



DIMENSIONS

of Early Childhood

Best Practices in Peer Mentoring



Creating Inclusive Classrooms Through the Arts



Playing With Technology: Is It All Bad?



Breakfast Blitz



Ten Ways to Foster Resilience

Volume 42, Number 3, 2014



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66th Annual Conference • January 14-17, 2015 • New Orleans, Louisiana
The World From Our Front Porch: Community and Culture

CLASS: Instructional Support Strategies Wednesday/January 14, 2015



We are pleased to announce that SECA has partnered with Teachstone to provide this special pre-conference session as one of the training opportunities available through our 66nd annual conference. This 1-day program teaches education managers, coaches, and mentors research-based strategies they can use with teachers to boost Instructional Support.

Teachstone is offering a registration discount to participants and SECA will allow CLASS registrants to register for the annual conference at the SECA member rate. For more information on how to register for this special pre-conference session, go to http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/seca_conference.php

Thursday/January 15, 2015

The 2015 SECA Trainers' Institute

Make Learning Stick! Using the 4 M Strategy for Engaging Adult Learners

Participants will deepen and broaden their understanding of using a systematic approach to engage adult learners based on Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences and strategies based on Constant Hine's 4M's of Adult Learning (Magnetic, Meaningful, Memorable and Mobilizing) to get your message to stick.

Constant Hine lives in Denver, Colorado and is an early childhood consultant, adult educator, coach, and author with a M.A. in Education. Constant is known as a coach's coach, broadening and deepening the skills and mastery of coaches and mentors.

Constant Hine



2015 Director's Seminar

Developing the Successful Team: Supporting Diversity for Staff and Parents

The 2015 Seminar is focused on our theme, *The World From Our Front Porch: Community and Culture*. As directors, you're dealing not only with new cultural norms among many of your staff, you're also encountering these same issues with the parents of children you serve.

Daniel Hodgins is an internationally recognized presenter and author of two books titled: *Boys: Changing the Classroom, Not the Child* and his new book: *GET OVER IT: Relearning Guidance Practices*. His work has been featured in national publications including, *International Cooperative Nursery* and *Early Childhood News*.

Daniel Hodgins

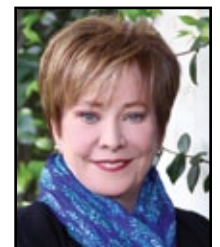


Featured Session

Creating Amazing Environments That Will Inspire Learning and Literacy in the Early Childhood Classroom

The environment in which young children live has a tremendous impact on their development. This session will focus on ways to design and implement classroom spaces that match children's way of knowing and help them reach their potential. It will include many practical ways to inspire communication and literacy learning that will engage children in meaningful experiences.

Dr. Rebecca Isbell was the Director of the Center of Excellence in Early Childhood Learning and Development and Professor of Early Childhood Education at East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, TN and is an Early Childhood Consultant and Author.



For information on how to register for the SECA conference, the Directors' Seminar or the Trainer Institute, go to http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/seca_conference_registration.php

Southern Early Childhood Association

Editor - Mari Cortez, Ph.D.

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SECA serves the interests of early childhood educators concerned with child development, including university researchers and teacher educators; early childhood, kindergarten, and primary-grade teachers; and early childhood program administrators and proprietors. The association has affiliates in 13 Southern states. Non-affiliate memberships are available to anyone living outside the 13 affiliate states. For information about joining SECA, contact the executive offices at P.O. Box 55930, Little Rock, AR 72215-5930, (800) 305-7322. Members receive a one-year subscription to *Dimensions of Early Childhood* and discounts on SECA publications and conference registration fees.

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President's Message

Kathy Attaway

Hello and Happy Fall!

In the past couple of months I have travelled to several state conferences and met with many strong southern leaders in the field of early childhood education. Each of these leaders is serving the field in his/her own personal way. It has been my pleasure to meet with them and discuss their leadership journeys.

I've been asking the question, "When did your leadership journey begin?" Many answered by recalling a defining moment that made a difference in their lives and set them on their journey. Others mentioned the first time someone showed interest and encouraged them to step out of their comfort zone to take on a challenge. Many reported that their journey began when a person in a leadership position said to them, "Yes, you can."

During these discussions about the leadership journey, a list of adjectives that describe a good leader has emerged. It should be no surprise to anyone that some of the words listed were: good listener, good communications skills, honest, approachable, calm, consistent, responsive, good mentor, respectful.

Consider for a moment the work we are doing every day with our youngest children. Aren't we encouraging these children toward leadership in their very early years? When passing a preschool classroom one often hears the phrase "Use your words." Children are asked to communicate their needs and desires with words. As adults we follow leaders who have good communication skills. At the same time one might hear a facilitator thanking a young child for "doing the right thing." Translated into our adult world these same words might be uttered about an honest, ethical leader. A person who makes good choices and follows best practice is a good leader.

Young children are encouraged to share with their friends. Comparably, it is easy to follow a leader who is a good mentor and shares their expertise. Consistency is the number one rule when caring for young children. A good leader is consistent, approachable and calm when resolving conflict or problem solving. We daily ask our youngest friends to be respectful and kind to their peers. Don't we expect our leaders to be kind and respectful?

A good leader is a life-long learner who constantly strives for excellence. As you care for the young children in your lives, remember you are introducing leadership qualities and laying a strong foundation for our future leaders. As adults, I ask you to begin your journey to leadership. When someone says, "You can do it," believe them. Step up, take on the challenge and make a difference.



Words from the Editor

Dr. Mari Cortez

It is so great to hear so many inspiring stories from early childhood educators who strive to make the world a better place for children. Every week when I go and observe my preservice teachers in their field placements at Head Start centers, I see teachers opening doors to a wealth of learning opportunities so that children can be successful. In this issue of *Dimensions* we share some ideas about how to open doors for children's success in different areas. For example, the use of technology in early childhood continues to be questioned by many educators but Slutsky, Slutsky and DeShetler show us

that the use of technology can certainly provide enriching experiences particularly when adults intentionally select technology that enhances children's learning. Henderson and Lasley, also encourage educators to open doors for all children through the arts while Bowden advocates for the importance of peer mentoring in kindergarten. Opening doors to increase opportunities for healthy eating habits using culturally relevant practices is the focus of the Towery, Nix and Norman article. Lastly, Petty describes ways to build and foster resilience in young children, which opens doors to healthy emotional development.

I hope that this issue opens some doors for you to share this information with others and enhance children's learning.

Mari Riojas-Cortez, Ph.D.

Editor

Notas del Editor:

Es tan genial escuchar tantas historias inspiradoras de los educadores de la primera infancia que se esfuerzan por hacer del mundo un lugar mejor para los niños. Cada semana cuando voy y observo a mis futuros maestros en sus prácticas de campo en los centros de Head Start veo maestros que abren las puertas a una gran cantidad de oportunidades de aprendizaje para el éxito de los niños pequeños. En este número de *Dimensions* compartimos algunas ideas acerca de como abrir puertas para el éxito de los niños en diferentes áreas. Por ejemplo, el uso de la tecnología en la primera infancia sigue siendo cuestionada por muchos educadores sin embargo Slutsky , Slutsky y DeShetler nos muestran que el uso de la tecnología sin duda puede ofrecer experiencias enriquecedoras sobre todo cuando los adultos seleccionan intencionalmente tecnología que avanza el aprendizaje de los niños. Henderson y Lasely, también animan a los educadores para abrir puertas a través de las artes, mientras que Bowden aboga por la importancia de la tutoría entre amigos en el jardín de niños. Abrir las puertas para aumentar las oportunidades de hábitos alimenticios sanos, utilizando prácticas culturalmente relevantes es el enfoque de Towery Nix y Norman. Por último, Petty describe maneras de construir y fomentar el poder de recuperación en los niños pequeños lo cual abre puertas a un desarrollo emocional saludable. Espero que este tema abra algunas puertas para que ustedes compartan esta información con otras personas y el aprendizaje de los niños pueda avanzar.

Mari Riojas-Cortez, Ph.D.

Editor

Rocks, Paper, Scissors: Best Practices in Peer Mentoring

Learn how to identify and support peer mentoring in your early childhood classroom.

Shelly Hudson Bowden

As a kindergarten teacher for 14 years, mentoring has been my teacher research focus. I was mentored by my mother (who was a kindergarten teacher for 33 years), college professors, supervisors, coworkers, and parents of the students in my classroom. Most importantly, I observed and came to value the peer to peer mentoring relationships among my kindergarten students which they formed and maintained. These mentoring relationships supported my students' learning. In my role as their teacher, I acknowledged, valued, and put to good use peer mentoring as in the following example.

Dade writes: haos (inventive spelling for the picture of his house).

Chris: "Hey! That's a good house! Give me five!"

Chris holds up his hand as Dade smiles and responds with his own high five.

In my kindergarten classroom, students mentored one another in both *social* and *academic* situations. Social mentoring occurred when students helped classmates open milk at snack and during center time and worked together building skyscrapers with wooden blocks. I observed academic mentoring most regularly during daily journal writing time. Together students realized that their talk became the inventively spelled words they wrote in their journals, spending sometimes as long as two hours crafting their stories. Students exchanged questions of spelling, punctuation, character development, conflicts, and story lines.

Since I wanted to support my students' mentoring, I followed Cambourne's (1988) conditions of learning--a model that comprises the following components:

- Immersion
- Demonstration

- Expectation
- Responsibility
- Use
- Approximation
- Response

Children's engagement with learning connects these components. I saw my students' social and academic interactions as significant teaching and learning experiences not only in isolated teaching times such as journal writing, but all during our daily schedule (Bowden, 2005). For example, shared reading with big books of rhyming, repetitive, and predictable text encouraged students' discussions of and play with emergent literacy learning. Students understood they were real writers and readers not through teaching with scripted lessons but in engagement with stories and words that helped create our print rich classroom environment.

**Peer to peer
mentoring provides
significant learning
opportunities.**

In this article I share new stories of *peer-to-peer* and *teacher-to-teacher* mentoring relationships I found and experienced in Mrs. Forrest's kindergarten classroom at Mills Elementary School. (All names have been changed to protect the participants' identity.)

I had been a kindergarten teacher at Mills for four years and chose Mrs. Forrest (a teacher for nine years) to become a part of this story based on our shared beliefs and practices of early childhood education as she struggled under our southern state's requirement of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

NOTE: While many states are moving away from NCLB, the idea of balancing accountability vs. developmentally appropriate practice continues as a pressing issue for teachers.

One of Many Stories

As an educator for over twenty-five years (now as a college professor), I have used the stories of my teaching, and others, to document mentoring in educational settings (Bowden, 2004; Hudson, 2000; Corrigan, 2013). Telling stories and reflecting on them provides an understanding of the characters, settings, and conflicts unique to each. Graves (1998) indicates that from the time we get up in the morning until we retire in the evening, we are surrounded by teaching/learning events. Thousands of stories become part of us during our lifetime. The questions are:

- Can we recall these stories with any profit?
- Can I reach back and recall stories that might help me not only to understand myself but also to assist others in teaching and learning? (p. 5)

As humans, we are all storytellers, yet we may not feel adequate enough to paint the most impressionistic tales. However, painting by the numbers others have scripted

will not depict the creativity our classroom stories and we, as teachers, have to share.

Originally, this story of mentoring was going to be simple enough. My experiences of five months in Mrs. Forrest's class would help me answer questions I generated including:

- Do peer mentoring relationships continue to exist in kindergarten classrooms?
- What influence does the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law play in such relationships?
- If these interactions do exist, does the teacher's role help or hinder this mentoring?

During an initial visit in Mrs. Forrest's classroom in August, I witnessed *social mentoring* as Lucy, a small girl with long, blondish hair falling over her smiling face, approached us to report she had just taught her classmate Paul how to tie his shoes. I also planned to observe and document examples of *academic mentoring*, if they existed, during journal writing time from 8:00-8:30. As a teacher researcher, I took many notes from my observations and discussions with Mrs. Forrest; yet, as themes emerged, what I had not planned on was my personal shift in character as I left my role of observer to take on a participant mentoring role with Mrs. Forrest and her students who asked, "How did you, how do you write, make stories...?"

In early August I observed Mrs. Forrest writing words under the pictures her students drew. When I asked her if she enjoyed this approach, she told me not really but she just "fell into doing it this way." She encouraged inventive spelling, yet only six of her 18 students demonstrated or attempted it during journal writing. She suggested,

"Maybe you can help me make the break." While watching her students, many times they would ask, "Can you help me draw a cat, dog, house, etc. on my paper?" Although my intent was to simply observe, the answers I generated to my questions became this story's curtain call.

In this setting, teacher research became a reflection of my own kindergarten experiences as I wrote this original story of kindergarten mentoring, *peer-to-peer*, and *teacher-to-teacher*. The answers I found to each question reflected the children's game, *Rock, Paper, Scissors*. No matter what we as educators try to cover with accountability and are forced to cut away from our beliefs and practices, it is our students' own voices which remain rocks--rocks we must acknowledge and build upon.

Students should be active members of the classroom culture.

Characters and Setting

In August, Mrs. Forrest and I quickly settled into a comfortable teacher/observer relationship. During journal writing, I sat on the small kindergarten sized chairs among students while Mrs. Forrest first collected juice and lunch money at her desk. She then mingled among students, writing their stories for them under the pictures they had drawn. At six feet tall, Mrs. Forrest towered over her kindergarten students in height but not in power. She expected her students to be active members of the classroom



Photo by Elisabeth Nichols

Peer to peer mentoring can assist children in developing writing and reading skills.

culture they built together, a community of respect for teaching, learning, and mainly social mentoring.

Storytelling was valued as students retold their lives with one another. Consider these insights students shared.

Quentin: My mom pulled my tooth out last night and I couldn't even taste the blood.

Chris: My lips keep on ripping, does anyone have some Vaseline?

Sam: I got my tonsils out at the hospital.

Joshua: That's where I got my brother out too!

In August and September students drew pictures representing their verbal exchanges; however, there was little time to finish stories as Mrs. Forrest reminded students at 8:30, "It's time to change class. Please stop writing now!" There was also little indication of peer academic mentoring. To address the levels of student progress mandated by NCLB (intensive, strategic, and challenged), what little time Mrs. Forrest scheduled for journal writing time (thirty minutes) was cut short at 8:30 as

she and the four other kindergarten teachers moved children from room to room based on testing results. In August Mrs. Forrest as "the challenged teacher," the teacher with the children that were lowest in test scores, kept only four out of the 18 students she greeted each morning at 8:00 as her homeroom children. The others (14) designated by scores of lower levels of progress, moved to coworkers' classrooms. After the shift, Mrs. Forrest was the teacher of 29 students. When the number reached 30, Judy, her coworker, also became a challenged teacher, sharing the number of students with her. Mrs. Forrest followed and taught the required scripted program of phonics which included having students repeat such sentences as "The pink pig has on a wig." The majority of books in the classroom library that Mrs. Forrest read aloud were also parts of the scripted program. One book which was not part of the program, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear* was a class favorite and was requested and read weekly with its repetitive predictable text. This book appeared to be the only book students could actually read.

Mrs. Forrest believed in peer academic mentoring but struggled with the schedule and the effects of the accountability paper trail as she explained, "The idea is lost in the shuffle and even worse children in the lower groups (intensive) have no one to follow or ask for help. I want to do things I know are right, like more journal writing time, but I struggle every day with time and schedules. If they draw a picture, at least they've had 30 minutes of creativity." Judy agreed with the struggles, "We had a boy in kindergarten last year. He went on to the first grade and then was going to move. His first grade teacher asked the teachers he had had in kindergarten to join him for a picture so he could remember all of them (his teachers). There were nine teachers in the picture. In two years this child had nine teachers and he still was not reading on grade level!"

Mentoring and accountability can co-exist.

From August to September I reflected on my own kindergarten teaching while questioning how Froebel's "children's garden" was so negatively transformed. My notes included questions such as:

- How have we gotten so far away from Froebel, Piaget, and Vygotsky?
- What about developmentally appropriate practices (Bredenkamp & Copple, 1997)?

I also questioned whether my beliefs and former practices could uncover and cut through the NCLB

“paper.” In early October the mentoring plot thickened.

Mentoring, Peer-to-Peer, Teacher-to-Teacher, and Literacy Begins

In reflection of the popular movie *Field of Dreams*, I was the pitcher believing teaching emergent literacy must be accomplished through natural and children’s play with language. After many attempts of maintaining my observer role and, with Mrs. Forrest and her students’ continuing questions, I offered to put my beliefs into practice. As in the movie, if I could rebuild it (my experiences), positive results would occur through natural engagement with stories and words. Statistics representing student progress were not as important as the process itself. I was in search of real writers and readers and students that would see themselves as both with their intrinsic engagement of literacy. Teachers would support their efforts. With Mrs. Forrest’s agreement and total support, I began to implement Cambourne’s (1988) conditions of learning. I also incorporated characteristics of good mentoring strategies which included acknowledging mutual respect and trust among mentors and those being mentored (Chu, 2012; Hobson, Ashby, Malderez, & Tomlinson, 2009) while establishing mentoring pairs within close proximity to one another.

My first goal was to immerse students, with their help, in the idea of peer mentoring. On October 5, I individually asked students who were already using inventive spelling, “If you could sit next to anyone in the class and help them during journal writing time, who would you help?” I recorded their answers in my notes and provided Mrs. Forrest with the



Photo by Elisabeth Nichols

Mentoring can take many forms in an early childhood classroom.

mentoring pair information. For example, and in light of respect among mentoring pairs, Hannah asked to help Tommy, Quentin asked to help Dade, and Chris asked to help Elliot. Now at 8:30 and at an end of our journal writing time on this day, Mrs. Forrest and I planned to reassign students to new seats the next morning placing mentoring pairs next to one another. As I began to leave the classroom, Chris met me at the door running from his seat to stop me before I left for the day. In his soft sincere whisper he asked, “Do you want me to go help Elliot right now?” Acknowledging academic *peer-to-peer* mentoring now truly existed, I explained we would begin helping one another the next day. This immersion idea was not contained to Mrs. Forrest’s classroom. The next day two parents stopped by to see the “new seats” their children told them they would get this morning.

Although students did begin to initiate mentoring conversations, I also provided a mini lesson on the stages of writing-scribbling, inventive spelling, and correct spelling and discussed how many words have

a beginning, middle, and ending sound. I suggested to the students that many words were like a sandwich with bread, meat, and another slice of bread. In the days to come, Hannah quickly mentored Tommy saying, “You need some meat in that word! You need a middle sound!” Additionally, on a day Mrs. Forrest did not have to change classes until 9:30 due to a planned school-wide fire drill, we gathered on the rug and watched a video of my own kindergarten journal writing time. Children on the tape talked about what they were writing and helped one another with spelling, punctuation, and story ideas. Mrs. Forrest’s students commented “They drew good pictures and nice words,” and “They are real storytellers.”

I also saw and documented Cambourne’s responsibility component transferring from social to academic mentoring as many students in Mrs. Forrest’s homeroom class were actively involved in helping “raise” Larry, a small brown hair, brown eyed child dealing with Attention Deficit Disorder. Students provided social mentoring for Larry by holding his hand and making sure he did

not get lost during the scheduled class rotations. Academically, students began to mentor Larry too. On one occasion during journal writing time, Matt told me Larry, a scribble writer and picture drawer, could not write like the other children. Quickly Matt added, “We need to help him learn how.” By December, Larry was a letter stringer adding l’s, r’s, and other letters under the pictures he drew.

To continue demonstrating immersion in literacy learning, I shared many examples of rhyming, repetitive, and predictable text with the class. Book titles included *The Monster’s Party* (What can this little monster do?) and *Who Will Be My Mother* (Lamb said, “My mother has died, will you be my mother?”). We also listed stories, sentences, and words of different topics such as December Vocabulary To Know (cold, snow, icicles) on language experience charts and hung them about the classroom at student eye level. These teaching strategies, books and charts, became references for spelling words in students’ stories.

Lauren: How do you spell monster? Mon star. That’s funny! There’s a star in it.

Hannah to Tommy: Balloon needs an “s” on it like in The Monster’s Party because there’s more than one.

As the students mentored one another, Mrs. Forrest and I grew in our own mentoring relationship. I offered ideas for her questions concerning expectation, use, approximation and response. We discussed writing correct spelling for students’ inventive spelling. We agreed that if our expectations were for students to see themselves as writers, we must accept their approximations and emergent use of literacy. Our response would support their journeys as writers and readers.

My mentoring attempts were not without challenges. I imagined my own “field of dreams” as I struggled with the 30 minutes allotted for journal writing time. I expected Mrs. Forrest’s students to reach the same level of successful writing and reading as students had in my classroom. As a teacher I provided up to two hours a day for writing and incorporated literacy throughout the daily schedule and the entire school year. Yet, even within the 30 minute time frame, my notes reflected many success stories of students’ writing, peer mentoring, and reading. With support, even incorrect mentoring was resolved:

Chris to Dade: How do you spell you?

Dade to Chris: How do you spell me?

Chris to Dade: Yes, how do you spell you?

Dade to Chris: M-e.

Susan (author): I believe the word you need is y-o-u!

Chris/Dade: Ah! You! Y-o-u!

**Give mentoring
peers time to
practice their skills.**

Students came to see themselves as writers and readers and their voices revealed their successes. “My story is like a sandwich. I have a beginning, middle, and an end.” “This *Monster’s Party* book is easy to read!” By December, from Mrs. Forrest’s homeroom class of 18 children, all remained with her in the challenged group except two. One student was

in the strategic level: Larry remained in the intensive.

Best Practice: What Our Students Taught Us

Peer to peer mentoring relationships continue to exist in kindergarten classrooms.

While NCLB accountability covered Mrs. Forrest’s beliefs and practices, we were able to cut away from mandates and documented natural and intrinsic emergent writing and reading. Mrs. Forrest continues to “struggle with finding a happy mix between what I believe and what I have to do.” There is no indication peer-to-peer, teacher-to-teacher mentoring or the teaching strategies we implemented helped place students in specific reading levels. Yet with developmentally appropriate beliefs, modeling, and practices, students, respected by peers and teachers, came to see themselves as storytellers, writers, and readers with natural exploration and success with literacy learning. **Figure 1** provides mentoring ideas for teachers to use in their classrooms.

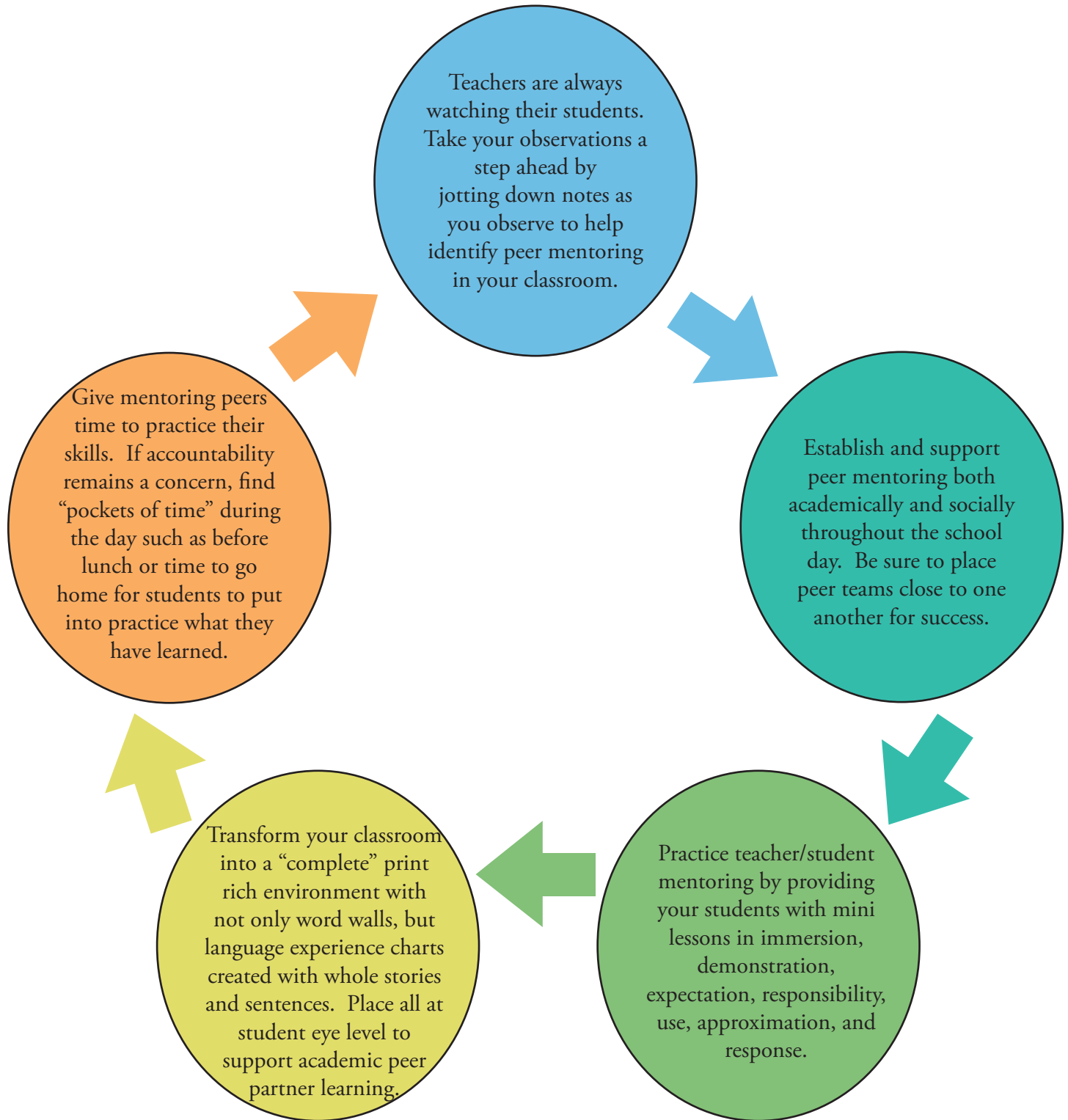
On December 15 I recorded this exchange between Laura and Halley as they read together *Who Will Be My Mother?*

Halley: What happened to the mother?

*Laura: Can’t you see the **word** died? She died!*

While this story took place in a kindergarten setting, academic and social mentoring can be practiced in all early childhood classrooms. As educators and proponents of early childhood education, we must hear our students’ voices and build upon what is right for their learning.

Figure 1. Supporting Best Practices in Peer Mentoring



In conclusion, I offer this writing/mentoring exchange between Hannah and Mrs. Forrest: *Hannah writes: I can rite and red thz wht I can do (I can write and read that's what I can do)*

Mrs. Forrest: Are you finished with your story?

Hannah: Nope! I need a period at the end.

A period ends this story but we will never need a period to end our learning--our mentoring from each child, adult experience. These stories will be the rock upon which children's gardens will grow and flourish again.

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SECA Elects its Next President!



Carol Coleman Montealegre of Florida has been elected as our next SECA President and we look forward to her leadership during the next four years. Carol brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the position, having served as President of the Florida Association for the Education of Young Children and as a member-at-large on the SECA Board of Directors. Carol states that her "passion is to move our great organization forward by serving membership, nurturing leadership and strengthening advocacy."

Our thanks go to Linda Novak of North Carolina and Beth Parr of Georgia for their willingness to stand as a candidate for this position.

Notice of Annual Business Meeting

The Annual Business Meeting and Leadership Breakfast will be held at the 66th annual conference in New Orleans, Louisiana on Saturday, January 17, 2015 from 8:45-10:15 at the Astor Crowne Plaza Hotel. All SECA members are invited to attend. For more information, go to:

http://www.southernearlychildhood.org/seca_conference_speakers_and_schedules.php

Creating Inclusive Classrooms through the Arts

Read about creating an inclusive environment that promotes the Arts.

C. Miki Henderson
& Elizabeth Lasley

Editor's Note: In the context of this article, inclusion is not a term that is restricted to children with special needs who attend mainstream classrooms. In this context, inclusion means an environment that meets the needs of all children.

“The future belongs to young people with an education and the imagination to create.”

—President Barack Obama

Inclusion is a philosophy that seeks the acceptance of all learners. It is developing a sense of belonging, value and being valued as well as accepting differences (Allen and Cowdery, 2011; Salend, 2010). The basic goals for inclusion in early childhood programs are facilitating the development of independence and participation in socially interactive environments (Allen & Cowdery, 2011). The expressive arts such as dance, drama, music, poetry and visual arts can be differentiated so that everyone can be engaged and successful. Teachers can use prior knowledge and understanding of their learners to create challenging curriculum which incorporates the arts to meet learning goals (Alexander, Johnson, Leibham & Kelley, 2008) for children of all abilities.

Art, drama, music, dance and literature activities are part of the basic components of an early childhood curriculum. They do not rely heavily on oral language or English proficiency and this makes them accessible to all children regardless of language differences or language abilities. Teachers can use creative expression and art to practice cognitive, language, social, emotional and motor skills while integrating them into themes and relating

Language differences include different languages (Spanish, Vietnamese, etc.). *Language abilities* include any skills that are required for communication regardless of native language.

them to content. This provides natural opportunities for children to learn through play without feeling anxious over failure. The “arts” are child-friendly and engaging because they are as natural as play.

Creating an Inclusive Environment

Developing an inclusive classroom while incorporating the arts, signifies judicious planning using appropriate content standards, knowledge of child development, individual needs, abilities, interests and cultural understanding of each individual child (Division for Early Childhood/National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009). Planning is time-consuming, but the rewards can be abundant as it creates a zone of proximal development and frees children to take risks and explore roles not necessarily part of their current life (Holzman, 2009).

There are ten areas to consider when creating an inclusive environment:

- Togetherness
- Diversity
- Community building
- Differing abilities
- “Can Do” attitude
- Student-centered
- Shared space and time
- Professional collaboration
- Documenting student learning
- Families

The “arts” can fit into each of these areas to enhance inclusion and provide a richness of experience for young learners.



Photo courtesy of Canterbury Community Nursery School, Richmond, VA.

Creative art activities don't always require an easel and paper.

Togetherness

The late President John F. Kennedy gave a speech to the entire nation saying, “Together let us explore the stars, conquer the deserts, eradicate disease, tap the ocean depths, and encourage the arts and commerce” (1961). He saw the importance of drawing people together and with the pooled strength of the many, great things could be accomplished. Teachers can help students understand this by ensuring all students are treated as equals and are not segregated from the group. Everyone learns

together. Students learn better when they are an equal member of the classroom. This togetherness allows the students to feel valued, supported and increases their self-esteem.

The arts are accessible to all.

Developmental differences are accepted by all learners unless influenced otherwise (Allen & Cowdery,

2011). Teachers can take advantage of this naiveté to nurture the development of attitudes in children, which will grow with them as they advance through school. Educators should incorporate art experiences that involve pairing or being a part of a small group such as playing rhythm instruments or painting a mural. These activities provide opportunities for children to feel good about learning from one another and to experience the pleasure of togetherness.

Diversity

Diversity includes issues of family, culture, language, family structure, socioeconomic status, gender, and religion, among others. The inclusive preschool classroom allows all children to value the wonderful differences around them. Children learn greatly about the world and the way it works from their peers who differ from themselves. Behaviors and beliefs are influenced by peers that may be perceived as more knowledgeable, significant and/or important (Gardner, 2008).

Play as a form of art allows children to share their diverse backgrounds. Thoughtfully planned expressive art experiences should be developed in a manner that inspires children to share their differences and discover ways they are similar. One example of this might be placing male and female clothing in the dramatic play center and supporting children as they explore both gender roles. Another example is to encourage children to draw their families and share the pictures with classmates to nurture further understanding of the diversity within their class setting. Play becomes a way for students to construct new meaning and knowledge based on familiar objects within meaningful contexts (Holzman, 2009).

Community Building

Community building in an inclusive classroom requires the developing of authentic relationships between all people, teachers, students, and families. Effective inclusive classroom communities do not happen by accident: careful and intentional planning on the part of teachers is required. Inclusion and community are both about belonging. However, it is not just about students with special needs (although very important to include); it's about all students who will need to work together to build their community and promote acceptance of all learners' interests, abilities, and differences.

Teachers are responsible for creating a nurturing environment so that all learners feel comfortable to explore, ask questions, test themselves, and solve problems (Alexander, Johnson, Leibham & Kelley, 2008). For example, during a shared writing experience, teachers can transcribe while students compose the text. This type of experience can be useful when creating poems or stories written by the whole class to share with families or other classes. Another example includes creative projects that can be used to build community which allow children to work together and develop camaraderie. When everyone has a chance to give input or provide constructive feedback and see that their ideas are valued, they may be better able to appreciate what it means to be a member of the community.

Differing Abilities

When children are treated as unique individuals with their own needs, interests, and abilities, they are given the opportunity to practice their strengths and further develop



Photo courtesy of Our Neighborhood Child Development Center, Charlottesville, VA.

Young children enjoy using a variety of media and resources.

in their challenging areas. Within an inclusion setting, the student should be encouraged to focus on their talents and abilities while also sharing them with others. Engaging in meaningful conversations, solving problems together, and play provides daily opportunities to build a sense of community and shared purpose to learn with others (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). In return, they also improve themselves by learning from the strengths others will share with them (Coyne, Kame'enui & Carnine, 2010).

Preschool teachers need to provide many ways for children to show what they know. Some children may express themselves better verbally and dramatically, while others are more physical and demonstrate capability by making a product. For instance, children might get to choose from the options of writing a poem about bugs, making a habitat from clay, dictating and illustrating a story about them, or putting on a puppet show that will share information while entertaining their classmates. Unlike pencil and paper assessments that assume only one particular level

of knowledge, the arts can provide ways for children to showcase their own abilities.

“Can Do” Attitude

All children are strong and capable, but they need teachers to demonstrate their confidence in them. *Early Childhood Inclusion: A Joint Position Statement of the Division for Early Childhood and the National Association for the Education of Young Children* asserts, “Even if environments and programs are designed to facilitate access, some children will need additional individualized accommodations and supports to participate fully in play and learning activities with peers and adults.” (2009, p.2)

Students should be taught at their level and then challenged with more difficult material to increase knowledge and comprehension. With support, children can learn to face intellectual, socio-emotional, and physical challenges right alongside their peers throughout the school day. Sociocultural knowledge is a part of development that enhances the use of verbal and non-verbal communication, preferred approaches to learning and learning styles, and how to interact with others (Holzman, 2009). Use play as a tool to teach coping and learning strategies to deal with these challenges as this will allow them to excel within the classroom and later in life.

Similarly, active learning through the arts creates a feeling of excitement in children. Hands-on science and math art will excite and dare children. For science, rather than talking about evaporation, give children painter’s tools such as rollers and brushes along with buckets of water and let them paint disappearing

murals on an outside wall. In math, for example, instead of discussing the number ten with preschoolers, taking them on a nature walk to collect ten items to use in a collage will make the number meaningful to them.

Teachers must provide many ways for children to demonstrate what they know.

Teachers should intentionally choose activities that use the strengths possessed by the children in the class. This means inclusive educators probably will not reuse lesson plans from previous years in their entirety, but instead will tailor the curriculum to match what their current students can do successfully.

Student-centered

Piagetian theory indicates the need for students to be actively involved in the construction of their knowledge (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987). Vygotsky’s theory emphasizes that internal development of individuals occurs through interacting and cooperating with others within their environment (Holzman, 2009). Dewey, like Piaget and Vygotsky, promotes the premise that student development occurs when students are actively engaged in the learning process (Dewey, 1910). Students interaction with their environment needs to be meaningful and functional (Dewey, 1910). The Arts provide a logical avenue for actively engaging students in the construction of their own knowledge within a student-centered

environment. Focus must be on the needs, abilities, interests, and learning styles of the students (Alexander, Johnson, Leibham & Kelley, 2008). As facilitators within the learning process we provoke students to learn how to learn and then support their efforts to teach themselves. Students bring a set of rules and expectations for behavior when approaching learning experiences based on their cultural group (Holzman, 2009). Acknowledge the student voice as a critical element of the entire learning experience and expect all students to be active, responsible participants in their own learning.

Offering choices from a variety of projects and activities will ensure a more student-centered environment (Coyne, Kame’enui & Carnine, 2010). For example, a teacher in a school that was primarily Islamic and Jewish did not feel the need to incorporate Easter into the curriculum since these two religions don’t celebrate it. However, when the season arrived, the children were interested in the decorated eggs they saw in the community. She told them about some special eggs made by Russian artists and the children became excited to find out more. Working together they planned a research project on the Fabergé Eggs. In the writing center, children explored the Fabergé Eggs via the Internet and collected data to share with the group. They counted, matched and sorted decorated plastic eggs in the manipulative center, and created their own designs for original Fabergé Eggs in the art center. In a culminating event, they made their own decorated eggs and set them in a museum for families and other classes to view. Children can participate in projects that they are drawn to and will then be more likely to elaborate and expand their research

interests to build onto their knowledge as these children did.

Although this example focuses on a student-centered example as a means of inclusion, teachers can also use this opportunity to talk about diversity within the community.

Shared Space & Time

An inclusive approach that supports the inclusion philosophy of increased accessibility to the general education classroom is the “pull-in” approach (Smith & Tyler, 2010). Special services are brought to students within the general education setting (Smith & Tyler, 2010). Since specialists may have overwhelming demands on their time and be forced to move from school to school, teachers must also be flexible in their schedules so that children with special needs can get the services they require.

Early childhood teachers should consider scheduling their learning center and small group times during the visits of the specialists. Many times specialists can get a better understanding of the child by observing and interacting with them in a more natural play setting and engaging in the arts rather than a clinical one. They may even be able to utilize the current class themes, art processes and projects, or learning center offerings in their therapies. Through advanced planning between classroom teachers and therapy providers, the Arts may be used to meet the special needs of students.

A teacher in a small preschool in San Diego, California had a child in her class who was born addicted to drugs. She invited specialists who worked with him such as the speech therapist and other service providers into the classroom to observe

and work with the child. Together they reviewed the overall plans for the first semester and determined which activities she would put in the child’s portfolio to demonstrate his growth over time. One of the projects included finger painting, but the child’s sensory issues precluded him from engaging in it. The teacher modified the activity, first with sponges, to Q-tips, to wearing latex gloves and by the end of the year he was using a finger to paint. By sharing her classroom with the specialists the portfolio became an integral part of this child’s therapy.

Professional Collaboration

A collaborative consultative approach is one way to focus on student needs (Salend, 2010; Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Special education or other professional support personnel collaborate with general education teachers (Salend, 2010; Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Their knowledge and skills are combined to address student needs based on

agreed upon problems and solutions (Salend, 2010; Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Emphasis in this professional collaboration is on identifying problems, constructing solutions, and providing avenues for the implementation of the agreed upon solutions that will support the general education teacher (Salend, 2010; Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Money and resources are often problematic to procure in education (Petriwskyj, 2010). Specialists and classroom teachers need to share materials and equipment whenever possible. This may make the difference in the development of the child while increasing the likelihood of the classroom being an inclusive environment for them.

Specialists may have access to adaptive equipment or technology that teachers could borrow when the child needs them in order to participate fully in classroom activities. Teachers might be able to provide consumable art materials that a specialist would not be able to store or move around from place to place.



Photo courtesy of Micah’s Children’s Academy, Brentwood, TN.

Creative activities can be combined with play in outdoor classrooms.

The occupational therapist might have a computer program, such as *Dragon*, that would read computer directions aloud for a child with a visual impairment, thus allowing them to create a design in a paint program along with the other children in the class.

Documenting Student Learning

There are content standards with regards to the Arts that teachers can draw upon for planning purposes. Authentic assessment reflects and describes each student's development within content standards based on their experiences, abilities and strengths (Sandall, McLean, & Smith, 2009). McMillan (2011) as well as Wortham (2011) indicate that authentic assessment examines students' performance, ability, and knowledge within the meaningful context of the students' real world experiences. Furthermore, one type of authentic assessment is the construction of portfolios. Portfolios serve multiple purposes – specific academic content, evaluating performance, reporting student work, alternative to standardized assessment, and reporting student progress. The purpose of portfolios, especially for the Arts, is to systematically document student progress/development based on learning outcomes and experiences..

Portfolios provide authentic performance based assessment that influences instructional practices and progress monitoring (McMillan, 2011; Wortham, 2011; Salend, 2010). The key component is student self-reflection and self-evaluation (McMillan, 2011; Wortham, 2011; Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Salend, 2010). The contents of an Arts portfolio may include student

selected products, self-reflections, self-evaluations, audio or video clips of dance and movement, dramatic performances or musical presentations, scanned or photographed artwork, and copies of creative writing products. The advantage of using portfolios for the Arts in inclusive settings is that students are part of the assessment process (McMillan, 2011; Wortham, 2011; Friend & Bursuck, 2012; Salend, 2010). Portfolios remove assumptions, conjecture, or the need to guess what a particular child needs or thinks. It can facilitate profound discussions about the real progress students are making.

A creative, inclusive classroom values imagination and innovation.

Schools need to have collaborative systems for information-gathering and sharing purposes. There is a need for effective communication that identifies similarities and differences among the curriculum, learning goals, teaching materials, strategies and support services (Salend, 2010; Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Stakeholders such as speech and language pathologists, teachers, occupational therapists, hearing specialists, counselors, families, etc., need to share information that will benefit the child and set them up for successful beginnings. Whenever they communicate, whether verbally at informational meetings or in written reports, they should begin with a discussion of the child's strengths and gifts so that everyone who cares about the child can begin in a place of capabil-

ity for the child and do what they can to build on their strengths.

Families

Families are the most important people in a child's life. Parents have insights into their child's medical needs, previous experiences, family background, and possible future needs (Salend, 2010; Friend & Bursuck, 2012). Trust established between teachers, parents and school personnel is a key component when building positive family relationships (Salend, 2010). Teachers and schools need to provide opportunities for all families to become part of the classroom and school community through elective meetings, trainings and events that are offered at various times and on various days of the week. Families must be an integral part of classroom programming as well as the development of the school's mission, vision and climate. They should feel welcome and appreciated in the classroom and school.

Understanding a family's point-of-view or perspectives is critical. Some families are not comfortable within a school setting due to previous unpleasant personal experiences. Schools may be viewed as intimidating and unfriendly places. Teachers should devise ways to build families into the Arts being offered in their classroom whether it is preparing materials, demonstrating a skill or process, or by providing a context or impetus for a particular creative activity. Ask families if they would like to share their talents, culture, or family traditions through an art experience that can be enjoyed by all of the children. The ability to include families within the decision making process validates and supports family beliefs, culture and traditions.

Why the Arts?

John Dewey (1910) said, “The aim of education should be to teach us rather how to think, than what to think—rather to improve our minds, so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with the thoughts of other men (p. 38).” Making developmentally appropriate, interesting and engaging projects and themes available to young children can advance the goals of inclusion in the classroom while also helping children develop the habit of thinking for themselves (Alexander, Johnson, Leibham & Kelley, 2008). The use of the arts to relay early childhood content is practical and advantageous because it builds on what is natural for children to do, but without the fear of falling short that might come with a more academic approach. Inclusive teachers thoughtfully incorporate the arts while planning for meeting standards, age and stage expectations, individual needs, abilities and interests, and what is culturally and socially appropriate for each child. The arts are natural, pleasurable and gratifying for children because they can be made accessible to all, they are desirable to teachers because of the beneficial opportunities they

contribute to establishing a creative inclusive classroom where imagination and innovation are valued.

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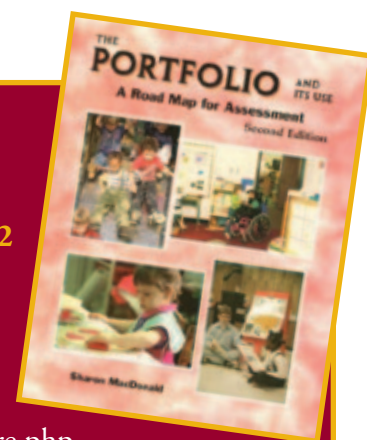
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Playing with Technology: Is it All Bad?

Technology and Play: What do you need to know?

**Ruslan Slutsky,
Mindy Slutsky
& Lori M. DeShetler**

Play is arguably the most important and fundamental experience that children can have. However, the type of experiences that children have and the types of play they engage in is changing. Technology now plays a very large role in the way children of all ages play. From computers to video games to television to battery-operated toys, play is not what it used to be. Children are spending large amounts of time in front of televisions and computer screens which leaves less time for them to engage in dramatic, constructive or outdoor play (Slutsky, DeShetler, & Slutsky, 2013). Children are not to blame for this as there are more television shows geared for children of all ages with new content added weekly. There is even now a channel for babies! Along with the television content, children also have tablets, smart phones, and video games that cut into their play experiences. The greatest challenge for adults is that many kids are opting to play with technological devices rather than engaging in traditional forms of play.

**Don't be afraid of
technology.**

Research on the subject of technology, however, is quite mixed, showing both negative and positive results. Johnson and Christie (2009) explain that technology is here to stay so we need to figure out how to “maximize the positive consequences of these new media so that they enrich rather than hinder children’s play experiences” (p. 285). While there is concern that children who play with computers, tablets, and smart phones are isolated from their peers, computer play can actually encourage social interactions. Children will often observe

one another and make helpful suggestions or comments (Chen, 2002).

Making the Most of Technology

Children want access to technology, so as parents and teachers, we must figure out the best ways to present it to them. Computers are a popular form of technology for children as young as age three. With that in mind, computer games should be problem-solving oriented and open-ended. They should provide children choices and opportunities to explore and use their curiosity. Closed-ended games limit children’s decision making skills and do not allow for them to take initiative in their thoughts (Fischer & Gillespie, 2003).

Children will bring to life what they see on the computer screen, thus the content they explore on the computer can be used to help encourage creative and imaginary play (Brooker & Siraj-Blatchford, 2002). Some computer games encourage this type of creativity and imagination by having them build things such as aquariums and amusement parks. These types of games can be pro-social and educational. Children have to figure out how to keep them up and running by making a profit with the amusement park, or whatever else it is they are building. Younger children can use these games to “promote learning, positive play experiences and development. Parental guidance is required so that such content does not exceed acceptable boundaries” (Johnson & Christie, 2009, p. 286).

Children’s play is also changing with the advent of new technology in toys. Digital toys can help to promote different kinds of play as well as encouraging traditional play, especially dramatic and constructive play. Digital toys are those that use technology and are battery operated. They may contain computer chips to help them talk or act in certain ways (Johnson & Christie, 2009).

While more research is needed on the effects of digital toys, Levin and Rosenquest (2001) found electronic toys to be more closed-ended when it comes to play. This can result in less creative play due to the fact that these toys tend to do the talking for the child. With toys such as talking mobile phones, talking dolls and toys that play music by pushing a button, creative play is reduced considerably. The key is to make sure the technology in the toy is not overpowering and still allows the child to engage in play creatively and constructively. Technology is okay as long as the child is still the one manipulating the object in the play episode.

Bergen (2004) found that there was no difference in how children played even when technology was present in a toy. In her research study, Bergen observed preschoolers playing with rescue heroes. Some of the rescue heroes talked and made noise while the others were traditional action figures. She found no difference in the way the children played with the two types of toys. The children who played with the talking action figures still used language narratives similar to those of the children who were playing with the non-talking toys. She discovered that the children took control of the play either way and that the two groups of children did not differ in the types of language and actions they used. Parents and teachers can observe how the toys are used during play. If children are overly dependent on the technology element in a given toy, they can be gently redirected to think about ways to play with that toy differently or consider what others sounds the toy can make. This will not limit the play, but potentially open it up for the children if they rely too much



Photo by Nancy P. Alexander

Technology can provide opportunities for social interaction.

on the built-in sounds and abilities of the toy.

Research on well designed digital games shows that these devices can provide fun and interactive experiences that can help “young children’s learning, cognitive development, skill building, social interactions, physical activity and healthy behaviors” (Lieberman, Fisk, & Biely, 2009, p. 299). However, when the games are not well designed they can lead to fear, hostility and aggression; stereotyped characters can lead to stereotyped beliefs; time spent playing these games could have been better spent in play and physical interaction (Lieberman et al., 2009).

It’s All About the Quality!

Children ages 3-6 have a growing number of digital toys available to them. As a parent or teacher, look through the number of toys that your children or students currently interact with daily. I think you will be surprised at how high that number is. Children today have access to hand-held devices, electronic toys, computers, tablets and electronic

learning systems. It is important to look at the effect these toys have on children and how they should be designed for this age group (Lieberman et al., 2009).

Quality is a key.

It has been found that well designed games can provide positive experiences that foster children’s learning and development whereas poorly designed toys can be time-wasting activities that do not do much to contribute to their learning and development. These poorly designed games are often attributed to obesity and low physical activity (Thai, Lowenstein, Ching, & Rejeski, 2009; Epstein et al., 2008; Vandewater et al., 2007). Very poorly designed games and toys can provide significant harm. These games often teach aggressive behavior, instill fear and anxiety, condone

gender and ethnic stereotypes, and encourage poor health habits (Calvert & Wilson, 2008; Christakis & Zimmerman, 2009). More research is needed to determine if there is a correlation between toy design and outcomes.

The Problems with Too Much Technology

Susan Linn (2009) argues that too much screen time is taking away from the critically important imaginary play of children. She explains that play is very important in terms of children's health and well-being. The American Academy of Pediatrics (n.d.) recommends no screen time of any sort for children under the age of 2. Limited screen time can be somewhat beneficial, as long as it is being monitored. While screen time is not as beneficial as books, it can be a beginning point for some creative play (Linn, 2009). According to Linn (2009), screen time for children is so different now than it was 20 or 30 years ago. Back then there was limited access to television, with not very many shows for children on the air. Children would watch something once and then bring what they learned into their play. Children had to play. Sitting and watching television for hours was not a choice. To keep alive their memories of the shows and movies they loved, children would bring those beloved characters to life in their imaginary play (Linn, 2009).

It used to be that children only had access to one television with very few channels to watch shows. Now, children have cell phones, mp3 players, DVD players in their family car, computers and even televisions in shopping carts. With all of this screen time available, children are

Playing with Technology: Is it All Bad?

losing out on so many opportunities to engage in the real world.

Linn (2009) described a very compelling example of two families in a restaurant. One of the families had a portable DVD player with them, which their child used for the entire time they were in the restaurant. While the child watched a DVD and ate, the parents were able to enjoy a nice, quiet dinner out. The other family did not engage their child with a technological distractor and had to keep their son occupied. The child was loud and quickly got bored with sitting in his high chair. The parents took turns walking around the restaurant with him.

Balance technology with non-technology play.

While the family with the DVD player had a peaceful and calmer dining experience, the family without the DVD player gave their child many more learning experiences. While walking around the restaurant, they discussed with him what he was seeing in a pastry case. He even took a spoon he was carrying around with him and pretended to feed his mom. With his parents' help, the child used the restaurant to explore new vocabulary, colors, spatial concepts and make-believe. In addition, the child had an opportunity to further bond with his parents through social interaction. As Linn states, the child with the DVD player was given none of these experiences. He was taught to expect to be entertained, that it is boring to interact with his family, to look at

a screen for stimulation rather than the environment and that eating is something to do while also engaging in other things.

Positive Aspects of Technology

Yelland (2011) states that play is synonymous with learning in early childhood. Many early childhood programs are advertised as being play based and developmentally appropriate. Yelland further explains that it is essential for teachers to rethink play in today's technological society in order to provide a richer learning environment. This can be done in part by adding technology into the classroom. Adding technology provides the opportunity to create meaning making, extending communications and interactions, which are important to playful explorations.

Including technology in traditional play areas/centers, such as blocks, can enable and extend playful explorations. Yelland (2011) tells of a young boy, George, and his love for building with blocks. He would build elaborate plans in drawings and on a computer with help from adults. George also used a digital camera to document his creations. With this camera, he made a zoo out of Duplo blocks and created a short animation in which the animals moved. This was done with the help of his teacher when he first started school. This is a positive example of how teacher assistance and interaction allowed a child to use his full potential and better articulate his thoughts and ideas. Technology in this episode was used to help the child extend his thinking and provided a more robust learning experience that added to his interests.



Photo by Bob Ebbesen

Technology-based activities should be balanced with non-technology activities.

Yelland (2011) indicates that some researchers question this type of play where there is so much help and interaction from the teacher. Their belief is that “children need to play in the real world, with actual objects and in materials that are tactile and tangible, with minimal intervention between the teacher” (p. 7). Yelland continues to highlight that:

“In playful explorations not only are new technologies part of a repertoire of experiences for young children’s learning but the teacher is able to scaffold this learning so that it is

articulated and represented by the children in a variety of modes. In this way playful explorations provide evidence of children’s multimodal learning and encourage the use of a variety of media and resources that are part of this learning as well as being artifacts of the learning process.” (p.8)

Lieberman et al. (2009) found that digital media can be effective in helping children ages 3-6 with language and reading, mathematics, creativity and learning, cognitive skills and collaborative learning and

motivation to learn. There are many games that teach children reading, letter recognition, word building and even learning a second language. It has been found that the use of well-designed computer games and activities can improve children’s skills in abstract thinking, reflective thinking, analyzing and evaluating information (Klein, Nir-Gal, & Darom, 2000). Research has shown that digital media can be more effective than traditional methods for teaching cognitive skills (Lieberman et al, 2009).

Media can also foster social skills. Sharing technology like computers in schools can help children learn collaboration, cooperation and social interaction skills. Researchers found that pairing children on computers helped promote sharing, cooperation, turn taking and assistance to each other as they explored the technology and its content (Bergen, Ford & Hess, 1993; Lau, Higgins, Gelfer, Hong, & Miller, 2005; Martin & Forsbach-Rothman, 2004).

Children using digital media and technology have a higher desire to learn (Bergen et al., 1993). High levels of interest and focus on learning is present while children engage in computer learning activities, and these do not fade away over time (Bergen et al., 1993). Children gravitate toward technology that has become easier for them to navigate with the introduction of tablets, iPods and smart phones. Preschool children with ADHD tend to be more attentive when they are engaged in computer-based learning. This could be because they receive immediate feedback on their performance, so there is no need for their attention to wander (Shute & Miksad, 1997).

More research is needed to understand the full effects of children

learning though technology. Lieberman et al. (2009) explain that studies focusing on the comparison of different types of media are difficult to control. Therefore, it is difficult to understand why one environment may be more effective than the other. Lieberman et al. (2009) state that it may be more beneficial to look at “different kinds of learning outcomes that depend on the kinds of learning each format tends to encourage and support the best” (p. 278).

While there has been mixed research on children’s use of technology, there is no doubt that technology is here to stay. Schools are looking for new ways to bridge technology and learning in the classroom and how to move traditional learning content, including books, to digital formats. Such changes to education are important to research, as they will directly impact the play and learning experiences of children in the immediate future. Children born in the past decade are digital natives and are well versed in the usage of computers, tablets, iPods and smart phones. It is important for parents and teachers to understand how children use technology so they can use it to help scaffold children’s learning.

Implications for Education

Should we be worried about the large influx of technology into the lives of young children? Will the preference to integrate technology into their play limit children’s social, emotional, and physical development? These are important issues to consider for parents and teachers as technology innovations become even more enticing for children. Not all technology is negative as it can provide enriching experiences through interactive books and mathematical games that

Strategies to Balance Technology with More Traditional Play Experiences

- Provide a balanced play experience. For each 30 minutes a child plays with technology, provide that much time to play with traditional non-digitized toys. Mix in outdoor play experiences. With active and busy lives that parents and children have, outdoor play is not always a daily option. If that is the case, be sure to schedule some time for children to play outside or visit a park.
- It is easy to allow technology to occupy children’s social time but be proactive in what the child does during that time. Experiences should focus on learning. When learning on technology can also be done through traditional manipulatives, provide those as well so the child understands how what is learned on screen can also be accomplished outside of it.
- Look for games and apps that are appropriate for your child. Play the games with them. Scaffold learning during this time as you would when engaging in non-technology play.
- Don’t be afraid of technology. Technology has much to offer to children and, if used in moderation along with other forms of play, can be very enriching.

can be uploaded to tablets and smart phones for free or for as little as a few dollars. The biggest question is how much time should children be allowed to spend on these technologies even if they are educational in nature? Screen time takes away from social playtime, and parents and teachers must balance technology with non-technology play.

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interests focusing on the Reggio Emilia approach, and children's use of technology during play.

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Breakfast Blitz: An Innovative Nutrition Education Program

Good nutrition is a key to preventing childhood obesity. Learn how breakfast can be an important part of the prevention effort.

**Pamela C. Towery,
Elizabeth S. Nix,
and Bilinda Norman**

Childhood overweight and obesity are major problems in the United States, with important consequences for our nation's health and economy. The link of obesity to health issues, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes, stroke and some cancers, which persist into adulthood, is well documented. More recent studies have examined overweight and obesity in relation to household food insecurity (Metallinos-Katsaras, Must, & Gorman, 2012). The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2013) reported the number of children who live at or below the poverty level as 16.4 million or 23 percent. Food insecurity can occur when families are struggling to maintain access to nutritious and safe food due to lack of money and other resources (Coleman-Jensen, Nord, & Singh, 2013).

As low-income families struggle in tough economic times, levels of food insecurity rise. Inadequate access to healthy, affordable food and lack of variety are noted in food insecure households. More frequent consumption of high-fat fast foods, also associated with food insecurity, leads to decreased consumption of nutrient-dense foods such as lean meats, dairy, whole grains, fruits and vegetables. Eating fewer family meals and breakfast meals is likewise associated with food-insecure children (Bruening, MacLehose, Loth, Story & Neumak-Sztainer, 2012).

Breakfast is considered the most important meal of the day, yet children, adolescents and adults skip breakfast on a routine basis. This habit of breakfast skipping is related to weight gain, higher body mass index, and obesity (Leidy, Ortinau, Douglas, & Hoertel, 2013). Kaisari, Yannakoulia and Panagiotakos (2013) concluded that there is an inverse relationship between eating frequency and overweight/obesity in children and adolescents. Children who eat breakfast perform better, exhibit more energy and demonstrate improved behavior and attentiveness (McIndoo, n.d.). Benefits for adult

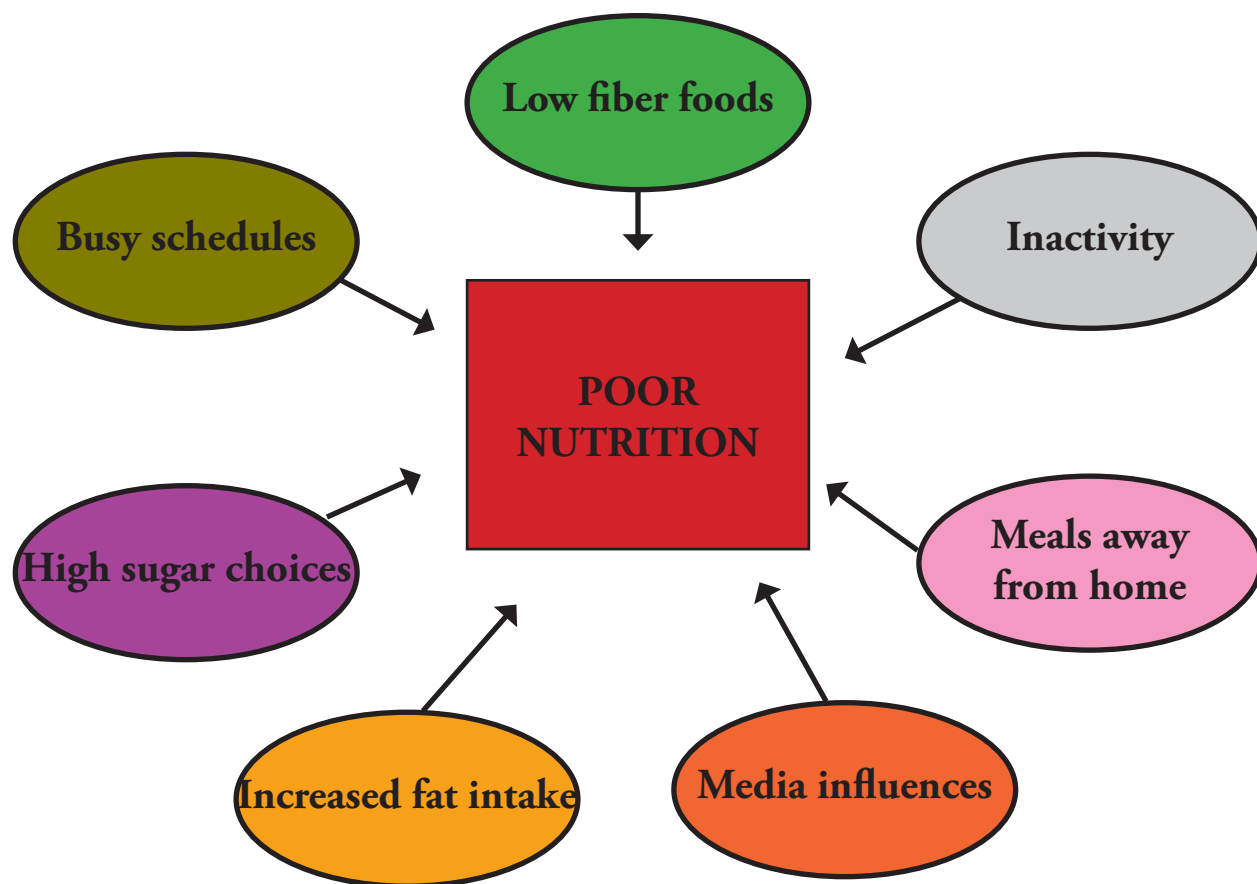
breakfast eaters also show decreased risk for heart disease and type 2 diabetes. There are also advantages of breakfast for boosting metabolism, improving mood, aiding in weight control, adding fiber, and nutrients to daily intake, among others (Schaeffer, 2011).

In looking close to home, the Mississippi Delta region of Arkansas has a large underserved population in terms of poverty, education, and food insecurity. Thirty percent of children in Arkansas are overweight or obese (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). These children are at risk for poor nutrition. Practical interventions, such as nutrition education, dietary counseling, parenting skills, and behavior strategies are recommended to improve the diets of young children in an effort to prevent obesity (Benjamin Neelon & Briley, 2011).

Such recommendations provided a starting point for three faculty members in the nursing and health professions department at a southern university to develop a program and work with area parents and children on incorporating healthy breakfast habits. The purpose of our innovative nutrition education program called "Breakfast Blitz," was to promote healthy eating through good nutrition. This program targeted families with young children in an effort to improve weight status and the quality of the household diet, particularly at the morning meal, reducing the risk for major chronic disease. The program was offered at the child development center on the university campus, which provided an ideal setting to intervene with a high-risk target audience and impact the chronic problems that exist in the region.

Two Advanced Practice Registered Nurses, each board certified in diabetes management, and a Registered Dietitian served as the inter-professional teaching staff. The program provided an opportunity for the educators to showcase their skills and expertise in an interactive

Figure 1: Possible Causes of Poor Quality Diet



teaching and learning environment. In the classroom setting of the child development center, parents participated in hands-on experiences as they were engaged in learning through return demonstrations with food model replicas and simple meal preparation.

Target Audience

The target audience included parents and caregivers of preschool-aged children who attend the university's day program. The model center and training facility serves children ages six months through four years; there are seven classrooms with an approximate enrollment of 100 children. The programs were conducted in two classrooms within the center. The population served by this center is not typical of university childcare programs where most of

the children's parents are employed at the university. Both the parents and children were representative of a wide variety of race, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic, and educational backgrounds. Many parents are enrolled as university students or work in the local and surrounding communities of northeast Arkansas.

Various factors, as shown in **Figure 1**, contribute to poor quality diets in many families with young children (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2011). This target audience appeared to be no different than what is normally seen in today's society.

The program participants were single and two-parent families as well as grandparents. **Table 1** categorizes the participants by age, showing a broad range from 21 to 60. The audience also represented a culturally diverse population, including

African-American, Asian, White and Latino families. Education level of group attendees varied from high school diplomas to graduate-level degrees. Cultural differences were apparent in eating habits, meal patterns, food choices and health beliefs as participants progressed through each lesson. For example, rice and beans were the important staples in the diets of Latino families, even as breakfast foods. White and African-American families reported ready-to-eat breakfast pastries and cereal with milk as traditional choices for the morning meal.

Description of the Program/Intervention

Four lessons focusing on healthy breakfast habits were presented to the target audience. Specific objectives for each lesson are shown in

Table 1: Age Ranges of Program Participants

Age Ranges				
Group	21 - 30	31 - 40	41 - 50	51 - 60
1	12	14	2	4
2	5	8	0	1

Table 2: Lesson Objectives

After participating in the healthy breakfast program, parents will be able to:
1. Verbalize three reasons why breakfast is important.
2. Brainstorm ways to overcome breakfast barriers.
3. Decipher the Nutrition Facts label on breakfast items.
4. Select healthy breakfast cereals and appropriate portion sizes.
5. Choose nutrient-rich foods for morning meals.
6. Plan five healthy breakfast meals for weekdays or weekends.
7. Prepare quick and healthy breakfast foods.
8. Practice food safety guidelines in food preparation.

Table 2. Information on nutrition knowledge, behaviors and demographics was collected at the beginning and end of the lesson series.

A variety of teaching strategies and aids were utilized in presenting the lessons to create an atmosphere of active learning and to facilitate reaching the objectives.

- Brainstorming activity
- Bulletin board display
- DVD and listening guide
- Group discussions
- Hands-on activities
- Reading labels on breakfast foods
- Measuring cereal portions
- Counting sugar cubes to visualize sugar content
- Planning breakfast meals with food model replicas
- Handouts and bookmarks
- Posters
- Power point presentation

Lesson One began the series with breakfast benefits, barriers to eating breakfast regularly and strategies to overcome those barriers. The health benefits of breakfast were presented using discussion and via power points slides. Participants shared reasons they don't eat breakfast, which transitioned to a discussion of strategies to overcome these barriers.

Topics for **Lesson Two** included how to read nutrition labels, select healthy cereals and consume appropriate portion sizes. A video on food labels introduced the topic; a listening guide was provided to emphasize the key points presented in the video. Actual ready-to-eat cereals, cereal bars, and other breakfast items were used to review pertinent information such as calories, fat, sugar, and fiber. Participants chose the healthiest examples and practiced measuring appropriate serving sizes after reading the label. Various bowl sizes were available to make the activity realistic. Sugar cubes were counted by participants and displayed to help

the group visualize the sugar content of available breakfast foods.

The focus for **Lesson Three** was to balance carbohydrates, proteins and fats in the morning meal and to plan a healthy breakfast. The key recommendations of the Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010 and My Plate served as the basis for planning a healthy meal. The goal was to balance calories in order to achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, increase intake of nutrient-dense foods, reduce intake of foods that are high in sodium, fat, and added sugars, and build a healthy eating pattern. The relationship of various food components to chronic diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and obesity was emphasized in this lesson. Participants utilized food model replicas to plan healthy breakfast meals, which represented the major nutrients in foods: carbohydrates, protein and fat. A variety of food model replicas were available for the activity, including both traditional and ethnic choices for the morning meal, representing relevant cultural practices among the families. Sandwich, soup, and pizza slice replicas were also on hand as possible alternatives for typical breakfast foods.

These also serve as examples of leftovers that can be used for nourishing a hungry body in the morning, whether a child or adult.

Lesson Four included a review of food safety basics in the kitchen and preparation of quick and healthy breakfast foods. The four simple steps to food safety were emphasized in this class: clean, separate, cook, and chill. Food safety slogans, such as "when in doubt, throw it out," were used to help participants remember to put these steps into action in their home kitchens.

Hands-on food preparation of quick and healthy breakfast foods engaged the participants in group “cooking” activities. Fruits smoothies, whole grain waffles with toppings, and cheese quesadillas with salsa were prepared in three stations around the room. Foods were then sampled and evaluated by the participants.

Attendance was encouraged for the lessons by registering for door prizes to be given away at the conclusion of the series. The door prizes were small appliances that could be used for quick food preparation for all meals, not just breakfast. The choice of small appliances reflected one of the recurring themes in the program, which was to eat more family meals at home, rather than driving through fast food restaurants or buying meals at the local convenience store to be eaten in the car.



Photo by Subjects and Predicates

Parent education is a key to healthy diets for young children.

Starting the day with breakfast is important for children and adults.

Lessons Learned

Consistent attendance and participation in the breakfast program by parents and caregivers was a challenge. One program a month was scheduled, so in the span of four months, attendance was sporadic at best. Parent numbers were small and declined as time progressed. This might not be a significant problem in larger facilities.

The time chosen at the end of the day was the time parent meetings were normally held at the facility,

but parents and caregivers picking up young children were ready to go home. Door prizes and food did not appear to be motivating factors for attendance.

Food preparation by adults in the rooms at the childcare center was not ideal. Hand washing facilities were available, but suitable space for simple recipes to be created was limited. With furniture and set-up designed for children, adults were not comfortable during the lessons in the small chairs. So the choice of location is an important factor to be considered.

Replication of Program

The breakfast program could easily be replicated in other childcare centers throughout Arkansas and the nation. However, the availability of healthy food will vary in each region. Chronic diseases and conditions that are pertinent to different geographical areas could easily be adjusted to change the focus of the lessons. Obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, hypertension and anemia are prevalent topics in the Mississippi Delta, which includes Arkansas, among



Photo courtesy of J. Salter

Healthy eating habits start at home. Broccoli anyone?

other states (Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Much of the discussion in the lessons revolved around those chronic conditions.

The addition of teaching staff in related disciplines, as well as nursing and nutrition, would provide more inter-professional opportunities and collaboration in other university settings. Realistically, not all centers have access to nearby universities for such resources. The basics of healthy eating, not only at breakfast, but also at all meals, especially for families with young children, are suitable for any area across the United States.

Further Interventions

Educational programs provide opportunities to involve parents and caregivers in making better food choices and preparing healthier meals for their children. Efforts to teach, support, and work with young children and their parents

are recommended to improve their eating habits and ultimately reduce childhood obesity and risks for chronic disease. These are timely and pertinent topics for parent involvement programs.

Ideas for parent involvement activities that teachers can implement in their classrooms include:

- Start vegetable and herb seeds indoor to be transplanted in a family garden.
- Taste new fruits or vegetables such as kiwi, pomegranate or chickpeas.
- Share favorite food-related children's books.
- Invite a family to talk about traditional breakfast food in their culture.
- Explore healthy eating resources on the Internet such as www.eatright.org, www.eatright.org/kids, or www.myplate.gov.

- Search out a local extension agent, dietitian or family and consumer science teacher to present a program on healthy and quick breakfast ideas.

Additional programs with consistent parent participation and attendance would allow more formal data collection, including demographics, and interpretation as to the benefits of nutrition education in changing eating habits to improve the health of families with young children. Other interventions, such as physical activity programs, could also be incorporated to help reach this goal.

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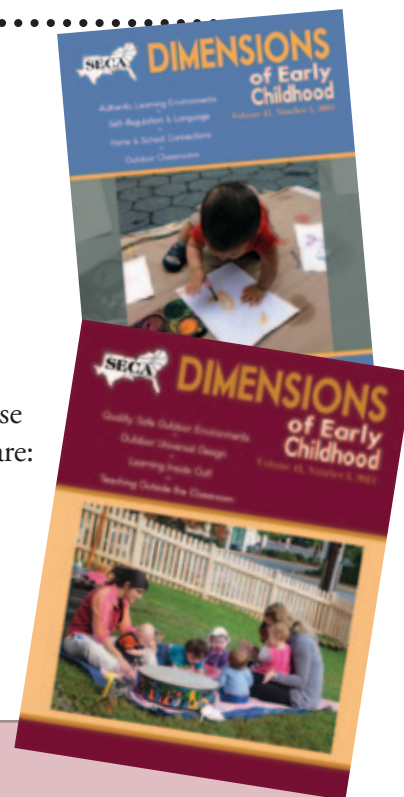
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The 2014 SECA Exemplary Outdoor Classroom

Creating a Nature Inspired Outdoor Learning Environment on a Shoestring Budget

For the past two years, SECA has sponsored a contest to showcase an exemplary outdoor classroom in the Southern region that demonstrates great outdoor spaces for young children. For this second year of the contest, we asked for submissions that demonstrated that “great spaces could be developed on a shoestring budget.....developmentally appropriate spaces designed without significant budgets.”

Applications were reviewed based on the following criteria and, upon designation as a potential winner, on-site visits were made by members of the SECA Board of Directors to verify the application components.

Criteria 1: Natural modifications and innovations in at least five of the following areas: large motor, climbing/crawling space, building area, art area, music and movement area, garden area, storage, water, dirt digging, sand and wheeled toy area.

Criteria 2: Effective and appropriate monitoring of children in these areas by caregivers/teachers.

Criteria 3: The use of natural materials in the outdoor classroom.

Criteria 4: The use of materials specific to the region/community.

Criteria 5: Ease of maintenance of the outdoor classroom.

Criteria 6: Compliance with local/licensing regulations.

The overall winner of the 2014 contest was profiled in our first 2014 issue of *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, Volume 42: 1 (pp.26-31). **Agapeland Youth Enrichment Program** (YEP) in Marion, South Carolina clearly demonstrated that with hard work, some resources and a lot of creativity, outdoor spaces could be developed that provided educational and fun opportunities for children to experience and learn in the outdoor environment. In the second issue of *Dimensions of Early Childhood* in 2014, we showcased **The Child Development & Family Studies Center of Mississippi State University** in Starkville, MS, a runner-up in the 2014 contest.

With the third issue of 2014, we're going to share some “special” highlights of three early childhood programs that merited honorable mention in the contest. The key to these “shoestring budgets”: **DONATIONS!**

Lifespan Montessori

Athens, Georgia

Lifespan Montessori of Athens chose the announcement of the 2014 Exemplary Outdoor Classroom

contest to initiate the creation of an outdoor classroom at their facility. *“We were inspired by SECA’s challenge to create this outdoor classroom space and we enjoyed engaging the community, creating an opportunity for parents to be involved, and most importantly, improving the outdoor learning environment for our children enrolled at Lifespan. The looks on their faces when they first saw their playground transform into an outdoor classroom were priceless!”*

Their goal was to create a nature-inspired outdoor learning environment for under \$150 of out-of-pocket costs for the school. With community engagement, parent volunteers and purchases that were deeply discounted, they met their goal with a total expense of \$139.

The Highlights: Music/Movement and Dramatic Play Areas

In the music area, they utilized the fence to hang pots, pans and wind chimes. “The children use varying types of spoons and chop sticks (wooden, metal and plastic) to experiment and play unique tunes and sounds. The movement area’s focus is a stage that was constructed by

a parent. The children use this area to perform plays, fashion shows, concerts, and any form of dramatic play they can dream. The audience can stand or sit on the tree stumps that were donated by parents. The music and movement areas are connected by a bridge that was constructed by a parent volunteer.”

For more information contact Dr. Emma Laing, Director, lifespanmontessori@gmail.com



St. Martin’s Episcopal School/Early Childhood Science Lab

Atlanta, Georgia

St. Martin’s Preschool is connected to an independent/private school that is a member of the Georgia Independent Schools Association and is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The outdoor classroom is certified by the Arbor Day Foundation as a “Nature Explore” Classroom, the first one to be so designated in Georgia. They are also part of the Children and Nature Network’s “Natural Teacher Network”.



The Highlight: Garden Area

The outdoor area and equipment was donated by a former employee; however, it is maintained by current staff and children, or as the director tells visitors, *“The children do everything but mow the grass.”* This includes planting flowers, picking up pinecones and sticks, throwing away and recycling any trash, feeding the pond animals and keeping the pond clean. The area also contains raised planting beds that the children maintain.

For more information contact Elizabeth Beckwith, Early Childhood Science Lab, ebeckwith@stmartinschool.org



Child Development Center of the University of Louisiana at Monroe

Monroe, Louisiana

From Emily Williamson, Director: *“Five years ago the University of Louisiana at Monroe Child Development Center (ULM CDC) moved to a new building. With this new building our president told us we could have part of the parking lot from the fence to the large oak tree behind our*

center for a ‘playground.’ We decided that we wanted more than just a playground: we wanted an outdoor classroom. So we started with a blank canvas and no funds!

Year one we began to campaign our administration for fencing to secure the outdoor area. *Year two* after the fence was installed, we made a list of all the centers that we wanted to have. Then we made a diagram of where they would go. We realized we would need some shade so we

wrote a grant and received funding to purchase two carport covers which we had installed, then we were ready to develop our centers. We began by recycling used items that had found their way to university surplus. We asked parents to donate pots and pans and anything else they thought we could use and we went to work. **Three years later** this is where we are.”

The Highlights: Music Area and Weaving Board

One of the carport covers houses four learning centers: Science, Exercise, Music and Blocks. The music area is full of homemade instruments where children can explore sound, tone and rhythm. A **music wall** was created with pots and pans, a washboard, triangle, cymbal, wooden xylophone and various kitchen cast offs. Next to the music wall are hand drums made from plastic and metal buckets. Behind the music wall is a frame with different pieces of wood that the children can play with wooden spoons to create different sounds.

Beside the covered area is an open grassy area where children can run and play group games. There is also “Ace’s Flower Shop”, a dramatic play area. In the fall it is converted to a pumpkin patch /farmer’s market. Beside the flower shop on the fence are **weaving boards** made from recycled bread trays.

For more information, contact Emily Williamson, Director, ewilliamson@ulm.edu

Children don’t need “fancy” and “expensive”. They need “hands-on” and opportunities to explore with adults who can help to guide them through their explorations. As our application for the contest stated:

“The purpose of the SECA Exemplary Outdoor Classroom Contest is to:

1. Highlight quality, nature-friendly outdoor learning environments that can be used as models for programs seeking to improve their own outdoor spaces.
2. Identify models of quality outdoor spaces which can be exemplified in each of the SECA Affiliate states.”

We hope you’ve found something that you can replicate in your program. Remember, getting everyone involved is the key! Don’t forget to retrieve past issues of



Dimensions of Early Childhood (Volumes 41 and 42) to find other articles about wonderful outdoor spaces for children.

Congratulations to all our colleagues throughout the South who are working to ensure quality early childhood education for our children.

The content and photos in this article were submitted by Dr. Emma Laing, Elizabeth Beckwith and Emily Williamson. The article was prepared from the contest applications by Glenda Bean, Executive Director of the Southern Early Childhood Association.

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Ten Ways to Foster Resilience in Young Children – Teaching Kids to “Bounce Back”

Discover how caregivers can use activities to assist young children in building resilience.

Karen Petty

Resilience has often been defined as the ability to bounce back in times of adversity and to develop in a positive way when faced with setbacks (Dillen, 2012; Masten, 2009). Children routinely show high amounts of resilience mostly because of temperament and a built-in sense of autonomy. Children are able to overcome adversity to bounce back before social and emotional harm is done, even after being exposed to extreme risks. Dr. Ken Ginsburg, a contemporary resilience expert, wrote that resilience may be the fourth “R” and is as important to teach as “Reading”, “Riting”, and “Rithmetic” (2006; 2011). As we teach and provide care for young children, there is always opportunity to assist them in becoming more resilient by looking at research in resilience and finding the best practices.

Resilience may be the 4th “R”.

What Does the Research Say?

Most children are emotionally buoyant and are able to bounce back quickly and live resilient lives, even when they grow up in families with extreme challenges that include loss and separation (Masten, 2011; Petty, 2009b) such as the case of children of parents who are in the military (Petty, 2009a). The following research studies represent examples of ways that children who have been exposed to extreme hardships have found ways to show emotional hardiness or competence later in life.

Masten and Garmezy studied African-American children who faced poverty but seemed to have an internal locus of control or self-efficacy that was surprising to their teachers (Garmezy, 1981; Masten, 2009). Interestingly they found that when we put forth our best efforts in caring for our youth (or schooling them), resilience can be fostered against any odds.

Shiner and Masten (2012) tracked 205 children to early adulthood and then young adulthood where they looked at “Big Five personality traits” (p. 507) such as being:

- extraverted or outgoing and active
- neurotic or fearful and distrusting
- conscientious or careful and attentive
- agreeable
- open

It was found that children have the potential to change, “both naturally and through intervention” (p. 526) as they enter adulthood and are faced with hardship and stress.

Michael Ungar looked at resilience from the perspective of the positive adaptations that social services can provide to children who experienced maltreatment, trauma, abuse, and neglect and found that their ability to bounce back is often associated with their own personal coping strategies as well as the community services that are provided such as schools and care giving (2013).

In a grounded qualitative study, Christine Eppler (2008) explored the resilient traits of 12 school-agers who had experienced the death of a parent and found that there were certain themes present in their stories about their grief. They identified feelings such as sadness, anger, and fear, and happiness as well as themes of family support and extended support. Eppler discovered that

the use of a strength-based lens in order to foster resilience in children is necessary in order to honor their feelings and build on their strengths.

In every study (above) where children had positive outcomes when living in dire circumstances, they received support or were surrounded by protective factors such as the following to foster resilience. We can use resilience literature and theory to build emotional hardiness if we are aware of the basic ways that kids can be taught to keep bouncing (Benard, 2004; Shiner & Masten, 2012).

Ten Ways to Foster Resilience

Working with children can be challenging, especially when they face enduring hardships. For children with low amounts of resilience, it can be extremely difficult to bounce back or remain buoyant in challenging times. The following ways to foster resilience are found in literature based on resilience theory and best practices.

#1: Build Empathy

Help children to build resilience by becoming more understanding or able to see the view of someone else by using children’s literature (Petty, 2012). After reading a story such as *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* with younger children, talk about the characters and ask children to tell how they might feel if they were a particular character. Talk about feelings such as scared, angry, frustrated, hungry, lonely, sad, etc. Then have them change the story by having each “character” tell another “character” how they feel. For example, “I don’t want to go across the bridge ‘cause I’m scared.”, said the littlest Billy goat. Ask the children to



Photo courtesy of the author

Children’s literature can be used to build empathy with characters and classmates.

reenact the story, adding the phrase, “‘cause I’m feeling...” to each character. When children begin to see that other children have some of the same feelings that they do, they may begin to identify those feelings in others and experience compassion, perspective taking, and/or empathy.

#2: Identify a Go-To Person

Children need at least one caring adult with whom they can attach to offset the challenges they face each day. This person is often their teacher or care provider. By mentoring or coaching a child who is building resilience, our actions go a long way in ensuring success. Intentionally care for children who lack the ability to rebound quickly from challenges

or adversities by spending time just being there for them or simply noticing them (Ginsburg, 2006). When caring for large groups, this takes much practice to become the go-to person when under-resilient children need you. Set aside a few minutes each day to “check-in” with them: “I saw that you were having difficulty building a tower (or writing your name) earlier. Can I help?” For social skill building, phrases such as, “When you get stuck or don’t know what to do, remember that I’m here for you.”

#3: Listen

Noah, a caregiver, recently reminded me there is a difference in listening and hearing. Caregivers

often say, “I’m listening.”, but they may not be really hearing what the child is saying. Noah advises us to make eye contact, move in toward the child at a distance that is comfortable for you and the child, and really listen (hear). Use phrases such as, “I’ve got a whole minute to listen to you and I really want to hear your story.” or, “Sometimes I go too fast so ask me to slow down and hear your words.” These simple requests to pay positive attention to young children can go a long way in building resilience by acknowledgement that what she has to say is important to you. Intentional caring by listening is a wonderful protective factor for young children building their resilience.

**Children’s mistakes
can be growth
experiences.**

#4: Learn to “See Next”

Help kids “see next” which simply means to look forward, using past experiences as lessons but future experiences as opportunities to bounce better/become more resilient. Set goals and make plans with the kids in your care. Help younger kids to plan short-term goals such as planning the activities we can do today vs. long-term goals for older children such as making good grades, joining a team, or mastering a skill. Use

circle time (group time) as well as individual times with children to plan, i.e. “What will you build next?” and “When will you let Jay have a turn?” or “How many days will you take to finish your project?”

#5: Accept Children for Who They Are

Acceptance means knowing the disposition and temperament of the children in your care and working to begin where they are in order to move forward in building resilience. For example, some children need lots of practice in social skill building or following the rules, while some need lots of practice in learning cognitive concepts. One is not more important than the other, so we can begin to think of social skill building or



Photo courtesy of the author

Connect children’s “islands of competence” by providing many group activities.



Photo courtesy of the author

Empower children to make choices and explore options.

guided participation as important as learning to read, write, and do arithmetic (Petty, 2009c). As teachers and caregivers, we must know appropriate expectations at different ages and stages of development (Brooks and Goldstein, 2003; Petty, 2009b) to plan resilience-building activities appropriately. Take into account cultural differences in the children in your care and encourage their responses to be germane or connected to their everyday experiences.

#6: Identify Strengths or “Islands of Competence” (Brooks and Goldstein, 2003)

Find areas of strength in kids and build upon those by offering activities that provide practice and repetition as opportunities to improve. For example, Sam enjoys being a runner, so be sure to plan activities that al-

low him to run often. Vivian is adept at writing all the letters in the alphabet and wants to write all the names of the children in her class to share with her parents. Provide resources for her and offer intentional, gentle guidance when needed. Once you identify some of the same islands of competence in the young children in your care, be sure to connect their “islands” by providing lots of group or team activities. Resilience building comes more easily when activities are matched with children’s propensities. Once they have enjoyed success on one “island”, the chances of building efficacy or esteem on other areas is greater.

#7: Do-Overs

Help children to realize that mistakes are not fatal and can be experiences from which to grow. Give children

the chance to have a “do-over” or the opportunity to redo a “mistaken behavior” (Gartrell, 2003). This not only gives children the chance to practice appropriate behaviors, but also builds trust between you and the child. Also, encourage children to give one another “do-overs” or opportunities to make it better. One teacher made a do-over ball by writing the word “DO-OVER” on an inflated beach ball. When the opportunity arose, she tossed the ball to the child who could practice a more appropriate behavior by having a “re-do” and kept the ball in sight so that children could choose to have a do-over when needed.

#8: Develop Responsibility

Provide children opportunities to take care of themselves and others by participating in tasks that make their environments better such as cleaning their spaces, helping one another, caring for pets (with assistance) and being responsible for their belongings. Give them chances to make their communities better also by participating in food and clothing drives, feeding the homeless, and providing services or goods for those in need.

#9: Offer Meaningful Participation (Benard, 2004)

Allow children to participate in group care in a meaningful and authentic way. Encourage them to help make class rules along with the daily schedule and a commitment to follow them. Prepare rebus word and picture charts for them to follow or have them make their own. Allow them to assist in menu planning for snacks, meals, special events, etc. as well as planning field trips and other events. Environments in which children feel a part or connected may

foster resilience by reducing stress and anxiety.

#10: Teach Problem-Solving (Brooks, 2007)

Foster resilience by modeling problem solving. Model these three steps and then have children to act independently from you.

- Identify the problem with all involved.
- Think of two or three ways to solve the problem that all can agree upon.
- Think of a reminder that you can use when needed and share with those involved such as using signs or non-verbal cues.

Model problem solving.

Children tend to bounce back more if they can solve their own problems rather than having adults constantly directing them. Brooks and Goldstein use the term “resilient mindset” as it empowers children to make choices and explore options that lead to the most positive decisions (2009). For example, when five-year-old Kason uses teasing as a friendly gesture but the recipient of the teasing does not understand, the opportunity for using the three-step plan above is present. Kason may experience teasing as an everyday occurrence from family members and friends and does not see any harm in his actions (Myers et al., 2013). It is with care and consideration that a caregiver may help Kason under-

stand that not everyone has the same perceptions or awareness of teasing.

Conclusion

The ten ways to foster resilience provided above will be better received by children if we allow them to experience change in small increments as they take baby steps. These small changes can lead to the ability to adjust to larger changes that children routinely face and can create a more resilient or buoyant child who can adapt to life’s challenges. By honoring feelings that children have in dealing with adversity or setbacks, along with identifying their strengths, we can play a part in helping them to “bounce back” or be resilient.

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About the Author

Karen Petty is a Professor and Department Chair of Early Child Development and Education in the College of Professional Education, Department of Family Sciences at Texas Woman's University, Denton, Texas. She has 20 years' experience teaching young children in early childhood classrooms and 18 years teaching early childhood classes at the college level. Her research interests are in resilience and young children who are separated from their parents for prolonged periods of time, especially in military families.

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Source: *Fast Food Menu Prices*, <http://www.fastfoodmenuprices.com/>, Information retrieved 8/25/2014



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Friday, January 16, 2015

Donald Davis, Storyteller

Go to <http://www.jackstreet.com/jackstreet/KSECA.Davis.cfm> to listen to Donald's SECA Radio interview.

Donald Davis was born in a Southern Appalachian mountain world rich in stories. "I didn't learn stories, I just absorbed them," he says as he recounts tales and more tales learned from a family of traditional storytellers who have lived on the same Western North Carolina land since 1781. Davis grew up hearing gentle fairy tales, simple and silly Jack tales, scary mountain lore, ancient Welsh and Scottish folktales, and-most importantly-nourishing true-to-life stories of his own neighbors and kin.



"I could have listened all morning to Donald Davis...his stories often left listeners limp with laughter at the same time they struggled with a lump in the throat."

Wilma Dykeman
The New York Times

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Daniel Hodgins is an internationally recognized presenter and author of two books titled: *Boys: Changing the Classroom, Not the Child* and his new book: *GET OVER IT: Relearning Guidance Practices*. His work has been featured in national publications including, *International Cooperative Nursery* and *Early Childhood News*.



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Saturday, January 17, 2015

Johnette Downing

Johnette Downing is a multi-award winning musician and author presenting concerts and author visits for children, and keynotes and workshops for educators globally. Johnette's presentations celebrate childhood and speak to a child's interests in an engaging, interactive, thought-provoking, educational, entertaining and culturally respectful way; earning her a reputation for being the "Musical Ambassador to Children."



Downing has garnered multiple awards including eight Parents' Choice Awards, four iParenting Media Awards, two Parent's Guide to Children's Media Awards, four National Parenting Publications Awards, a Family Choice Award, two Family Review Center Best of the Year Awards, an Imagination Award and a Haiku International Association Honorable Mention Award.

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