambio, separación y transición, respaldadas por los educadores de la primera infancia, les da a los niños la oportunidad de adquirir habilidades de control que, de otra manera, pueden ser imposibles. De hecho, aprender a usar un objeto de transición de manera profunda y significativa garantiza un funcionamiento autónomo y una maduración emocional, cuando los maestros y las familias lo alientan.

Una vez que comienza la escuela, no obstante, muchas familias comunican que sus hijos están “perfectamente bien” y no “necesitan” nada; y que, en algunas situaciones, los objetos de transición son escondidos en alacenas o en las mochilas por los padres. En mis varios años de enseñanza, me he asombrado por aquellos niños que, en apariencia, no “necesitaban” nada (un objeto de transición) se procuraban y utilizaban activamente objetos elegidos por ellos mismos, que habían descubierto en el aula. Por ejemplo, si la madre había dejado sin querer su bufanda, se convertía en una manta de seguridad. Otros niños llevaban almohadas o animales de peluche que habían descubierto en el aula y se abrazaban tenazmente a ellos hasta que regresaban los padres. El elemento de transición era arrojado por el aire cuando el niño corría hacia sus padres a su regreso.

Esta respuesta en particular da paso a los aspectos debatibles del uso de objetos de transición. ¿Por qué, a menudo, los objetos de transición son percibidos socialmente inaceptables y restringidos a determinados lugares y ocasiones? Si se toman en el contexto de un componente instrumental del desarrollo del niño, si el objeto es pensado como para hacernos más fuertes y más resilientes es rechazado, removido o negado, realmente podría crear más ansiedad y discusión. Además, el uso, la disponibilidad y la consideración por tales objetos realmente mejoran la conexión social y emocional entre las relaciones niño/maestro, y entre los niños mismos.

En una de mis visitas diarias a la escuela donde trabajo, quedé encantada por la cantidad de animales de peluche, muñecas de trapo y ositos que abundaban y se integraban armoniosamente con el trabajo y los juegos de los niños de la sala de 4 años. Pude observar en una de las aulas la integración de estos objetos en diferentes maneras y en varias áreas del aula. Esto fue sorprendente ya que muchas

veces estos objetos no se incluyen en las aulas de clase sino que se dejan para las habitaciones, mochilas o viajes familiares.

Observé a una niña aferrada a su preciado perro mientras le leía un libro a su amigo, tanto ella como su perro daban vuelta a las páginas activamente, y con cada página, miraba hacia su perro, con cariño y con un gran agradecimiento por su aparente aporte y cooperación otro niño estrujaba, apretaba y metía a su Snoopy dentro de un bloque de madera y, alternativamente, abría la puerta de la nevera para que su querido perro pudiera “refrescarse”. Me impactó el nivel de autoconciencia que este niño en particular tenía sobre sus propias necesidades autorregulatorias y cómo satisfacerlas. En la alfombra, dos niños construían un techo de losas plásticas para dos animales: una oveja de trapo cuidadosamente extendida hacia arriba y fuera de la construcción mientras un oso con los colores del arco iris, cubierto en apósitos, yacía encima. Estos niños estaban inmersos en una conversación sobre su “hospital” y cómo mejorarían sus amadas criaturas. Del otro lado de la sala, sentada frente a su armario, una niña con los dedos peinaba el pelo de su muñeca de trapo; otra niña se sentaba con su muñeca de jengibre gigante, sosteniendo un teléfono junto a su oreja y colocando otro junto a su muñeca, mientras asentía que Mami regresaría luego del almuerzo. Otra niña se sentaba en la cocina de juguete, alimentando y vistiendo a su oso, sostenido junto a su corazón.

Estos niños estaban utilizando e integrando objetos de transición a sus trabajos y juegos: instrumentos autoelegidos, personificados, de autoexpresión, que eran respaldados, reconocidos y honrados sinónimicamente por sus Maestros. Estos objetos de transición estaban siendo usados no solo como objetos de seguridad por los niños para aferrarse a ellos, sino, de manera más importante y distinta, como herramientas de interacción social, ricos en detalles emocionales y el confort psicológico del “hogar” en la escuela.

Cómo los educadores pueden respaldar el uso de los objetos de transición en el aula de la primera infancia

En las primeras salas de infancia, las separaciones y los apegos, además de las reuniones son experimentados todos los días. Esto puede encontrarse con una gran incertidumbre y discordia. Un objeto de

transición de un niño disminuye la erupción de tensiones, la incomodidad y la duda. El objeto de transición del niño ofrece certeza, seguridad, confort y consuelo. En especial, cuando se analiza la importancia de este objeto íntimo y particular, con un profundo respeto y con una gran aceptación. El uso de un objeto de transición no debe asociarse con la vergüenza o la culpa, ni con ningún tipo de juicio. Los educadores deben alentar a los padres a no insistir en que sus niños abandonen sus objetos de transición, sino, en su lugar, defender sus usos de diferentes maneras. Al hacerlo, trabajan en conjunto con los padres para alentar el desarrollo social y emocional de un niño, profundamente enraizado en las significativas interacciones con los pares, momento en el que el objeto de transición cambiará de uso, aunque, ciertamente, no en importancia.

El uso de objetos de transición no debe realizarse en el contexto de castigos o recompensas, dado que incluso los educadores puedan fijar límites sobre cómo y cuándo deben usarlos si estos distraen a los niños o a los demás. En este punto, el objeto ya no es totalmente internalizado como una herramienta autónoma y ha tomado un propósito diferente, en el que la reasignación del objeto puede probar ser necesaria. Si se pierde el objeto, los educadores deben reconocer la pérdida y permitirle al niño hablar al respecto. Permitirle al niño elegir otro, si así lo solicita, pero darse cuenta de cuán amado por el niño es/era el objeto.

Los objetos de transición y el desarrollo de los niños

Creo que gran parte del juego de los niños proviene de un deseo de sentirse en control del mundo exterior y del yo interior. Cuando los niños crean escenarios de juego elaborados y complejos, están tomando decisiones sobre sus vidas, que se traducen hermosamente en el contexto enriquecedor y significativo de sus juegos. Al poder expresarse a través del juego, los niños pueden identificar sus sentimientos y un sentido holístico del yo, en el que se realiza por completo el desarrollo cognitivo y emocional, social y físico.

Esto puede realizarse por completo vía el uso de objetos de transición de un niño, representados en “el proceso de exploración, investigación y creación: adónde va y cómo

se ve, resulta de la negociación que se produce entre el Maestro y los niños, y entre los niños, también” (Jones, Evans & Rencken, 2001, p. 129), enraizada en la confianza y la intimidad, que proporciona el principio para un mayor crecimiento desarrollo humano.

El desarrollo humano

Los objetos de transición son representativos de cada hito humano de desarrollo, tanto para el yo individual como para diferenciarse de los demás. Es el “otro” el que es sinónimo de una fuente externa de identificación, no obstante, la madre o el padre. Los objetos de transición tipifican aquello que es rudimentario y sólido. En esencia, el objeto representa el proceso por el cual uno puede navegar por la vida, experimentar un equilibrio interno homeostático y un sentido cohesivo de bienestar en cada hito de desarrollo.

Según Brenner (2004), los objetos de transición continúan durante todo el curso de nuestras vidas, como “recuerdos sagrados”, que nos devuelven a “un lugar y tiempo de gran consuelo y memoria” (p. 7.) Es la dependencia, la identificación y el apego con los objetos más allá de uno mismo, tales como fotografías, anillos de bodas, recuerdos, música, arte y cultura. Estos elementos pueden ser definidos como recuerdos nostálgicos, pero, de manera más importante y más astuta, definen un estado de conexión y presencia en el mundo adulto. Sin embargo, si el teléfono celular, la computadora, el reloj, la billetera o las llaves son dejados u olvidados, el osito, la manta o el biberón colocados fuera de lugar o arruinados, uno puede sentirse desconectado, triste o desplazado. Es la colocación, la asignación y la presencia de los objetos de transición, en las primeras salas infantiles, es lo que nos conecta a una base segura.

Es la base segura del desarrollo humano a la que me inclino por celebrar, donde los objetos de transición no solo hacen de puente de conexión entre el hogar y la escuela, sino que permiten la emergencia del sentido inherente de sí mismo de un niño. En calidad de tales, respaldados, respetados y honrados por los educadores de la primera infancia en el mismo contexto del Psicólogo Abraham Maslow (1971), un objeto de transición propio “importa más que cualquier cosa en el mundo”... O como un niño de dos años recientemente exclamó en una de las aulas donde trabajo, sosteniendo su

animal de peluche pegado al corazón, “¡Lo quiero tanto que no lo puedo soltar!”, lo que tipifica la importancia y la representación del objeto como permanente en su estado de impermanencia.

Como educadores de la primera infancia, debemos observar cómo los niños de nuestras aulas usan los objetos de transición, además de respetar, honrar y apreciar su uso como una construcción fundamental del desarrollo humano. ¿Cómo podrían los Maestros moldear y sustanciar el uso de los objetos de transición en sus aulas, a medida que reflejan sus propias experiencias, tanto como niños y como adultos? Además, ¿cómo podría influir esto o negar sus respuestas a estos objetos de apego de maneras relacionales y representativas? En una aula, se puede alentar e implementar un tiempo de reunión donde se documente, reflexione y hable sobre los objetos de importancia y apego de los niños, compartidos en el contexto de su unicidad e importancia. Las reflexiones pueden incluir un lente observador e interpretativo, además de una perspectiva educativa y parental.

¿Cómo alentamos el uso de objetos de transición en el aula como instrumentales para el curso del proceso de separación/apego? Tal vez, los educadores de la primera infancia puedan defender el uso de dichos objetos durante el proceso de separación/apego, como un medio por el cual un niño pueda encontrar confort y control inmediato sobre una transición en apariencia difícil. Por ejemplo, separarse de la presencia profundamente querida del padre o la madre y apegarse a un Maestro muy cariñoso, mientras los objetos de transición actúan como punto de interconexión.

¿Cómo podemos promover el uso de objetos de transición como conectores sociales/familiares, además de estabilizadores emocionales? Posiblemente, estos objetos puedan encontrar un lugar permanente en el aula y convertirse en una fuente familiar e integral de individualidad e identidad. Según Brett, artista gráfico (2011):

Los objetos de transición son más importantes, que lo que la mayoría ve, la forma en que los humanos interactúan con los objetos en la primera edad es fundamental para determinar cómo llegamos a comprendernos y a nuestro entorno en cada etapa de nuestro desarrollo (p. 5).

La naturaleza de estos objetos proporcio-

nan y evocan un escenario emocional de pensamientos, sentimientos y expresiones, además de estados de íntima conexión y capacidad de respuesta. Al respaldar la relación de un niño con su objeto de transición, basada en la empatía, el confort y la comprensión, tanto en el hogar como en la escuela, el sentido del yo de un niño, su interconexión social y su madurez emocional serán experimentados, en esencia, de manera profunda y significativa.

COLLEEN GODDARD, PHD es la directora educativa en el Centro para la Infancia Temprana de Brooklyn College. También trabaja como Especialista / Consultora de Desarrollo Infantil en escuelas y centros de educación infantil en Manhattan y Brooklyn. Ella tiene más de 24 años de experiencia en educación infantil. Colleen recibió un Premio a la Excelencia en la Enseñanza del Instituto de Desarrollo Profesional de la Primera Infancia de la Ciudad de Nueva York en 2009, y tiene una Maestría en Desarrollo Humano con una Especialización en Estudios de la Primera Infancia del Pacific Oaks College. Obtuvo una Maestría adicional en Estudios Humanos y Organizacionales de Fielding Graduate University donde también recibió su Ph.D. en Desarrollo Humano / Infantil. Su disertación explora la importancia de los objetos de transición al comienzo y al final de la vida. Colleen también ha trabajado como profesora adjunta en la Escuela de Estudios Profesionales de la NYU, Hunter College, Touro College, la Escuela de Cultura, Educación y Desarrollo Humano de NYU Steinhardt, y actualmente enseña en el Brooklyn College.

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Nutrition Research and Policy: Implications for Best Practices in Early Childhood Education Programs

BY ANI N. SHABAZIAN & CAROLINE L. SOGA



Nutrition is a current key issue with over 78 million adults and about 12.5 million children and adolescents in America considered obese (Finucane et al., 2011). Approximately 40% of U.S. children ages 2 to 5 are overweight or at the risk of being overweight (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2012). Diet has been identified as one of the leading factors contributing to childhood obesity (O’Dea & Wilson, 2006). Early childhood education programs provide opportune settings to establish healthful attitudes and knowledge about food and nutrition.

Nutrition in Early Childhood Programs

Nationwide there are approximately 15 million children under the age of 6 that are in non-parental childcare programs (Child Care Aware of America, 2012). Specifically, “preschool children enter care as early as six weeks of age and can be in care for as many as 40 hours a week until they reach school age” (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006, p. 145). Consequently, with increasing numbers of children attending child care, these programs contribute immensely to childhood nutrition. Epidemiologic studies have found that preschool experiences

have the potential to significantly determine children’s weight (Maher, Li, Carter, & Johnson, 2008). This paper attempts to better understand the role that early non-parental group care environments have on influencing preschoolers’ nutrition and developing data-driven best practices for nutrition in child care programs.

U.S. Nutrition Policy for Early Childhood Settings

In the U.S., every child care program serving children must be licensed or regulated and, thus, comply with the nutrition standards set by their state licensing regulations, which vary widely from state to state and at best often meet very minimum nutritional standards (Story et al., 2006). Story et al. (2006) reported that in a national study of child care programs, 50% served lunches that had more than 35% of the calories from fat and an average of 13% of the calories from all meals were from saturated fat, over and beyond the United States’ Department of Health and Agriculture’s recommended *Dietary Guidelines*. In addition to excess fat, this study also found that minimal amounts of fruits and vegetables were served. They

found that only “ten states limit foods and beverages of low nutritional value” (Story et al., 2006, p. 159). Moreover, recent statistics in the United States indicate that young children consume enormous amounts of sugar particularly in the form of drinks. More specifically, it is estimated that 44% of young children between the ages of 19 to 24 months drink a sugar-laden beverage daily, and 70% of 2 to 5 year olds consume similar amounts as well (Wang, Bleich, & Gortmaker, 2008). This is problematic because soda and other sugary drinks replace healthier food items that provide vital nutrients such as calcium, iron, and vitamin A, in a developing child’s diet resulting in poorer quality of overall diet. As a result, there should be policies in place to ban sugary drinks in child care programs; however, as will be discussed later, the policy monitoring beverages in pre-elementary schools is minimal at best.

It is important to note the child care programs that participated in the study (Story et al., 2006) were all center based and were required to follow the same meal patterns that both the National Association for the Education of Young Children and the California state licensing standards mandate. In a nutshell, this study found that there is no uniform policy regulating the nutritional standards of non-parental group care settings for young children in the U.S. and the research available points to mediocre food and beverage quality and overall nutritional practices in early care programs. The section to follow will include a detailed analysis of the California state licensing requirements as an example of what states require for nutrition policies in child care programs. A similar analysis could be replicated for any state child care licensing requirements to gain a better understanding of how state policies are fostering healthy nutritional practices in child care centers across the nation.

Document Analysis

The State of California Community Care Licensing

The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) Community Care Licensing Division licenses approximately 13,000 child care centers, providing care for close to 800,000 children (CDSS, 2012). Child care centers are defined as any child care facility, except “family child care home, in which less than 24-hour per day, non-medical care and supervision are provided to children in a group setting” (State of California, Health and Human Services Agency, and Department of Social Services, 2005, p. 7). All child care centers must obtain a license from the CDSS unless they are exempt from licensure. The *CDSS Community Care Licensing Division Manual of Policies and Procedures* contains regulations adopted by the CDSS, other State Departments affecting CDSS programs,

statutes from appropriate codes which govern CDSS programs, and court decisions. The regulations apply to all child care programs regulated by the state of California.

An analysis of the *CDSS Community Care Licensing Division Manual of Policies and Procedures* revealed that while there are licensing regulations with detailed specifications regarding the storage of breast milk, the sanitation of food, requirements for food components and serving size based on the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child Care Food Program and Code of Federal Regulations standards; there is not a single guideline offered regarding how children or teachers should be educated about nutrition. This indicates a big gap in the field in regards to teaching training practices that are affiliated with instilling healthy eating habits in children (**see Table 1**). This study highlights the often

overlooked or miniscule role that nutrition plays in the overall assessment of quality of a child care program.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children Accreditation Regulations

A much more rigorous regulatory system to maintain quality assurance nationwide is offered by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The NAEYC is the world’s largest and most widely recognized organization advocating for young children from birth to age eight (Surr, 2004). The NAEYC first began to accredit child care programs in 1985, basing its criteria on current empirical research, setting the bar high for child care programs. In 2006, the NAEYC accreditation standards were reviewed and a much more rigorous,

Table 1. State of California Child Care Regulations Pertaining to Nutrition

1012227	Food service
1012227.a.1	All food shall be safe and of the quality and in the quantity necessary to meet the needs of the children. Each meal shall include, at a minimum, the amount of food components as specified by Title 7, Code of Federal Regulations. All food shall be selected, stored, prepared and served in a safe and healthful manner.
1012227.2	Where all food is provided by the center, arrangements shall be made so that each child has available at least three meals per day. Not more than 15 hours shall elapse between the third meal of one day and first meal of the following day.
1012227.3	Where meal service within a center is elective, arrangements shall be made to ensure availability of a daily food intake meeting the requirements of (a) (1) above for all children who elect meal service in their admission agreement.
1012227.4	Between meals, snacks shall be available for all children unless the food a child may eat is limited by dietary restrictions prescribed by a physician. Each snack shall include at least one serving from each of two or more of the four major food groups.
102227.5	The following shall be offered daily: (A) Full-day programs shall offer a midmorning and midafternoon snack. (B) Full-day programs shall ensure that each child has a lunch. 1. The child’s authorized representative may send meals and/or snacks for the child. (C) Half-day programs shall offer a midmorning or midafternoon snack.
102227.6	Menus shall be in writing and shall be posted at least one week in advance in an area accessible for review by the child’s authorized representative. Copies of the menus as served shall be dated and kept on file for at least 30 days. Menus shall be made available for review by the child’s authorized representative and the Department upon request.
102227.7	Modified diets prescribed by a child’s physician as a medical necessity shall be provided.
102227.10	Powdered milk shall not be used as a beverage but shall be allowed in cooking and baking. Raw milk, as defined in Division 15 of the California Food and Agricultural Code, shall not be used. Milk shall be pasteurized.

*State of California, Health and Human Services Agency, Department of Social Services (1998, November 1). Manual of policies and procedures, community care licensing division: child care center (Manual Letter NO. CCL-98-11). Retrieved from <http://www.cdss.ca.gov/ord/entres/getinfo/pdf/cccl.pdf>

comprehensive, and research-based NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria took effect. The new standards include 417 criteria within 10 standards. After a comprehensive document analysis of the NAEYC accreditation criteria (including all sub-criteria) that are used to assess child care quality, analysis revealed that 10 out of NAEYC's 417 criteria are devoted to nutrition and the establishment of healthy eating habits for young children (Ritchie, 2006). These 10 criteria were

spread among four out of the ten accreditation standards. These four accreditation standards were Standard 1 Relationships; Standard 2 Curriculum; Standard 3 Teaching; and Standard 5 Health.

While it is encouraging to read about these data driven standards that regulate nutrition practices at NAEYC accredited child care programs, it is also important to note that NAEYC Accreditation is a voluntary process and is not mandatory. As a result, only 8% of all child care in the United States programs

are accredited by the NAEYC (Surr, 2004). Furthermore, in comparison to other nutrition regulations such as state licensing, NAEYC criteria—while only comprising 2% of their total pool of standards—are often more rigorous (see Table 2).

Nutritional Practice Recommendations for Child Care Programs

The Menu

With children spending more time in

Table 2. NAEYC Accreditation Standards and Criteria Pertaining to Nutrition

Standard 1.B.	Building Positive Relationships between Teachers and Children
Standard 1.B.10	Teaching staff never use threats or derogatory remarks and neither withhold nor threaten to withhold food as a form of discipline.
Standard 5.A.	Promoting and Protecting Children's Health and Controlling Infectious Disease
Standard 5.A.02	Unless the program participates in the United States Department of Agriculture's Child and Adult Care Food Program, at least two times a year a registered dietitian or pediatric public health nutritionist evaluates the menus for nutritional content; portion sizes; nationally recommended limits on juice, sugar, sodium, and saturated fats; food service operations; special feeding needs to be met by the program; and procedures used for food brought from home.
Standard 5.B.	Ensuring Children's Nutritional Well-being
Standard 5.B.01	If the program provides food for meals and snacks, the food is prepared, served and stored in accordance with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Child and Adult Care food Program (CACFP) guidelines.
Standard 5.B.06	Clean sanitary drinking water is made available to children throughout the day. (Infants who are fed only human milk do not need to be offered water).
Standard 5.B.11	Teaching staff do not offer solid foods and fruit juices to infants younger than six months of age, unless that practice is recommended by the child's health care provider and approved by families. Sweetened beverages are avoided. If juice (only 100% fruit juice is recommended is served, the amount is limited to no more than four ounces per child daily.
Standard 5.B.13	The program does not feed cow's milk to infants younger than 12 months, and it serves only whole milk to children of ages 12 months to 24 months.
Standard 5.B.16	The program serves meals and snacks at regularly established times. Meals and snacks are at least two hours apart but not more than three hours apart.
Standard 2.K.	Curriculum Content Area for Cognitive Development: Health and Safety
Standard 2.K.01	Children are provided varied opportunities and materials that encourage good health practices such as serving and feeding themselves, rest, good nutrition, exercise, hand washing, and tooth brushing.
Standard 2.K.02	Children are provided varied opportunities and materials to help them learn about nutrition, including identifying sources of food, recognizing, preparing, eating, and valuing healthy foods.
Standard 3.D.	Using Time, Grouping and Routines to Achieve learning Goals
Standard 3.D.07	At snack times, teaching staff sit and eat with children and engage them in conversation. When provided meals are served family style, and teaching staff sit and eat with children and engage them in conversation.

*Ritchie, S. (Ed.). (2006). A Guide to the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standard and Related Accreditation Criteria. Washington, DC: National Association for the Education of Young Children.

non-parental group care, childcare program practice need to share in the responsibility of helping to create healthy eating habits for young children and ensure that children get the nutrition they need. However, as this paper has revealed the majority of child care programs are still struggling to acknowledge the importance of nutrition and nutrition standards.

To begin with, child care programs should give children repeated opportunities to sample healthy new foods (foods that are high in fiber, calcium, and iron-rich, and low in sodium and sugar) in positive contexts so that some of the foods offered will become preferred and accepted. The importance of exposure to new foods and how repeated exposure can alter initial rejection to acceptance underscores the critical role that childcare providers play in choosing the foods presented to children. For instance, when our school revamped its nutrition standards, one early childhood classroom teacher when asked what she learned about nutrition based on the school's nutrition program, attested to this stating, "It has reinforced the idea, for me, that often times it just takes multiple exposures and peer or adult modeling to encourage children to try new things," (T. Hayes, personal communication, June 8, 2017) Another teacher when asked, if the new lunch and snack menus at our school changed their personal eating habits responded; "Yes, actually they have, and I have even tried to make a few things that I have seen here at school!" (J. Graham, personal communication, May 31, 2017). An administrator from our school agreed stating, "I have been exposed to new foods that I did not know I would like and have now included as part of my diet such as tofu," (G. Lopez, personal communication, May 21, 2017). Another administrator while she did not express a change in her diet per se, remarked, "The lunches have not changed what I know, but have validated that children can enjoy a variety of healthy food including lettuce and spinach" (T. Hayes, personal communication, June 8, 2017). Often times, parents have inquired about specific recipes because they want to provide the same type of food at home. As one parent stated, "I love that the lunches and snacks are made from wholesome, non-processed ingredients without artificial colors and flavors. It makes me happy to

see children eating healthy food because it gives them balanced and sustained energy," (J. Graham, personal communication, May, 31, 2016). This has also appeared to be true for the children as well. Appreciation for new healthy food choices was also seen in the children's responses. As one 5-year-old, when asked what they liked about the nutritious lunches, stated, "Well, I like that every day we get to have surprising foods and sometimes we get to have new foods. Snack is really good because when you dip the polenta in the polenta sauce, it's really good," (J. Graham, personal communication, May 31, 2017).

Moreover, an often unnoticed but critical element of a child care program's menu is the beverages that are served at mealtimes and throughout the day. This paper recommends that early child care programs take the nutritional content one step above and beyond California State licensing and NAEYC accreditation standards and create policies that refrain from serving children any form of juice throughout the day and rather offer children milk or water and when available, fresh whole fruit instead of juice.

The Mealtime Experience

In consideration of the associative learning process, child care programs should aim to create a positive atmosphere while offering healthy snack choices. Acknowledging that mealtimes are a social occasion for children, child care programs should offer snack and lunch in a pleasant, aesthetically pleasing context. While children in group care spend their days amongst one another, rarely do they gather together for a shared purpose. Family style dining is an exception to that. This way of dining, where a group of children come together to eat a shared meal, often tends to be a more culturally accurate representation of how people eat and therefore a very valid way to approach mealtimes in group care settings. It is recommended that children as soon as they are able to get into and out of a chair on their own are invited to sit at the table together. Should children over or under serve themselves, caregivers should be seated with them and help scaffold the process. If there is only one bowl of a particular food available, hence, children practice waiting with adult guidance as well as learn to pass the bowl to their peers when they are done serving themselves. Among other things, this

particular practice allows children to practice their emerging abilities of perspective taking (American Academy of Pediatrics & American Public Health Association, 2011).

Programs should pay close attention to the context in which food is presented to children. The mealtime experience should mimic a collective, family dining experience more than an individualized, cafeteria atmosphere. Consequently, program policy should encourage family style dining and pay close attention to the context in which food is presented to children.

Staff Training

To support the development of healthy eating habits for children, early child care programs should give staff regular and consistent training on research based best practices for caregiver interactions and nutritional content. For example, programs should aim to give young children repeated opportunities to sample healthy foods in a positive, non-coercive context. When adults coerce children to eat a food and as a result receive a tangible reward, children are less prone to like that food later. For instance, if an adult encourages a child to eat their carrots and if they do so they will get a sticker. Accordingly, asking a child to eat other food first can create a coercive or negative context, which can then influence the child to dislike foods. Thus, while caregivers should monitor the foods that the children are served, it is important to note they should not choose the order in which the children eat them.

As cited previously, research has found that "imposing stringent controls can increase preferences for high-fat, energy-dense foods, perhaps causing children's normal internal cues to self-regulate hunger and satiety to become unbalanced" (Gortmaker et al., 2006, p. 171). Whereas early childhood program best practices should allow caregivers to have clearly defined roles in offering food to the children while allowing the child to maintain the responsibility for deciding what and how much they would like to eat. A child, for instance may want repeated servings of rice but a caregiver may intervene and bring to attention to the fact that they have other choices on their plate as well. Caregivers should strive to strike a balance between controlling the foods that are offered to children while allowing children to choose which foods and how

much they want to taste. In terms of lessons learned from implementing such practices, one teacher aptly stated, “Something that I am more cognizant of now is serving portions. I was raised to eat everything on my plate. Another thing that I have learned is to have smaller meals every three hours just like the children” (G. Lopez, personal conversation, May 31, 2017).

Finally, just as it is important for caregivers to be trained on and know the importance of healthy nutrition, it is important for early childhood pedagogical practices to include conversations with children about the importance of establishing healthy eating practices so that children understand what it means to be healthy and how food relates to health. The following children all articulated their understanding of healthy eating habits:

“Healthy means that if you eat like broccoli and carrots and salmon and healthy stuff you can grow and grow and grow and then you can be mom and dads and then you can go on scary rides and watch scary movies and stuff. It means you can’t get cavities.” (4-year old)

“I know a lot about junk food. Junk food is like all candy. When you eat too much candy you get sick and you get a fever because if you get a fever you don’t feel good and you don’t get to go to school.” (5-year-old)

“I think healthy means like eating stuff that’s good for your body. Foods that is healthy for you is good for your body and makes you get bigger.” (4-year-old)

Making solid foundational links between food and health early on will go a long way in establishing healthy eating habits at an early age and help children develop into adults that make—at the very least—informed decisions about the foods they choose to consume.

Conclusion

Early childhood programs need to heighten their focus on instilling healthy eating habits in young children. Subsequently, it is recommended that early child care programs add the aforementioned systemic data driven measures regarding children’s access to high quality nutrition in the form of menu specifications, the mealtime environment and staff training on interactions and nutritional content to ensure that children are served healthy, nutritious food

and beverages during their time in group care. Good nutrition in school improves a child’s learning ability and overall welfare and, ultimately, determines the nutritional trajectory for a child’s lifetime.

ANI SHABAZIAN has been in the field of early childhood education for over 20 years. Her experience includes teaching, research and administration at university-based programs. Ani received her undergraduate BAs (History & Psychology) from UCLA, her Masters from Harvard University’s Graduate School of Education in Human Developmental Psychology, and finally her MA/PhD in Urban Schooling from UCLA. Currently, Ani serves a dual appointment at Loyola Marymount University. She received her tenure in 2015 as Associate Professor in the LMU School of Education and she also serves as the Director of the University’s Children’s Center.

CAROLINE LI SOGA has been in the early childhood education field for over 20 years. Her experience includes teaching, administration, and coaching at university-based programs, Head Start, and Charter Schools. She received her Masters degree in Early Childhood Education from Loyola Marymount University. Caroline is currently working on her doctoral degree in Educational Psychology at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

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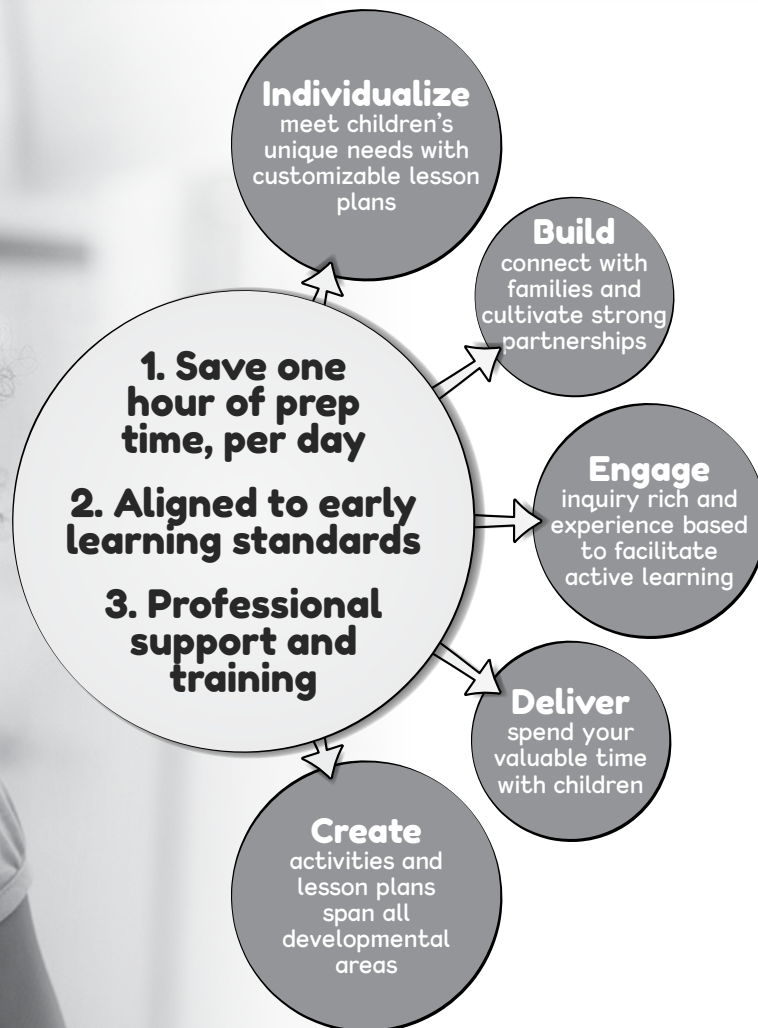


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The Brain Body Connection: Advocating Physical Activity in Our Schools

BY ELIZABETH FRANXMAN & JAESOOK L. GILBERT, PH.D.

Ben is in the fourth grade. When he practices his weekly spelling words or runs through his multiplication tables, he has to pace around the kitchen to do it. For example, he tells himself as he buzzes from the door to the stove and back again, “Four times four is sixteen. Four times five is twenty...” There are many other children who are just like Ben. Ben represents many children for whom movement facilitates their learning. Physical movement actually supports brain development. Gross motor play enhances children’s emotional well-being (Howard & McInnes, 2012). Exercise helps facilitate cognitive function (something that Ben was experiencing), and regular engagement in physical activity provides an all-around boost to motor performance (Krombholz, 2012; Tomporowski, Davis, Miller & Naglieri, 2008). For Ben and many other children just like him, exercise is not just something that is nice to have more of, but for whom exercise is *needed* in order for him to function properly. The authors in this paper will discuss how brain and body are powerfully connected and provide strategies for intentional integration of physical activities within the school day.

Physical Activity and Learning

The universal sequence of physical development in children enables specific, localized body movements and actions. This ability to move and manipulate tools provide children a means for problem-solving and exploration of their world, resulting in learning. Thus, young children learn when they are actively engaged and physically manipulating hands-on materials. For theorists such as Jean Piaget, Maria Montessori, and Howard Gardner, actions children take to problem solve and adapt their solutions is critical to children’s learning (Donaldson, 1978; Gardner, 1993; Montessori, 1966) and physical movement is a necessity for children to take action. As illustrated by Jean Piaget’s (1952) title for the first stage of cognitive

development, the sensorimotor stage, children under two years use their five senses and movement to process their world. During Piaget’s preoperational stage, preschool and early elementary school age children still need to physically manipulate concrete objects through fine and gross motor skills (small and large muscle, respectively) to make sense of new concepts and language. Gardner (2011) also noted the importance of movement in his categories of multiple intelligences. According to the Institute for Learning Styles Research (<http://www.learningstyles.org>), the kinesthetic learning style is one of the seven perceptual learning styles. A kinesthetic learner is most effective in gaining new information when he/she can move around and physically touch or manipulate objects because the process of moving helps the learner focus on the instruction. Maria Montessori (1967a) recognized the integral nature of movement for young children’s learning when she stated, “only by action can the child learn” (p. 172) and identified movement as one of her sensitive periods for early childhood age children (1967b). Since academic learning emphasizes visual and auditory learning (i.e., children are expected to watch and listen to their teachers during instruction time), children who are tactile or kinesthetic learners tend to not perform as well in school (Reiff, 1992).

Physical activity or exercise positively impacts children’s intellectual learning and executive function (Ayhan, Aki, Aral, & Kayihan, 2007; Tomporowski, Davis, Miler, & Naglieri, 2008; Wassenberg et al., 2005). Children gained in early literacy skills when they were provided with a total of 30 minutes of moderate level of physical activity (Kirk, Vizcarra, Looney, & Kirk, 2014). In conclusion, physical activity programs in schools can foster improvement in children’s cognitive learning and academic success (Sibley & Etnier, 2003; Taras, 2005; Trudeau & Shepard, 2008).

Opportunities to engage in physical activity may heighten children’s social and emotional development as children can learn about the space around them, how much space they occupy in relationship to others near them, and how to negotiate social rules within the space with others, along with language acquisition associated with movement, time, direction, and orientation (Ben-Ari, 2002; Jensen, 2005; Shoal, 2006, 2010; Tversky, 2008). When children take turns, follow rules and interact with another child or a group of children during physical play such as rough-and-tumble or soccer, they become more socially aware and develop a sense of belonging (emotionally and literally as a member of that soccer or baseball team). Children feel a sense of pride in their physical accomplishments as they begin to master various movements such as running or throwing. Children’s discovery of how to become better at jumping or throwing reinforces their physical skills and increases their self-esteem as well as their desire to share these experiences (verbally and physically) with others (Leppo & Davis, 2005). Physical activity, especially aerobic exercise such as running, also benefits children’s biological health. Vigorous exercise gets oxygen into children’s brains (Wittberg, Northrup, & Cottrell, 2012), helps with emotional stability (Basch, 2011), and controls weight gain which reduces potential negative medical conditions associated with childhood obesity (Institute of Medicine, 2011; Jago et al., 2005; Klesges & Klesges, 1995).

Finally, the studies by Krombholz (2012) and Reilly et al. (2011) indicate regular engagement in physical activities enhances motor performance (body coordination, physical fitness, and dexterity). Children’s motor skill ability helps “in establishing a child’s reputation among peers and in the development of self-esteem and therefore increasing confidence” (Krombholz, 2012, p. 929). Therefore, physical play facilitates children’s executive functioning, it enhances

literacy learning, it improves children’s emotional well-being, and it enhances motor performance.

Physical Activity and Children’s Motor Development

Gagen and Getchell (2006) describe the progression of motor development for young children as reflexive (womb to six months), rudimentary like rolling over, sitting, creeping and standing (six months to age 2), to fundamental phase (age 2 to 7 or 8) where children practice their locomotor (e.g., running) and stability movements (e.g., twist, bend and hang upside down) along with improving their ability to control objects (e.g., strike, kick and throw). Graham, Holt-Hale and Parker (2001) delineated movement possibilities during Gagen and Getchell’s (2006) fundamental phase, which the authors slightly modified as a checklist

to facilitate teachers thinking about physical activity opportunities for their children during this phase in Table 1: “Movement Possibilities For Children To Explore” below. Each movement below present a different way to execute a large muscle physical movement within the Gagen and Getchell’s (2006) fundamental phase (ages 2-7), and the checklist helps prompt for teachers to have their students engage in different movements (i.e., traveling, jumping, balancing, kicking, throwing, catching, volleying, dribbling, and striking). For example, a teacher can have their students stop every 15-20 minutes and catch a rolling ball at the first break, catch a ball from a skilled teacher (i.e., teacher) at the next break; catch a ball in a drop-catch sequence at the next break; then catch a ball by tossing to self at the last break.

These movements from above are what young children should be working on

mastering and, typically, children would acquire them through the normal course of play. In the past, children spent ten hours a day engaged in active play, mostly outside, thus these skills developed naturally. Now, however, teachers must plan to intentionally incorporate physical activity into children’s school days and daily lives. A teacher can use the checklist (**Table 1**) to keep track of opportunity for physical skills for their students by asking “What did we do yesterday? What kind of movement have we not done yet? What kind of movements have we not worked on in a while?”

Addressing Barriers to Physical Activity Integration

The first author interviewed six teachers representing preschool to third grade in the fall of 2014 and found that the biggest challenge they faced when trying to incor-

Table 1: “Movement Possibilities For Children To Explore”

PRECONTROL PROFICIENCY LEVEL (BEGINNER) CHECKLIST	
<p>Traveling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> in general space <input type="checkbox"/> with different locomotor movements <input type="checkbox"/> in different ways <input type="checkbox"/> with imagery <input type="checkbox"/> in rope pathways 	<p>Catching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> a rolling ball <input type="checkbox"/> from a skilled thrower <input type="checkbox"/> in a drop-catch sequence <input type="checkbox"/> by tossing to self
<p>Jumping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> and landing using different patterns <input type="checkbox"/> for distance <input type="checkbox"/> for height <input type="checkbox"/> over a swinging rope 	<p>Volleying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> by striking balloons in the air <input type="checkbox"/> by striking a balloon forward <input type="checkbox"/> by striking with different body parts <input type="checkbox"/> by striking lightweight objects
<p>Balancing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> on different bases of support <input type="checkbox"/> on a wide base of support <input type="checkbox"/> in different body shapes <input type="checkbox"/> by traveling on low gymnastic equipment <input type="checkbox"/> by traveling and stopping in balanced positions <input type="checkbox"/> on boards 	<p>Dribbling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> by bouncing a ball down and catching it <input type="checkbox"/> by bouncing a ball down repeatedly (dribbling) <input type="checkbox"/> continuously <input type="checkbox"/> and walking
<p>Kicking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> a stationary ball from a fixed position <input type="checkbox"/> a ball at large targets <input type="checkbox"/> after approaching a stationary ball <input type="checkbox"/> the ball by tapping (as in soccer) 	<p>Striking (rackets and paddles)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> balloons (lightweight paddle) <input type="checkbox"/> a suspended ball
<p>Throwing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> a yarn ball against the wall <input type="checkbox"/> at a large target 	<p>Striking (long-handled instruments)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> a stationary ball (hockey/golf) <input type="checkbox"/> a puck/ball towards large targets <input type="checkbox"/> a ball off a batting tee (bats) <input type="checkbox"/> a puck scooted towards a goal <input type="checkbox"/> a puck pushed while traveling slowly

porate physical activity during school day is time. Teachers felt pressure to have their students academically ready and were afraid to reduce any academic time even when all six teachers believed in the importance of physical activity opportunities for their children and positive relationship between physical activity and academic learning. The concern for academic time or lack of time was evident in some of the teachers' reasons for why physical activity integration during class would be difficult. These included having two half day classes without any time for

recess, balancing Common Core, IEPs and learning, as well as managing issues with too many students and not enough adult help. In fact, over three-quarters of school principals throughout the United States report that taking away recess from students is a common classroom management strategy in schools (Turner, Chaloupka, Chriqui, & Sandoval, 2012).

One strategy for time management is to be proactive in preventing situations that promote problematic behavior during transition periods. Teachers can look at pos-

sible ideas on the Internet. Another option might be to play air guitar to a song on the SmartBoard or a CD player if her class just seemed distracted and needing to "get their sillies out". There are many more brain breaks like these each designed to be flexible to the needs of the classroom.

Another barrier to lack of physical activity integration in school may be due to the differences in teachers' perceptions of what actually constitutes physical activity. As explained in above sections of this paper (Table 1 in particular), physical activity consists of

Table 1 (continued): "Movement Possibilities For Children To Explore"

CONTROL PROFICIENCY LEVEL (SKILLED) CHECKLIST	
<p>Traveling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> using different locomotor patterns (run, leap, hop, skip, gallop, slide) <input type="checkbox"/> with music <input type="checkbox"/> an obstacle course <input type="checkbox"/> in different pathways <input type="checkbox"/> at different/challenging speeds 	<p>Catching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> in different places on the body <input type="checkbox"/> with a scoop <input type="checkbox"/> the rebound in throwing against a wall <input type="checkbox"/> and throwing with a partner
<p>Jumping</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> and land using basic patterns (2 feet to 1 foot, 2 feet to 2 feet) <input type="checkbox"/> a standing long jump <input type="checkbox"/> over low obstacles, hoops <input type="checkbox"/> rhythmically <input type="checkbox"/> with a self-turned rope <input type="checkbox"/> forming a body shape during flight 	<p>Volleying</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> by striking a ball non-continuously with different body parts <input type="checkbox"/> in striking a ball upward, underhand <input type="checkbox"/> in striking a ball toward a wall, underhand <input type="checkbox"/> to the wall, overhand <input type="checkbox"/> to the wall, overhand <input type="checkbox"/> to a partner, overhand <input type="checkbox"/> by playing Keep It Up
<p>Balancing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> with a counterbalance <input type="checkbox"/> with a stationary balance on equipment <input type="checkbox"/> with inverted balances <input type="checkbox"/> in traveling on a large apparatus <input type="checkbox"/> on a balance sequence <input type="checkbox"/> on stilts <input type="checkbox"/> on balance boards 	<p>Dribbling</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> all the time <input type="checkbox"/> at different heights with the body in different positions <input type="checkbox"/> in different places about the body while still <input type="checkbox"/> and traveling around obstacles
<p>Kicking</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> on the ground <input type="checkbox"/> in the air <input type="checkbox"/> for distance <input type="checkbox"/> to a distance zone <input type="checkbox"/> to targets <input type="checkbox"/> a rolling ball to a partner while still 	<p>Striking (rackets and paddles)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> up and <input type="checkbox"/> against the wall <input type="checkbox"/> on both sides of the paddle <input type="checkbox"/> to wall targets <input type="checkbox"/> a ball rebounding from a wall <input type="checkbox"/> continuously
<p>Throwing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> overhand, underhand, or sidearm <input type="checkbox"/> overhand at a stationary target <input type="checkbox"/> underhand to hoops <input type="checkbox"/> a Frisbee <input type="checkbox"/> for distance <input type="checkbox"/> and catching with a partner 	<p>Striking (long-handled instruments)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> a stationary ball on the ground <input type="checkbox"/> a ball into the air <input type="checkbox"/> for distance <input type="checkbox"/> suspended objects <input type="checkbox"/> while traveling, changing paths <input type="checkbox"/> after throwing ball into the air <input type="checkbox"/> a pitched ball

vigorous exercise or large muscle play (e.g., running, jumping, climbing, swinging). Two teachers interviewed, however, thought simply taking a walk down the hall during transition to specials or just being able to move around the classroom between centers or learning stations constituted physical activity (i.e., vigorous exercise). Children move during their time at school; however, just moving in and of itself is not as effective in helping children with their self-regulation and learning (Kirk, Vizcarra, Looney, & Kirk, 2014; Wittberg, Northrup, & Cottrell, 2012). Many preschool teachers incorporate finger play when singing during large groups to help “antsy” children calm down and focus on the upcoming large group instruction. Frances Carlson (2011) modified “I’m A Little Teapot,” a music and movement standby for early care and education teachers, to “I’m a Little Popcorn” to incorporate more vigorous big body movements. In Carlson’s “I’m a Little Popcorn” version, children huddle, jump up and down like popcorn one at a time, stand still, then continue jumping. Another strategy for getting children to exercise during center or station time is using technology. In the classrooms with SmartBoards, teachers can connect the SmartBoard to their smart phones or iPad and play physical activity apps for children. One of the apps is called “FitQuest Lite” <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/fitquest-lite/id390974713?mt=8> (JogHop, 2010) where children help a little squirrel get around by moving. When the student holds the iPad or smart phone and jogs, the squirrel jogs when the squirrel needs to jump over a rock, the student jumps. Also, the student ducks when the squirrel needs to duck. For classrooms with less technology, teachers can provide directions for children to follow instead. This would be similar to “We are going on a bear hunt” but actually moving rather than remaining seated or stationary.

The primary focus for integrating physical activity is to have all or as many of the children in the classroom participate in the exercise. Traditional movement games like “Duck Duck Goose” or “Tisket and Tasket” allow only one child or two at most to engage in large muscle movements. Typically most of the children are just sitting during “Duck Duck Goose”, and only two children (current “it” and one child that got picked by “it”) get to move at time. An adapted

version of “Duck Duck Goose” (National Association for Education of Young Children, 2010) gets everyone moving by having children stand in a circle and walk in place as well as instituting a rule that the child who is “it” chooses someone who has not yet been the goose to ensure that everyone gets to move. The chosen child (i.e., goose) can then walk, run, or skip around the circle once or twice before choosing the next goose. A more active version of the “Telephone” game (Dow, 2010) is another way to sustain a combination of large and small muscle movements. The teacher would begin by saying, “We are going to play an imitation game with our bodies. This game is similar to follow the leader only we are going to stay standing here in our circle. First, one person does a movement, then the next person copies that movement, then the person after them copies the same movement until we have gone all the way around the circle and everyone has had a turn. I will start.” Subsequently, the teacher gets the telephone chain started with something simple like crossing and uncrossing arms. The first child watches, turns to his/her neighbor, and performs the same movement. Children pass it along until it goes all the way around the circle. Once it comes back around, the first child comes up with a new movement for the rest to imitate. The teacher can repeat until everyone gets a turn to choose a movement (if time permits). With older students, all the movements can be reviewed together, in order, adding music, so it becomes a dance.

Conclusion

Physical activity appears to be undervalued in schools, and many students are not engaging in nearly enough big body play despite research connecting the brain and the body as well as the positive impact of vigorous, aerobic play on children’s ability to learn. Some causes for lack of exercise or physical play are teachers being under pressure to do many tasks with limited resources; the tendency of recess being used as a punishment; a lack of training for teachers, inappropriate or insufficient equipment to provide their students developmentally appropriate movement education (Gagen & Getchell, 2006), and other factors such as easy access to video games, television, and the internet competing for children’s time and desire. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2008) recommends a

minimum of one hour of physical play for children every day. Gallahue and Ozmun (2002) state that children who experience success in physical activity will have mastered the three levels of development (i.e., initial, elementary and mature). Therefore, integration of appropriate active play and exercise is critical to children’s success in school. The current practice in schools of reducing outside time or removing recess does not foster love for gross motor movement, especially vigorous exercise. Opportunities for free play for some children are not as prevalent, and even if children do engage in free play, some children may not choose to engage in physical activity or encounter setbacks in mastering proficiency in physical movement. Physical activity is vital to proper cognitive development. Teachers, especially those working with young children, must intentionally present these experiences to their students and help them and their children overcome the attitude: gross motor “play” is a treat. The research and child development theories support the importance of the brain-body connection; divorcing the body from the brain can negatively impact children’s physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral development.

ELIZABETH FRANXMAN is a therapist for children with autism in Indianapolis, Indiana. She was previously a preschool special education teacher in both Kentucky and Indiana.

JAESOOK GILBERT is a professor of Early Childhood Education Program (Birth-Kindergarten) at Northern Kentucky University. She has been a director, classroom teacher, special education facilitator, and a consultant to children’s programs and family engagement programs within the field of early care and education.

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The Power to ROAR: Reaching Out to All Readers by Using Shared Storybook Reading to Cultivate Self-Efficacy and Social-Emotional Growth

BY VIVIAN GONSALVES, ED.S., KRISTI CHEYNEY, M.ED.,
JULIE BADER, M.ED., & SHAUNTÉ DUGGINS, M. ED.

Consider this excerpt from a book discussion about Maurice Sendak's (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are* taking place in Mrs. Channing's pre-kindergarten classroom.

Mrs. Channing: What did you think of Max in the beginning of the story?

Clara (student): He was bad; he was not listening.

Mrs. Channing: So when you don't listen you are bad?

Alex (student): He is not bad, like in jail. He just wants to play, play, play! He got in trouble and was sad.

Mrs. Channing: Do you think Max felt powerful when his mom sent him to his room?

Alex: Not powerful like superman.

Mrs. Channing: What does it look like when someone is powerful?

Felix (student): Strong, with big muscles.

Mrs. Channing: Does everyone agree that you have to have big muscles to be powerful? How about this momma bird? [Mrs. Channing shows a picture of a bird feeding her young.]

Clara: She's sweet! She went to find food in the snow for her babies.

Mrs. Channing: That must have been hard work! The momma bird doesn't have big muscles but she can do powerful things to help her family. Max was much smaller than the creatures in the book, wasn't he? But was he powerful in other ways?

Felix: He was powerful with his words! He told the monsters to be still and they listened.

Mrs. Channing: You are right Felix. There are many ways to be powerful. One thing that makes me powerful is knowing how to read because I can learn about the world. Have you ever felt powerful?

A story like *Where the Wild Things Are* could

be used as a springboard for multiple learning goals. In this example, Mrs. Channing has set the stage for a developmentally appropriate lesson around self-efficacy within the context of a beloved story. In this discussion, we see how Mrs. Channing uses the character of Max to teach the abstract concept of "power" with the purpose of developing self-efficacy in her young students. In this classic story, Max, the main character, is confronted with a difficult situation where he could have felt powerless after being sent to his room for punishment. However, Max found a way to express his personal power despite his circumstances. This book discussion took place in Mrs. Channing's classroom, who uses shared storybook reading as a tool to build relationships with all students, guide them into understanding relationships that are part of their everyday lives, and to help them develop social-emotional skills (see Figure 1).

Shared storybook reading (Justice & Kaderavek, 2002) is a book-reading strategy that emphasizes equal and reciprocal interactions between the adult reader and child. Rather than reading TO children, adults read WITH them interactively. These experiences can happen one-on-one, with small groups of children, or as Ms. Channing used the strategy, during whole class instruction. Mrs. Channing reads to her class often and uses shared storybook reading experiences to deepen and extend language interactions with children and to address her state's required learning standards across both the cognitive and social-emotional domains.

Self-Efficacy and the Potential of "I did it!"

Self-efficacy is an abstract idea that can be difficult for young children to understand, though most have experienced it in one

Figure 1. Ms. Channing teaches self-efficacy through shared storybook reading
Photo courtesy of K. Cheyney-Collante.



form or another in everyday life events. Self-efficacy is the ability to affect change in one's world or to have control over one's choices despite external circumstances. For example, a child may not be able to choose when the class begins Circle Time, but she may be able to choose where she sits on the carpet. When a child completes a challenging activity like putting together a difficult puzzle and she says, "I did it!" that is self-efficacy in action. Teachers can choose to highlight these events throughout the day by embedding opportunities for mastery. "I did it" moments can be incorporated in everyday routines as well as in planned instructional activities.

Without a sense of self-efficacy, children are less likely to become independent, confident learners. Conversely, when children understand that they are powerful over many aspects of their lives, they can develop age-appropriate self-regulatory skills alongside personal responsibility and self-acceptance (Bailey, 2011b). In the opening example, Mrs. Channing uses a familiar story to open discussion about these abstract concepts. In the days that follow this short excerpt, Mrs. Channing will plan whole group, small group, and one-on-one activities that deepen her student's understanding of self-efficacy, while eliciting opportunities for students to identify, experience, and practice examples of self-efficacy in their own lives.

Self-efficacy is important for children to develop. Bandura (1993) noted that one of the main goals of education should be to provide children with the "intellectual tools, self-beliefs, and self-regulatory capabilities to educate themselves throughout their lifetime" (p.136). People with low self-efficacy toward a particular task are likely to avoid attempting it. In contrast, those with high self-efficacy are more likely to both attempt the task and to sustain their hard work because they believe their efforts are likely to be rewarded with success. Teachers of young children play an integral role in helping to develop a sense of self-efficacy for the children in their care because of their consistent presence during teachable moments. When teachers provide opportunities for children to visualize themselves as efficacious individuals – such as in Ms. Channing's shared storybook reading – it allows children to develop a sense of the many things they can do as well as the value in persisting when a task is challenging. Us-

ing books is an ideal way for teachers and students to engage in these types of reflective language interactions.

The development of social-emotional competency is intimately linked to language development (Wersch, 2008). Young children develop a sense of self-efficacy in conjunction with the cultivation of the self-regulatory skills required for navigating their transition to Kindergarten. Language plays a central role in this cultivation, as everyday language experiences can guide young children from being "regulated" by adults to being regulated by their own internal voice (i.e., Cheyney, Bettini, & Wang, 2013; Wersch, 2008). Consequently, early childhood educators can use the same responsive language interactions that promote early language and literacy development to promote a child's expanding sense of personal power. In essence, storybook readings and all of the myriad extensions on language that can occur in the context of connected oral language experiences, capitalize on these linkages across developmental domains. Moreover, teachers can use discussions about self-efficacy and power as a springboard for more advanced social-emotional concepts and behaviors. For example, skills of "self-advocacy," such as selecting personal goals and planning steps to achieve them, are critical for children to develop early, especially children with disabilities (Kleinert, Harrison, Fisher, & Kleinert, 2010).

Teachers are faced with many challenges as they seek to make curriculum accessible to increasingly diverse groups of students. When teachers create space for these responsive language interactions around engaging, high quality storybooks, *all children* can gain access to pivotal cognitive and social-emotional learning goals. In this article we explore ways to use shared storybook reading to develop social-emotional skills in young students, and specifically the abstract concept of self-efficacy.

Getting the Most Out of One Little Book

The uniquely interactional nature of book sharing (Conrad, Gong, Sipp, & Wright, 2004; Nichols, Rupley, Webb-Johnson, & Tlusty, 2000) provides an ideal opportunity to start developing a sense of self-efficacy in young learners. Fortunately, though some children may come to school having already acquired a sense of powerlessness, either

because of a language difference, difficult home circumstance, learning delay or other challenges, self-efficacy can be developed (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Indeed, teachers can be valuable change agents in this development (Bailey, 2015; Collins, 2006). As children experiment with and master a variety of skills across many domains, they learn that they have power over their own thoughts and actions.

Because a young child's mastery in the social-emotional domain forms the foundation for skills across all developmental domains, it is a critical key to unlocking a child's sense of self-efficacy. Teachers can facilitate this process by explicitly teaching and then reinforcing social-emotional skills such as: confidence; the capacity to develop good relationships with peers and adults; concentration and persistence on challenging tasks; effective self-identification and communication of emotions; the ability to listen to instructions and be attentive; and social problem solving skills (Hemmeter, Ostrosky, & Fox, 2006). Though this list may seem daunting, all of these skills can be expertly addressed through shared storybook reading (Wasik & Bond, 2001), an activity on which teachers already spend moderate to considerable amount of time (Baumann, Hoffman, Durry-Hester & Ro, 2000; Hoffman, Roser, & Battle, 1993) and that both children and teachers enjoy (Teale, 2003).

Why Shared Storybook Reading?

Using shared storybook reading activities presents many benefits for young children (i.e., Mol, Bus, & de Jong, 2009; Swanson et al., 2011; van Kleeck, Woude, & Hammett, 2006) including young children with disabilities (i.e., Justice & Kaderavek, 2002). Shared storybook reading can promote powerful growth in vocabulary and social competence simultaneously (Nichols et al., 2000). This growth can be achieved in a manner that respects each child's unique funds of knowledge, or the unique knowledge students acquire from their family and cultural background (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2013).

Just the simple act of reading together encourages students to read more (Krashen, 2004), which is in itself an empowering skill. However, children who engage more often in analytical reading activities with explicit instructional approaches have more

access to new vocabulary and knowledge about the world. For example, in a study of explicit instruction of vocabulary during shared storybook opportunities, Coyne et.al, (2004) found that all students made significant growth in their understanding of new vocabulary taught as compared to children in control groups who did not participate in this type of instruction. Even more encouraging is that the effects were even greater for students who had lower receptive vocabulary scores prior to the study. The benefits related to language growth go beyond learning new vocabulary. Additionally, by incorporating book-sharing activities teachers provide an opportunity for students to develop oral language skills and comprehension, as well as an opportunity to gain a deep understanding and appreciation for others and for themselves (Conrad et al., 2004).

In shared storybook reading, narratives that are “grounded in the lives of students,” allow classroom communities to celebrate the literacy competence of all students (Powell, 2011, p.7- 8). When stories map onto broader concepts such as culture, race, geographical location, socioeconomic, school policies, and other diverse topics (Algozzine, Obiakor, Nelson, & Bakken, 2008) young children can explore these complex issues using relatable stories found in authentic literature (Conrad et al., 2004). Furthermore, Nichols and colleagues (2000) point out that, once students are engaged in literature activities where they encounter characters that are alike and different from themselves, they learn that actions are guided by emotions. The interactions between the reader and these characters makes any literacy related activity a social activity (Gallardo, 2011). While teachers talk explicitly about the problems presented to these characters, children can interact with situations that mirror the challenges encountered in real life

(Collins, 2006; McGee & Schickedanz, 2007).

Using Shared Story Book Reading for Social Emotional Growth

A shared storybook reading activity is more than a read-aloud. It is a literacy event (Street & Martin-Jones, 2000), where teacher and children engage in the story through meaningful language interactions.

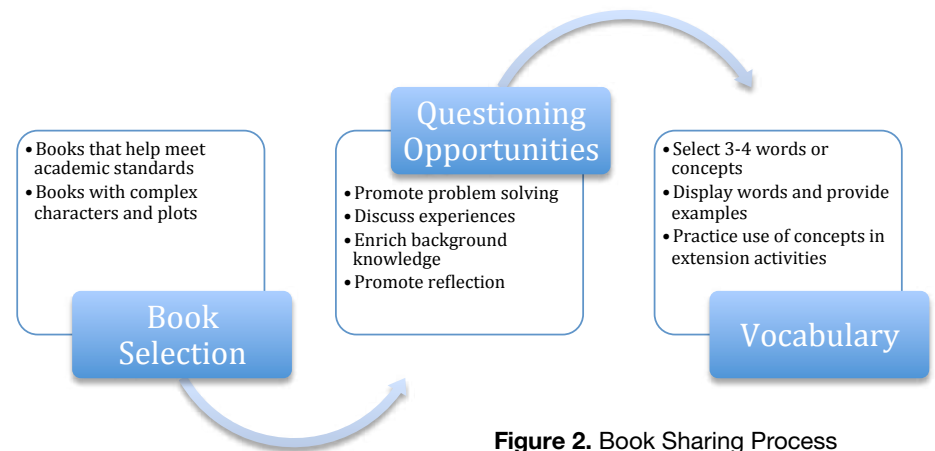


Figure 2. Book Sharing Process

Image courtesy of V. Gonsalves.

High quality shared storybook readings include several strategies beyond simply reading the text (Wasik & Bond, 2001), such as preselecting purposeful vocabulary and engaging students in using comprehension strategies like open-ended questioning and reflective discussion. Shared storybook reading can be done in large group settings but also in small groups or one-on-one. Planning ahead for how a book is shared with children versus how one will simply read a book to children, allows you to capitalize on the language interactions and discussion a book can spark (Dickinson, McCabe & Anastasopoulos, 2003).

Getting Started

We suggest that teachers consider book selection, questioning, and choosing vocabulary and extensions, prior to conducting shared storybook reading (see Figure 2). Many teachers are probably already quite skilled in certain aspects of the suggestions discussed below. However, we propose that shared storybook reading activities can become even more effective if teachers consider ways these suggestions might help them enhance the way they read stories with children with the specific goal of building self-efficacy and social-emotional skills.

Book selection. Book selection plays an integral role in how effective the shared reading experience is for young children and impacts how teachers interact with children. Thoughtful selection of storybooks can help support state required academic and social standards (Gallardo, 2011), particularly as a supplement to the curriculum already used in the classroom. The books selected should feature characters that are both similar and

different than the students in the classroom (Nichols et al., 2000). The best characters are complex and driven by specific feelings within plot structures that require them to deal with the problems and enjoyments of life in distinctive ways. As the heroes and heroines react and cope with life events, children can see how the character’s choices relate to their own experiences. Features of a good book include incorporating high literary quality. Such books include the literary elements of plot, setting, character, theme, and interesting language. Students’ needs and interests should guide book selection (Fisher, Flood, Lapp, & Frey, 2004). In a study of highly effective literacy teachers, Fisher and colleagues (2004) found that these teachers carefully selected books for shared storybook reading activities to fulfill this purpose by engaging students in discussions on how the plots related to their life situations and explicitly discussing why they were reading a particular book.

Questioning. Engaging with students in conversations about the plot and characters’ problem solving can also provide teachers with insight about students’ lives and experiences. In the questioning process, teachers can gain an understanding of the student’s background knowledge and current experiences outside and inside of school. In book sharing activities, children engage in questioning that deepens their understanding of the reading process, but that also builds upon their background knowledge even while they develop new schema and vocabulary (Conrad et al., 2004). Children try to make sense of the world and social relationships in the form of inquiry (Gallardo, 2011).

Looking back to our opening example,



Figure 3. Children roaring in an engaged discussion of “power”

Photo courtesy of K. Cheney-Collante.

Mrs. Channing followed a questioning progression that was led by the students’ beliefs and misconceptions. In these types of interactions the teacher acts as a facilitator of learning by probing students and challenging them to think critically about what is happening in the story. Mrs. Channing used questioning as a way to lead students to the understanding of different ways that one could be powerful. She did this by carefully crafting the conversation, yet following the students’ lead. Notice that she did not judge any students’ contributions. She provided evidence that challenged thought processes and led them to various conclusions.

Thus, shared storybook reading requires open-ended questioning that provokes thoughtful discussion. Such questions promote self-reflection that can help students face issues in an empowered way, especially as they are probed to think about how other people become empowered (Gallardo, 2011). Young children can indeed self-reflect when teachers masterfully craft their questioning style.

Choosing vocabulary. Often, young children feel an emotion without the ability to label it. When using stories to promote social-emotional learning, the vocabulary words used in book discussions are strategically selected to give children the language to describe their experiences and feelings. For example, a child may feel “fear” but exhibit behaviors associated with “anger,” if anger is an emotion with which he is more familiar. The discomfort of fear is mismatched with the only label he knows.

Calling attention to the language of the social-emotional domain during safe and fun times like shared storybook reading, sets the stage for children to better understand what is happening later, once an emotional situation presents itself (Bailey, 2011b). Moreover, explicitly teaching this type of vocabulary in advance assists teachers in dealing with difficult moments when they arise, because common language has already been established.

In the example of self-efficacy, Mrs. Channing chooses the word “power” and uses questioning to promote lively and engaged discussion around this new and abstract idea (Figure 3). What does it mean to be powerful? When did Max feel powerful in the story? How do you know that he is powerful? Tell me about a time when you felt powerful? Tell me about a time when you did not feel powerful? Teachers who use shared storybook reading to develop these social-emotional concepts, can substitute the underlined word for other crucial concepts such as independence, creativity, motivation, etc. (i.e. What does it mean to be independent, creative, motivated?).

Teachers should limit new vocabulary or concepts introduced in book sharing to 3–4 words, and should reinforce these words throughout the day. This will help children not only recognize new words, but use them in novel circumstances. Teachers can display new words in the classroom (i.e., through word walls or word posters), and encourage students to use them often and in context.

In using this new vocabulary, students become aware of how it applies in different situations and how these concepts relate to other concepts they are learning.

Literacy Extensions. Teachers can call attention to new skills children have mastered independently as a means to reinforce the language of social-emotional concepts throughout the day. In Mrs. Channing’s classroom this is done in the form of a literacy activity as an extension to the book discussion. Mrs. Channing assists students in dictating sentences communicating their own sense of “power.” During discussion, Mrs. Channing reinforced how Max learned to use eye contact and an assertive voice to silence the monsters in the story. Brandon, a student in Mrs. Channing’s class, is scared of the dark, but is learning that he can use his big voice to be assertive, too. The sentence he dictates in the extension activity is, “My bravery is powerful because it helps me chase away the monsters when I’m scared of the dark” (Figure 4).

Teachers could use images and dictations like the one displayed in Figure 4 to create a class book, a special bulletin board, or even a video montage. This type of extension activity incorporates all of the tips outlined above (i.e., best practices for discussion, book selection, questioning, and vocabulary instruction). Mrs. Channing masterfully reinforces both the vocabulary word *powerful* and also directs examples of self-efficacy for children by relating to their own personal context.

During the course of these types of activities, teachers will have the opportunity to observe how different students respond and therefore adjust their instruction accordingly. Often, children who struggle may be reluctant to speak out loud and may have trouble self-identifying an area where they feel powerful. In this case, the teacher may need to address the child individually for a few days first, talking about aspects of power she has observed in him casually, on the playground, settling down for naptime, or during lunch. Soon, the student will be ready to think of himself in the new light the teacher has cast.

Extensions in Everyday Routines. It is also important to apply what children learn through book sharing conversations to other aspects of their school day and life (Gallardo, 2011). Self-efficacy is the understanding that one has control over their personal choices

and actions. In order to build this sense of agency we must give children opportunities to act. Classroom routines are particularly useful in building a feeling of “I can do this!” because they are recurring throughout the days and weeks. That means multiple opportunities for practice, reinforcement, and ultimately, mastery. Two examples are classroom jobs for all students and behavior specific praise.

One classroom routine that provides an opportunity for mastery and increased self-efficacy is instituting meaningful classroom jobs for every child (Bailey 2011a). First, the teacher shares a book that highlights the importance of working together, such as Leo Leonni’s *Swimmy* (1973) or Tim Egan’s *Chestnut Cove* (1995). Next, each child is assigned a classroom job. It is important that every child has a job at all times so they can see how their responsibility contributes to the good of the school-family. If a student is absent, his job will not get done unless someone else fills in. Students learn that everyone has an important role to play and that their actions have an effect on others. Children keep these jobs for at least a week to allow time for training, practice, and mastery.

The goal is to increase opportunities for children to master something that affects the wellbeing of the entire class, but also to increase opportunities for teachers to give children the credit for their helpful behavior, increasing self-efficacy. This type of reinforcement is particularly powerful when it comes in the form of behavior specific praise (Conroy, Sutherland, Snyder, Al-Hendawi, & Vo, 2009). For example, a teacher might say, “You pushed in all the chairs so that no one would trip and fall. That was helpful.” More than the generic “good job”, behavior specific praise teaches children exactly what pro-social behavior looks like while simultaneously emphasizing the child’s role in the action: “You were silent so others could hear my instructions.” “You used your words to ask for a turn with the truck.” In adding the tag “That was helpful,” or “That was kind,” related vocabulary (*i.e. helpfulness, kindness*) is reinforced within the teachable moment, at the instant of direct and specific feedback. A sense of self-efficacy is thereby expanded by this reinforcement of recognizable helpful acts (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). The child’s internal thought of “I did it!” is quantified and extended to “I was helpful by pushing in my chair so that no one would trip.”

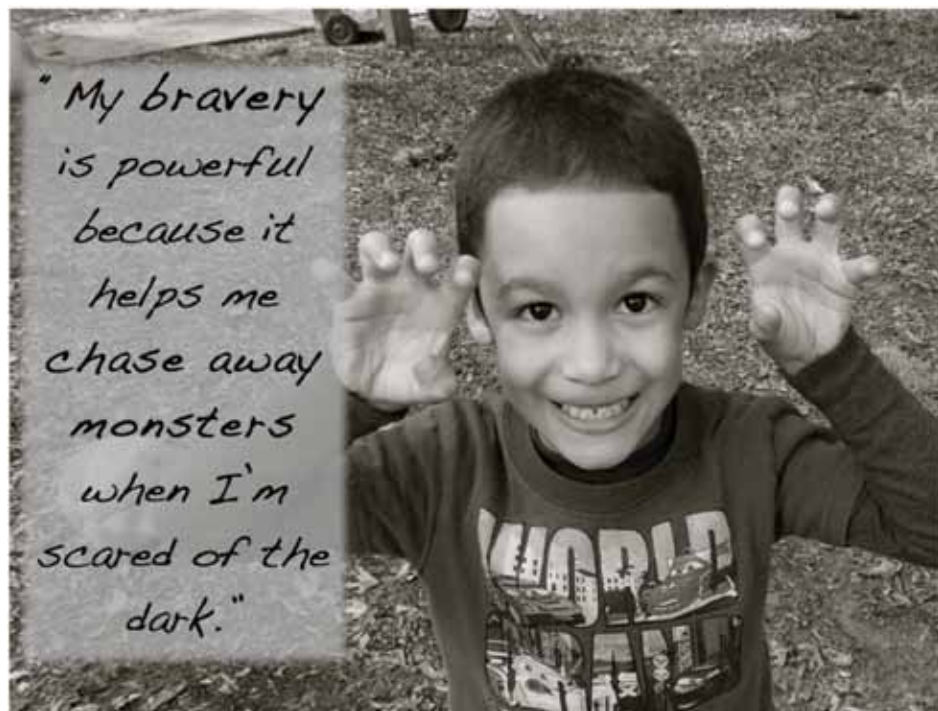


Figure 4. “My bravery is powerful”

Photo courtesy of K. Cheyney-Collante.

Concluding Thoughts

There are many instructional strategies that can enhance our efforts of building social-emotional skills with young children. Well-planned shared storybook reading activities provide teachers with an explicit tool to discuss crucial issues that affect all students in diverse ways. This article has provided a rationale and framework for using shared storybook reading activities to develop social-emotional skills in young students, and specifically the abstract concept of self-efficacy. As children grow, they will develop a sense of self, with or without the purposeful guidance of loving adults. Teachers can play an important role in determining how children come to perceive their own sense of power. At a young age children can learn that they have the power to choose how to respond to life’s challenges, creating a foundation of agency and personal responsibility that can see them through their schooling and beyond. Using a familiar and enjoyable activity like storybook reading to promote a child’s growing understanding of self-efficacy can give them the power to roar.

VIVIAN E. GONSALVES, PH.D., is currently a Clinical Assistant Professor and instructor of undergraduate and graduate literacy and special

education courses in the teacher preparation program at the University of Florida. Her research focuses on early literacy development, teacher education, mentoring, and reading instruction and remediation.

KRISTI CHEYNEY-COLLANTE, PH.D., is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at Santa Fe College. Kristi’s research and practice focuses on the early care and educational experiences of young children living in poverty and how optimizing high-quality interactions during these formative years can result in better outcomes for children in school and throughout their lives.

SHAUNTE DUGGINS, PH.D., is an Instructional Designer and Literacy Programs Coordinator at the Lastinger Center for Learning, University of Florida. Currently, she collaboratively designs and facilitates professional development in the areas of literacy and instructional coaching. Her research includes literacy, teacher education, and professional development, particularly in high-poverty schools.

JULIE BADER, M.ED., is a doctoral candidate in the Special Education department at the University of Florida. Her research focuses on literacy development, teacher education, and reading instruction and remediation.

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