2017 Trainer Institute and Director Seminar
Thursday, March 9, 2017 ● 7:30 a.m.—12:00 p.m.

Practice-Based Coaching: Why, Who, What and How?
### 2017 Trainer Institute
Presented by the Pyramid Model Consortium with Kristin Tenney-Blackwell

Time	Session
7:30 — 8:00 am	Continental Breakfast & Networking
8:00 — 8:15 am	Introductions and Setting the Stage
8:15 -— 8:30 am	Views of Coaching
8:30 -— 9:00 am	Define and Describe Practice-Based Coaching (PBC)
9:00 -— 9:30 am	Why Practice-Based Coaching?
9:30 -— 9:45 am	**Break**
9:45 -— 10:00 am	Who Is Involved?
10:00 -— 10:30 am	What of Practice-Based Coaching ● coaching focus
10:30 -— 11:40 am	How of Practice-Based Coaching
11:40 -— 12:00 pm	Reflection and Next Steps

- Define and describe an evidence-informed approach to coaching: Practice-Based Coaching (PBC)
- Discuss PBC framework and associated components
- Analyze why, who, what and how of PBC

Building Systems to Support Practice-Based Coaching
2017 Director Seminar
Presented by the Pyramid Model Consortium with September Gerety
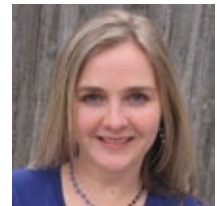
- Align professional development strategies with desired outcomes
- Learn about the Practice-Based Coaching framework
- Link Practice-Based Coaching to child learning
- Plan to implement and sustain Practice-Based Coaching

Time	Session
7:30 — 8:00 am	Continental Breakfast & Networking
8:00 — 8:15 am	Introductions and Setting the Stage
8:15 — 9:15 am	High-Quality Professional Development
9:15 — 9:30 am	Practice-Based Coaching as a Bridge from Training to Practice
9:30 — 10:15 am	Defining and Describing Practice-Based Coaching ● Components of PBC ● Delivery Formats for PBC
10:15 — 10:30	**Break**
10:30 — 11:45 am	Preparation, Personnel, Processes ● Budgeting ● Logistics ● Choosing and Preparing Coaches & Staff to be Coached ● Evaluating Implementation of Coaching
11:45 — 12:15 pm	Action Planning

Dimensions of Early Childhood

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Refereed Articles

Departments

President's Message
Carol Montealegre

'Escaping a Life of Poverty' is Everyone's Challenge

Overcoming the ill effects of persistent poverty sometimes seems to be treated as an afterthought in the field of early childhood education. Early childhood teachers know, despite the long silence from curriculum writers, journalists, and politicians, that extreme poverty during the first years of life can, and does, have very negative effects on a child's future.

Alarming statistics indicate that generational poverty is a stark reality in many rural and urban communities throughout the South, poverty that children and families live in year after year. This is an oppressive state that breeds hopelessness; beginning with grandparents, passed on to parents, and inherited by their children.

Today, as in the past, the benefits of *high quality programs* for young children continue to be held up as the best escape from a life of poverty. At the *Beau Rivage Resort* in Biloxi, MS, March 8-11, 2017, the *Southern Early Childhood Association's (SECA) Conference*, titled **"Strategies for the New South: Equipping Professionals for the Realities of Generational Poverty,"** attention will be focused on this issue of poverty. Policies and strategies that can avail young children and their families, trapped in generational poverty, will be highlighted. On March 8th, a *Research Symposium* will address this challenging topic, featuring national and regional experts; Dr. Michael Nettles, Dr. Catherine Scott-Little, Dr. Cathy Grace, Charles W. Fluharty, and others. This conference will also feature keynotes and sessions focusing on research-based educational experiences that best benefit children living in poverty.

I encourage you to make plans to attend this cutting-edge conference! The children we serve depend on us to apply what we know to our classroom practices! Best wishes to all as we move forward on our professional development trajectory, making a difference in the lives of children, one child at a time!!

Sincerely,

Carol C. Montealegre, M.S.

SECA President

Words from the Editor

Dr. Mari Cortez

Dear Readers:

Teacher preparation is often related with higher education. However, teacher preparation occurs in different contexts particularly in early childhood. We must prepare early childhood teachers to offer high quality early learning experiences for children. Preparation or training includes the active involvement in understanding issues that face young children and their families. In this issue of *Dimensions* we share useful articles that give readers ideas about to prepare as teachers on very different topics. For example, an easy way to develop knowledge about a particular topic of interest is through a book club as suggested by Dr. Kelly Mayer-White. The interesting aspect of a book club is that it engages teachers in literacy while at the same time they gain knowledge about the preferred topic. Jiang and Jones share the power of observation to learn about how to work with challenging behaviors in children while giving important guidance steps. I hope that you find these ideas useful, please let us know if you implement any of them in your classroom!

Queridos lectores:

La preparación de los maestros a menudo se relaciona con la educación universitaria. Sin embargo, la preparación del maestro se produce en diferentes contextos, sobre todo en la primera infancia. Debemos preparar a los maestros de niños pequeños para que puedan ofrecer experiencias de aprendizaje temprano de alta calidad. La preparación o formación incluye la participación activa en la comprensión de los problemas que enfrentan los niños pequeños y sus familias. En este número de *Dimensions* compartimos artículos útiles que dan los lectores ideas acerca de cómo prepararse como maestros enfocándose en temas diferentes. Por ejemplo, una manera fácil de desarrollar conocimientos sobre un tema particular de interés es a través de un club de libro, según lo sugerido por la Dra. Kelly Mayer-White. El aspecto interesante de un club de libro es que hace que los maestros participen en la lectura y, al mismo tiempo adquieren conocimientos sobre el tema preferido. Jiang y Jones comparten el poder de la observación para aprender acerca de cómo trabajar con los comportamientos problemáticos en los niños mientras que nos comparten importantes pasos para la orientación apropiada para los niños. Espero que les resulten útiles estas ideas, por favor, ¡déjenos saber si pudieron aplicar estas sugerencias en su escuela o aula.

Best/Deseándoles lo mejor,

Mari Riojas-Cortez, Ph.D.

Editor

Understanding the Effects of Deployment on Military Families: Implications for Early Childhood Practitioners

Early childhood professionals can provide services and effective support to assist military families with healthy coping and functioning before, during and after deployment.

Ellie Ketchem Barbee,
Vivian I. Correa &
Cynthia C. Baughan

American military families are a subculture that makes up a small percentage of the total number of American family units. The total force of military personnel comprises approximately 1% of the United States population, and nearly half of these individuals have children (Department of Defense, 2012). Forty percent of military children are under the age of 6, which can be an especially challenging age for families coping with deployment (Trautmann, Alhusen, & Gross, 2015). The lifestyle associated with this diverse population exposes them to unique experiences that differ drastically from those of civilian families in the U.S. Since 2001, military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan have led to the largest-ever call for American military troops. Operations Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, and New Dawn have involved military support in the form of the deployments of over two million service members (Baiocchi, 2013). These deployments have been frequent and long in duration, with the quality time at home between them kept short. Research shows that these wartime deployments cause significant amounts of stress that can negatively impact the family's ability to function (Chandra et al., 2011; Lester et al., 2010; Paris, DeVoe, Ross, & Acker, 2010; Trautmann et al., 2015).

The purpose of this article is to examine what is known about the effects of stressors associated with the military lifestyle and how they impact returning military members, the non-deployed at-home spouse, and the military child. In addition, research regarding the success of home-based intervention strategies for military families will be given special consideration. Finally, we will discuss implications and suggestions for early childhood practitioners about how to provide services and effective support to assist with healthy coping and functioning.

Deployment and its Effect on Families

Military deployment is defined as the shifting and positioning of armed forces troops and their logistical support infrastructure to various corners of the world. For American troops since 2001, this has primarily referred to the Middle East, with a massive call-up of over two million U.S. service members. These wartime deployments have been lengthy, frequent, and stressful, not only for the active duty military members, but also for their families who are left behind.

> *Forty percent of military children are under the age of 6.*

The Cycle of Deployment

Wartime military deployment is an experience unique to the military community, a challenging stressor, which in turn has effects on each member of the family. Upon receiving the news of an up-and-coming deployment, a military family unit will begin to go through a series of stages in preparation for the coming separation in what is referred to as the Cycle

Eaerly Childhood programs can support enhanced parent-child interactions.

of Deployment, outlined by Siegel and Davis (2013).

Stage 1. *Predicting difficulties with deployment* involves the family process of thinking about, analyzing, and assessing past problems experienced during a previous deployment or issues of family dysfunction in the past. The needs of the children, whether or not the family has recently relocated, or mental health issues of the at-home parent may all be factors foreseen as being difficult for the family during the deployment.

Stage 2. *Pre-deployment* is the stage in which the family may discuss the expectations and the responsibilities held by each family member during the upcoming deployment. The family often will develop plans or goals and prepare communication strategies.

Stage 3. The onset of the actual *deployment* involves the family initiating the plans outlined during the pre-deployment phase. The at-home parent may provide further support for children, helping to facilitate

their understanding that the deployment is finite. The family will maintain their traditions, along with developing new ones as needed as adjustment takes place.

Stage 4. *Sustainment* involves maintaining and/or establishing support systems surrounding the family (e.g., extended family, support groups, religious groups, or friends). The family will communicate with the deployed parent through email, letters, or phone. They may continue to watch their budget, and communication between the at-home parent and the children will be maintained.

Stage 5. *Post-deployment* consists of the family in the process of reintegration as all members readjust and begin restructuring their everyday lives to "fit" the returned parent back into the home routine. This stage is associated with easing the returned parent back into the family circle, taking time to communicate, and getting to know each other again. Generally, families will keep plans during this phase simple

and flexible. They may not schedule too many things during the early weeks of reintegration, and may also lower holiday expectations. It must be kept in mind that this entire cycle may last anywhere from a few months to a few years, depending on the deployment length and the family's ability to reintegrate and function normally again. It may not run smoothly, and significant challenges may accompany any or all of the five stages. Researchers have shown that the stages involving the most heightened amount of stress are the deployment itself, as well as post-deployment and reintegration (Chandra et al., 2011; Lester et al., 2010; Trautmann et al., 2015).

Deployment Related Challenges for Children and At-Home Parents

Several researchers have investigated the challenges faced by children and the at-home parent during the deployment stage (Gorman, Eide, & Hisle-Gorman, 2010;

Lester et al., 2010; Paris et al., 2010; Trautmann et al., 2015). Research suggests that children of all ages are affected by the wartime deployment of a parent and that regardless of developmental stage, stress accompanies the experience.

Chandra et al, (2011) studied the impact on 1,507 school-age children and their at-home parents from military families to shed light on the reported effects of deployment. As compared with data from national samples of U.S. youth from the same age groups, military children in the study had higher levels of emotional or behavioral difficulties. Approximately "34 percent of at-home parents reported elevated emotional or behavioral problems in their children, compared with only 19 percent of children within this age group in the general population" (Chandra et al., 2011, p. 24). Parents also reported challenges in academic engagement and engagement in risk behaviors such as alcohol use, fighting or getting into trouble at school. The children in the study sample also reported on their own emotional and behavioral difficulties, with 38 % reporting having a moderate to high range of difficulty. Thirty percent of children reported elevated anxiety symptoms, compared with half that percentage of youth in civilian studies. Children in the study sample also reported on what they felt were the most difficult deployment-related challenges. Three of the most frequent concerns voiced by the children were:

- "dealing with life without the deployed parent

- helping the at-home parent deal with life without the deployed parent

- not having people in the com-

munity who know what deployment is like" (Chandra et al., 2011, p. 32).

School-age children are not the only age groups affected by parental deployment. Research reveals that younger children are also affected by the wartime deployment of a parent and that regardless of developmental stage, stress accompanies the experience (Trautmann et al., 2015). Infants born to spouses of a deployed military member had mothers with twice as many depressive symptoms as women whose spouses were at home (Paris et al., 2010). Since very young children are in the process of building healthy attachments in the context of available, reliable, and nurturing caregivers, a lack of consistency due to the prolonged absence or compromised emotional status of the returning military parent (e.g., due to combat-stress related symptoms) may cause young children an inability to form this healthy attachment. Further, research suggests that separation due to deployment could compromise healthy functioning and development for children under the age of five (Gewirtz & Zamir, 2014; Lester et al., 2010; Paris et al., 2010; Trautmann et al., 2015). In fact, a study by Gorman, Eide, and Hisle-Gorman (2010) showed that toddlers had higher emotional reactivity, anxiousness, depression, somatic complaints and withdrawal symptoms, with mental and behavioral health hospital visits increasing by 11 percent during parental deployment.

Not surprisingly the degree of stress on the at-home parent appears to be the biggest predictor of how the child functions during the deployment cycle. Thus, the impact on the at-home parent's mental health is important to understand. Some of the challenges faced by at-home

parents were related to the stress of finding time to take care of an increasing number of responsibilities at home, including primary care of the children and helping them deal with the absence of the deployed parent. Additionally, parents reported struggles associated with the marital relationship and the changing roles in the marriage (Chandra et al., 2011; Lester et al., 2010; Trautman et al., 2015).

While both the children and the at-home parent face their own individual deployment-related stresses, parents' adjustment can directly impact the experience of the children. Chandra et al., (2011) found that at-home parents who were functioning well were much more likely to have children who fared well during the deployment and post-deployment experiences. Conversely, children of at-home parents who struggled with deployment stressors exhibited more difficulties functioning and communicating. Siegel and Davis (2013) also reported that at-home parents and children were ambivalent regarding their desire for access to the deployed parent. They reported comfort in talking to the wartime parent on the computer, while also universally identifying media coverage as a source of significant stress.

While deployment is not infinite, the problems and stress associated with the experience do not simply go away after the military parent returns. The following section outlines specific challenges faced by military families during post-deployment, or the reintegration process.

Reintegration Challenges for the Family and the Returning Military Parent

After deployment, the effects of war and combat-related stress may

take its toll on the psychological well-being of the returning military parent. Just as every soldier's wartime deployment experience is different, thus are his or her emotional and behavioral responses upon returning. Siegel and Davis (2013) reported that these responses might range from typical, short-term distress (e.g., such as decreased feelings of safety, a change in sleep pattern, or social isolation) to the development of more serious psychiatric disorders (e.g., clinical depression, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder [PTSD]). Siegel and Davis further explain that over 30 percent of returning soldiers have suffered a traumatic brain injury or experienced either PTSD or depression, and co-morbidities such as alcohol abuse or aggression manifest themselves in nearly half those with an impairment. These unhealthy complications related to war and combat-stress are detrimental for the returning military parent, and can also complicate family life for the children and the at-home spouse.

In fact, military children have reported specific challenges associated with reintegration after the return of the deployed parent including:

- "getting to know the deployed parent again

- fitting the returning parent back into the home routine

- and worrying about the next deployment" (Chandra, et al., 2011, p. 35).

Paris et al. (2010) reported that returning soldiers with PTSD may become numb and avoid interactions with others which can interfere with parenting. PTSD can disrupt the parental Reflective Functioning (RF) ability which is an "attachment-based concept which refers to the capacity to understand behavior in light of underlying mental states and intentions" (Paris et al., 2010, p. 612). RF essentially helps a parent to be conscious of his or her child's emotions while understanding the context of the behavioral interac-

tions, which may be altered in the form of inconsistent behavior and disrupted development. In addition to RF, combat-stress may cause marital discord between the returning parent and the at-home parent as they struggle to "re-connect" (Siegel & Davis, 2013). The negative implications for a child's well-being in the presence of marital discord is widely understood, as is the equally negative effect it has on a family's ability to function, and in the military family's unique case, to reintegrate. Researchers have also reported a greater likelihood of child maltreatment and neglect during the post-deployment period as returning soldiers may experience increased mental health issues (Hisle-Gorman et al., 2015; Paris, et al., 2010; Trautmann et al., 2015).

While the cycle of deployment is a difficult experience for military families, utilizing supports and services to ease transitions and promote healthy, adaptive coping strategies may prove beneficial. The various support

Early childhood programs can help children and parents reconnect in military families

Photo courtesy of Russ Child Development Center, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, VA

systems available for and used by military families are examined in the next section.

Effective Home-Based Support Programs for Military Families

Savant and Toombs (2009) conducted the Family Support Program survey with more than 800 military families and provided specific insight into what services military families used most often, as well as which family programs they considered most useful and valuable. The survey showed that the three most frequently used programs were family readiness or support groups, the Department of Defense-funded program *Military OneSource* (2014), and recreation/fitness centers. These results reflected an increase in the overall use of family support programs as compared with past National Military Family Association surveys. The surveyed families emphasized that they relied heavily on the support these programs provided, particularly when dealing with deployment-related stress. They also reported that they found it frustrating and difficult when and if they relocated to a base that did not offer the programs from which they had previously received assistance. According to both the survey results and additional research, family support programs have proven extremely successful in assisting military families, particularly those programs that involve home-based intervention strategies (Paris et al., 2010; Savant & Toombs, 2009).

Home-based interventions have been successfully utilized in military families since 1984 (Inouye, Cerny, Hollandsworth, & Ettipio, 2001; Paris et al., 2010) to assist families

with the reintegration process. Military families may feel safer receiving services in the home than going to hospital or mental health facilities to address the stressors that might be associated with deployment or post-deployment. These home-based interventions have also been credited with lowering the overall reported rates of child abuse in the military community across numerous states (Inouye et al., 2001; Kelley, Schwerin, Farrar, & Lane, 2006).

The *Strong Families Program* and the *New Parent Support Program* are some of the earliest family support programs that have been adapted for use with military families and are still utilized today (Paris et al., 2010). What these successful support programs have in common is their use of intervention strategies that take place within the home. The programs take a strengths-based approach to intervention and focus specifically on military-life related family challenges including isolation, deployment, stress management, communication between family members, sibling rivalry, and discipline.

> *Early childhood practitioners have a particularly significant role in supporting military families.*

Strong Families Program

The *Strong Families Program* utilizes home visitation to enhance the engagement of recently reunited military families with young children

(Ross & Devoe, 2014). Engagement in this case refers to the process of identifying a problem in regard to family functioning, recognizing the need for treatment, following through to treatment completion, and ending in disengagement. Due to a stigma and a negative connotation within the military community associated with seeking treatment, many families are reluctant to do so (Fallon & Russo, 2003). There are also often psychological barriers involved, such as a lack of a perceived need for treatment or avoidance behaviors, a common response for a person affected with PTSD.

In an attempt to encourage engagement, Ross and DeVoe (2014) designed the *Strong Families Program* to specifically address the impacts of both deployment and reintegration-related stressors, including separation, the returning parent's mental health symptoms, and parent-child relations. They stressed that it was a collaborative effort to assist children in the community, and they used a strengths-based approach to intervention. Researchers enrolled a total of 124 out of the 450 military families who had requested to participate.

The program content included eight modules, each taking place within the home over the duration of the program. *Modules One* and *Two* involved the elicitation of the family's hopes for the program, their motivation for participating, as well as their developmental and psychosocial history, specifically from a military perspective. In *Modules Three* and *Four*, the clinician focused heavily on each parent's individual experiences in the context of the deployment cycle, as well as the child's experience in regard to deployment and their reaction(s) during the

Even very young children can experience the stress of deployment and reintegration.

Photo courtesy of Russ Child Development Center, Joint Base Langley-Eustis, VA

reintegration process. The purpose of these activities was to aid the home visitor in developing the final goal-oriented modules (*Five* through *Eight*), ensuring that the outlined goals were both relevant and individualized to each family's unique needs. Ross and DeVoe (2014) reported that only four families discontinued their participation after the initial engagement interview, and that over 90 percent of the enrolled families completed all program sessions and posttest assessments. Interestingly, the researchers found that participation in *Strong Families* seemed to have a secondary program effect, meaning that families used the safety, privacy, and flexibility offered by the home-based program to "test out" the process of receiving help and services. Many went on to seek out more or other types of support following their completion of the program.

New Parent Support Program

The *New Parent Support Program* was adapted for use with military families in reducing the risk of child abuse and enhancing parent-child interactions (Inouye et al., 2001; Kelley et al., 2006; Marine Corps Community Service, 2015). The home-based program functions under the congressionally mandated Family Advocacy Program that targets child maltreatment and intimate partner violence in military families (Travis, Heyman, & Slep, 2015). The program offers outreach, prevention, and intervention with military families. The *New Parent Support Program* serves expectant families and families with children under the age of three by providing services such as childbirth classes, parenting classes, and supervised playgroups. Case managers provide services that include educational materials on child development, discipline, parenting, and home safety. The families are also connected to community or military installation services related to areas of need such as mental health, medical care, and substance abuse.

Inouye et al. (2001) conducted a study of the New Parent Support Program that was supplemented with telephone and video technology (i.e., telehealth) to reach 19 families at an Army medical center in Hawaii. Families were satisfied with the program and reported improved family functioning, parenting, and coping skills. The program not only provided home-based and telehealth supports but also community supports, including family fun festivals, parent education courses, and play groups (Inouye et al., 2001; Ross & DeVoe, 2014).

The *Strong Families Program* and *New Parent Support Program* have been shown to be effective for military families using home-based approaches. Also, their strengths-based and collaborative decision-making processes in terms of developing tasks and goals for treatment create a higher level of trust and rapport between the family and the home visitor, an important contributor to program commitment and

success (Inouye et al., 2001; Paris et al., 2010; Ross & DeVoe, 2014). Using a public health approach and shifting the focus to maintaining the safety and well-being of the *entire* military community also seems to be more effective in reaching military families and obtaining their interest in receiving services, as this subculture is known for being fiercely dedicated to helping to support one another.

Implications for Early Childhood Practitioners

It is clear that military families face numerous challenges related to the deployment cycle. Considering the large number of military families with children five years of age and younger and the potential significant effects that deployments can have on the development of young children (Gorman et al., 2010; Paris et al., 2010; Seigel & Davis, 2013), early childhood practitioners may have a particularly significant role in supporting and being responsive to the specific needs of military families with young children.

First, early childhood practitioners should be aware of common developmental issues that may be related to the deployment cycle (Paris et al., 2010). They must recognize the potential effects of deployment on the functioning of the adult caregiver (e.g., higher rates of depression), developmental trajectory of the young child (e.g., attachment with deployed parent, behavioral challenges, difficulties in development of critical social-emotional skills), as well as the reciprocal relationship between caregiver and child. Greater awareness of the potential effects of deployment on military families with young children may help early

childhood practitioners provide intentional supports in response to the unique experiences of these young children in the home and child-care environments, as well as identify caregivers and children who may need additional support from outside resources.

Home intervention strategies are beneficial in meeting the needs of military families.

Next, one cannot overstate the importance of responsive caregiving that supports the development of strong relationships between the family and child, out-of-home caregivers and the child, and between the family and out-of-home caregivers. Evidence-based models, such as the *Teaching Pyramid* (Fox, Dunlap, Hemmeter, & Joseph, 2003), could provide guidance for early childhood practitioners in implementing strategies that develop responsive and high quality supportive home and child-care environments for all young children. They also provide needed targeted and intentional supports for the development of social-emotional skills (e.g., expressing and regulating emotions) in young children who may be experiencing challenges related to the deployment cycle. The *Teaching Pyramid* (Fox et al., 2003) also provides guidance for identifying young children who may need more intensive individualized interventions related to social-emotional skills.

Finally, early childhood practitioners must know where to find additional resources, and, when

necessary, the process for referring families to these supports (Seigel et al., 2013). For example, families and practitioners can access resources specific for military families of young children through professional organizations such as *Zero to Three* (http://www.zerotothree.org). The *Military Child Education Coalition* (http://www.militarychild.org) provides resources for professionals and families related to how children and families experience the military, educational information and supports. *Military Kids Connect* (http://militarykidsconnect.dcoe.mil/) provides resources for teachers and families of young children in school-age programs. The American Psychological Association also provides supports for professionals working with military families through their psychology help center (Palomares, 2011). Although many resources are easily accessible for caregivers seeking information, some families and children may require more intensive supports. Early childhood practitioners need to be aware of evidence-based home and early childhood intervention programs that are effective for military families with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers (Paris et al., 2010), how to connect families to these programs when needed, and how to work as part of a team with other professionals such as counselors, who may be supporting military families to ensure cohesiveness and consistency of supports.

Conclusion

The unique experiences of military families revolving around the highly stressful cycle of deployment and the research regarding its effects on families, both as a unit as well as on individual members, must be kept in mind in order to effectively provide

proper support and assistance to those struggling to cope or function in a healthy manner. In addition, research suggests that evidence-based home intervention strategies that address military-specific family stressors including attachment relationships, deployment, reintegration, parental combat-stress, and military culture are beneficial for meeting the needs of military families. By becoming familiar with the special needs of military families and resources that civilians can use to support them, early childhood practitioners can provide meaningful and appropriate support to these children and their families.

Family support programs that utilize these services such as the *Strong Families Program* and the *New Parent Support Program* should continue to be funded. Further, the concern expressed by military families regarding the issue of the services and programs they depend on being offered on some bases, but not others, to which they are relocated and stationed should be considered. It could be argued that a concern such as this is alarming. These services and programs should be accessible and available on a nationwide scale for military families, regardless of which base they find themselves. Distress regarding whether or not the services on which they depend will be available following their family's relocation is unacceptable. These issues must be addressed through increased funding for military family support programs and awareness of personnel working with these families.

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Practical Strategies for Minimizing Challenging Behaviors in the Preschool Classroom

Challenging behaviors can happen to children with a variety of abilities in all kinds of settings, and children's early experiences as members of classroom communities serve as the foundation on which lifelong patterns of social behaviors are constructed. Helping children with challenging behaviors become fully included is essential for them to grow and thrive in the future.

Hui S. Jiang, M.A.
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Every day during free playtime in an inclusive preschool classroom, David (all names are pseudonyms), a 4-year-old, marches to the block center, takes all the blocks out from the shelf, and scatters them around on the floor. He piles up some long blocks and knocks them down. The classroom is filled with the loud noise of blocks hitting the floor. Teacher's constant verbal reminders are being ignored by David. No other children are able to play in the area because David uses all of the blocks and yells at or even hits those who attempt to touch one. However, during clean up, David runs away and lets the teachers and other children put away the blocks. David is unable to play cooperatively with his peers and is often socially rejected in other children's play.

"*Sharing and cooperative play are crucial to a successful classroom.*"

Photo by Elizabeth Nichols

Does this sound familiar to you? Do you have a child in your classroom like David? According to Raver & Knitzer (2002), one in ten young children exhibit challenging behaviors in classroom settings, and this results in the high rates of preschool expulsion due to behavior problems (Gilliam, 2005). In this study, "challenging behavior" for a preschooler can be defined as any behavior that feels overwhelming to and that challenges a child care provider's, child's, or family's sense of competence. These behaviors also limit children's ability to take full advantage of the classroom learning environment. However, it is imperative that we examine the causes of behavior to provide appropriate guidance and never blame the child.

The chance of having a child like David in a classroom is quite high. Teachers report increasing numbers of children with challenging behaviors and their increasing frustration with the negative effects of those behaviors on the dynamic and routine activities of the classroom (Campbell, 2002). Teachers are also expressing the need for training and assistance around managing challenging behaviors (Hemmeter, Corso, & Cheatham, 2006).

Challenging behaviors can happen to children with a variety of abilities in all kinds of settings, and children's early experiences as members of classroom communities serve as the foundation on which lifelong patterns of social behaviors are constructed (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). Therefore, helping children with challenging behaviors become fully included is essential for them to grow and thrive in the future. This article examines why challenging behaviors are great obstacles for children's learning and growth in the classrooms and uses four real life examples to demonstrate strategies to prevent and eliminate behavior problems among preschoolers. All strategies are evidence-based and easy to implement by classroom teachers.

Addressing challenging behaviors is critical to ensure children's successful preschool learning experiences. Recchia and Lee (2013) stressed that one of the biggest consequences of unaddressed challenging behaviors is social rejection. Children who are socially rejected are likely to "act out" in class, become involved in conflicts with peers, and/or withdraw from any social interaction. These challenging behaviors will, in turn, further hamper social integration and cause more rejections. Noncompliance is another common form of behavior problems (Miles & Wilder, 2009). Research indicates that noncompliance negatively affects children and correlates to having academic and social development struggles. In addition, according to Kalb & Loeber (2003), one of the most important indicators of "school readiness" for preschool and kindergarten children is compliance within the classroom, as evidenced by following teacher's directions. According to Conroy, Dunlap, Clarke, & Alter (2005), not only do challenging behaviors interrupt the classroom dynamics, but if left unaddressed these behaviors will most likely deteriorate, leading to a diagnosis of emotional/behavioral disorder (EBD) or emotional disturbance (ED).

Despite the wide recognition of the need to eliminate challenging behaviors and to help children and classroom teachers, few practical strategies are applicable to everyday preschool teachers due to the lack of adequate training and planning time. According to a detailed literature review on widely used practices for remediating behavior problems by Conroy et al. (2005), there has been an increasing amount of research focused on positive behavioral interventions, which is an umbrella term used for a group intervention strategies that are "highly individualized, … and designed to prevent the occurrence of challenging behaviors" (p. 165). However, most of the strategies suggested are not easy for classroom teachers to implement because they require highly specialized trainings or timely and systematic implementations, such as applied behavior analysis. In addition, most of the studies on behavior management did not describe how the results of their behavioral analysis led to the design of the intervention strategies, which would have greatly helped teachers in applying interventions to similar situations. Moreover, only a small part of the interventions reviewed focused on how children behave before they demonstrate challenging behaviors, indicating that the majority of the research deals with the consequences of behavior problems, but not enough attention has been directed at how to prevent the challenging behaviors from happening in the first place.

> ### In an inclusive classroom, there are no "norms."

In the fall of 2013, the authors of this paper had the opportunity to work as student teachers in two preschool inclusive classrooms with 3- and 4-year-olds at a Head Start program in New York City. There the authors had the privilege to meet and teach children like David. After witnessing some children's consistent exclusion within the classrooms and the complex, non-descriptive, and unrealistic strategies in scholarly studies, the authors decided to investigate and implement practical strategies to minimize behavior problems and its negative impact on the children and the teachers in the preschool classrooms in which we were working.

This research is based upon and aimed at preschool classroom teachers who often do not have a one-on-one aide or other forms of assistance, and who must take full responsibility of all children, including those with challenging behaviors. In this article, the authors will introduce four scenarios of challenging behaviors and offer some practical strategies and tools that were implemented to overcome the challenges we met in the classrooms. These strategies are simple and have been proven effective in managing individual child with consistent behavior problems, and they require no specialized training and only a small amount of planning time.

Strategies to Prevent Challenging Behaviors

Adam is a 3-year-old who has been in his preschool classroom for more than six months. He plays well during playtime and has made some friends in the classroom. However, he never participates in class meetings. Every morning, a teacher has to heavily coax him to the meeting area, sit him down next to her, and keep reminding him to remain seated. One morning, while Adam sat beside a teacher during morning meeting he was being particularly disruptive. He kept moving his body and making incoherent repetitive remarks about a train, which were consistently interrupting the morning meeting activities. When it was time to pick the classroom job of the day on

the job chart, Adam suddenly ran away from the meeting area looking very frustrated. The teacher said, "Come pick your job, Adam! What do you want to do today?" Adam screamed, "No, I hate it! I hate you! I hate school!" while throwing pieces of Lego at the job chart from afar. The assistant teacher had to get up and physically stop him from hurting other children. Adam never came back to join the morning meeting.

"Working closely with children and understanding their cultural differences is vital to an inclusive classroom."

Photo by Jan Brown

Has something familiar happened in your classroom? What triggered Adam's acting out behavior and how can it be prevented it from happening in the first place? To answer these questions, we first need to find out why Adam behaves the way he does, and what function that behavior serves. Long-term systematic observation and analysis of Adam and other children's behavior has informed the authors that the two most common reasons why children engage in undesirable behaviors are either to escape undesired activities and/or to gain access to attention or tangible items, both strongly related to children's communication skills (LaPan, 2014). When a child wants to avoid an uncomfortable situation, to interact with a teacher or a peer, or to play with a favored toy but does not know how to use his words or body language to communicate, he is more likely going to use other ways that are seen as inappropriate to teachers to express himself. Knowing this, we have developed the following strategies to prevent these challenging behaviors before they occur.

What Adam did in the previous anecdote was a typical escape behavior. To find out why he escaped from the morning meeting at that particular time when the children started to pick their jobs of the day, the teachers met with Adam after naptime when he was most calm to talk about what happened during the morning meeting.

> *Teacher:* Adam, you ran away and threw Legos at us this morning. What happened? You don't like the job chart activity?
>
> *Adam:* What 'jo-car? I don't like the 'Jo-car' thing. I hate it!
>
> *Teacher:* No. That is our 'Job Chart,' Adam.
>
> *Adam:* I don't care!

This short conversation with Adam informed us why he escaped from the morning meeting: he did not have the prerequisite knowledge to know what the job chart activity was, nor was he taught what the job chart was. Adam did not know what was happening or what he was supposed to do which resulted in his frustration and might have even given him a sense of failure. He ran away because he did not understand and wanted to cover up his unknowing. This led to the first strategy to help Adam.

Teaching the "Norms"

Having taught for so long, teachers sometimes tend to make assumptions about what our children should have already known when they arrive in our classrooms. However, children have a variety of abilities and may come from different backgrounds and cultures. They may not know or even be aware of what we consider the "norm knowledge."

For example, in one of the authors' classrooms, a girl named Prishala strongly refused to eat breakfast from time to time when cereal was served. The teachers did not understand why, so they asked her many questions, modeled how to eat with a spoon, and even had her best friend sit next to her during breakfast, but nothing worked. Later, we found out that Prishala's family had just come from a country in North Africa, where she had never had cereal for breakfast. She did not even know what cereal was. If we were more sensitive to her culture and her home life, her behavior problems could have been prevented. As teachers, it is hard to avoid making assumptions based upon our own experiences and

cultural norms, about what we think our children should have known. To help us break down this barrier, we made a Norm Knowledge Checklist of the assumptions that we as teachers could be making and overlooking (See Table 1).

When we tested out the checklist in our classrooms, the results were surprising. Many children did not know that their teacher's expectations of them change in different settings and classroom routines. They did not know that what they were supposed to do during playtime and meeting time was different, and they were often confused. We found that David did not know how to arrange his legs so he could sit "crisscross applesauce," James never sang along with the class because he did not know the traditional children songs that many children learned before entering preschool, and Samantha was not aware of the fact that she could look at pictures on the shelf for guidance on where to put away the toys during clean up time. By not knowing the "norm knowledge," children may be seen as acting out when in fact they may just feel insecure or frustrated. While some children can catch on rather quickly, other children may need clear instructions and time to learn these "norm knowledge."

Also, an increasing number of children in schools are from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds, and "some children are never exposed to dominant cultures and practices so prominently valued in schools prior to entering early education settings" (Mitchell & Souto-Manning, 2010, p. 269). For example, not all children know classic children's nursery songs like *Twinkle Twinkle Little Star* or have played with typical toys like Legos.

Table 1: The Norm Knowledge Checklist

Do all the children in your classroom know these basic skills?
• **Teacher's expectations during daily routines** ◊ Do children know what the classroom rules are? ◊ Are there ways to help them remember and follow these rules?
• **Classroom Materials** ◊ Most children came to the classroom knowing many traditional American children's songs, like Twinkle Twinkle Little Star, or Itsy Bitsy Spider. However, not all children learn them at home. ◊ We often put up charts like daily schedule, classroom jobs, and children's birthdays. Do all children know how to read these? ◊ Do all children in the classroom know how to use the toys in the classroom? Some children may not have seen Legos, dominos, or jigsaw puzzles before.
• **Self-help skills** ◊ Do all children know how to eat with the utensils the classroom provides? ◊ Do they know how to wash their hands, how to use the toilet, or how to set their cot before nap time in the United States?
• **Cultural Norms** ◊ Do all children celebrate American holidays? Do they know what Halloween or Thanksgiving is? ◊ Do they eat the same type of food the school provides at home?

Moreover, they may not celebrate Halloween or Thanksgiving and do not know about American food. Early childhood educators should be culturally aware by not making assumptions of what children have already known and being sensitive to children's cultural backgrounds.

Not only did teaching the "norms" help us prevent many behavior problems, but it also gave us a great opportunity to re-think and re-learn about what "norms" are. In an inclusive classroom where everybody is different in their unique ways, there are no "norms." Acknowledging everyone's uniqueness will bring the class together and

help us build a stronger classroom community.

Ease Transitions

George is a 4-year-old preschooler. Although he has been in this preschool for over a year now, he still has great difficulty transitioning from one activity to another. Teachers often have to give him many prompts to stay on task, and even then, it is not likely that he will do so. This often results in classroom delays. One day during morning meeting, George delayed the class as he continuously sang the "Good Morning" song well

after it was finished. His teacher told him, "We may not be able to go to the park if we keep singing. We need to keep our listening ears on." This only stopped George for a minute. George continued to sing. To ignore the teacher's reminders, he covered his ears and sang even louder. His teacher said, "George, I'm going to ask you to sit with me today because you are not listening to my words. We have to get ready to go to the park" George did not go and sit with the teacher until the direction was given for the third time. He then disrupted the class again by crawling over his peers to sit in the teacher's lap.

How long do you spend transitioning throughout the day? Try to track the amount of time that you spend each day during transitions. It can be easy to underestimate the amount of time spent during transition periods. Challenging behaviors often occur during transitions, when children are feeling stressed because they do not know what to do, frustrated because they have to leave their favorite toys behind, or overwhelmed by the noise

level and the disorder of the classroom. According to Hemmeter, Ostrosky, Artman, and Kinder (2008) "designing a schedule that minimizes transitions and maximizes the time children spend engaged in developmentally appropriate activities is the first step in decreasing challenging behavior" (p. 3).

Use Music and Movement during Transitions

Music and movement have a powerful influence on young children. To effectively transition the class after circle time, we often made a class train where each child held onto another child's back, with the children to collectively lead them to the next activity by dropping them off at different places as we progressed through the classroom, whether it is to their cubbies, small group tables or outside. This helped children line up quickly and made it fun for the whole group.

Movement Helper

Another tool to help children transition to a different area of the classroom is to have a "movement

helper." A "movement helper" is one of the classroom jobs. During transitions, we called on the movement helper first and invited him to make a movement which then the rest of the classroom would have to follow in the same way as they are called one by one. For example, the teacher calls out, "Maggie, you're the movement helper today. Show us how you're going to move." Maggie takes big stomping steps to her area and the teacher remarks, "What giant stomping feet you have, Maggie! Who else is sitting ready so that they can show us their big stomping feet?" This strategy can help make transitions effective and engaging.

Provide Visual Cues of What to Do

Some children have a hard time during transition because they do not know what to do while everyone else seems so busy. To ease their frustration, we used pictures and timers to give children clear directions. As not every child understood the picture schedule in the classroom, and even if they did, a classroom schedule often had more than ten activities, of which can be easy to lose track. Replacing the abstract drawings in our classroom schedule with real pictures of the class helped many children. We also created a new classroom job, called "the schedule monitor." This child was responsible for moving a clip on the schedule to the next activity before any transition occurred. The schedule monitor was a very popular job among children.

To make both teachers and students aware of the amount of time we spent on each transition, we used a large sand timer during all transitional periods. By doing so, children were visually able to stay on task

Photo by Nancy Alexander

"Smooth transitions reduce stress on children and reduce the opportunity for disruptive behavior."

Table 2 A Sample Positive Reinforcer Book: *David Likes to Play!*

Week 1	• Setting the stage • Stating the first behavior goal: Working with a friend	"David is a friend in Classroom #1. His favorite toys are Legos and blocks. He is very good at building animal farms. We wonder if he could teach a friend how to build an animal farm next week."
Week 2	• Acknowledge David's progress on the previous behavior goal. • Setting the next goal: Learn how to share toys	"On Tuesday, David and Marc played with the blocks and farm animals. Although there was some disagreement between them, they made a beautiful farm with the teacher's help. They are working really hard on how to share toys."
Week 3	• Continue to reinforce previous goals • Setting new goals: join classroom clean up	"Last Wednesday, when Meimei had no train to play with, David shared one of his trains with Meimei. What a good friend David becomes! Let's see if David will help Meimei and another friend clean up next week!"
Week 4	• Acknowledge David's progress, no matter how little. • Continue setting the previous goal: clean up.	"David put away two triangle blocks on Monday before he said he was too tired. Meimei and Tony helped him cleaned up the rest of the blocks. Cleaning up is such a fun activity and we can learn so much from it! We hope David do not lose this wonderful opportunity to learn next week!"
Note: This example shows only the text of the first four weeks of the book. A real book should include pictures showing the target child showing positive behaviors. Teacher could also include a small drawing at the corner of every page illustrating next week's behavior goal.		

during transitions and were encouraged when they were able to be faster than their previous time.

Minimize Waiting Time

Children are active by nature. As teachers, we need to acknowledge their natural instinct to move around. When children are held up in the classroom waiting for others to get ready, they are more likely to engage in some activities that seem inappropriate or unacceptable to teachers. A good way to prevent such behaviors is to keep the waiting children busy with songs, stories, and movements. If the teacher is busy during transitions and has no time to lead children in singing or movements, there are many children-initiated activities can be utilized. Even if the teacher does not know many children's games, he/she can ask the children in the classroom, as they are all experts!

Strategies to Minimize Existing Behavior Challenges

The strategies we previously discussed can be used to prevent behavior problems from happening in the first place. However, not everything can be prevented and when a child already exhibits challenging behaviors, such as David, as mentioned in the beginning of this article, then teachers must come up with strategies to replace those challenging behaviors with positive ones.

Negotiating a behavior contract is a strategy often used by teachers with children who have significant behavior problems. However, a behavior contract does not usually work as well with very young children. Additionally, programs such as Head Start and curricula like High

Scope believe that internal motivation should be used exclusively and therefore do not promote the use of any external reward or token system (Whiltshire, 2013).

So how then do we motivate children to change their behaviors? Besides using constant praise and attention, is there another way that consistently reminds children of their behavior goals and the teacher's expectations? One strategy we tried was making use of a teacher-made *positive reinforcer* book (see Table 2) within the classroom. The result proved promising.

Positive Reinforcer Books

A positive reinforcer book is easy to create, fun to use, and effective in eliminating undesirable behaviors and improve many other aspects of young children's learning. It is an

expanding classroom book made by the teacher. Every week the teacher negotiates a behavior goal with one or more children in the classroom, takes pictures of them exhibiting the agreed upon behavior goal, and records it in the book. The teacher adds one page for each child each week, which includes a picture of him/her demonstrating positive behavior, a short text describing the picture, and a goal for the next week. Teachers can make a book with all the children in it or even separate books for each student who needs one. Table 2 shows the text of the first few weeks of David's positive reinforcer book *David Likes to Play*. As a class, we would read and discuss the book once a week, and with David, we would read it to him daily. The book made the teacher's expectation for David easy to understand and remember, provided positive attention for him, and most importantly, it helped us notice David's progress every week. When a child is demonstrating consistent behavior issues like David, teachers can become overly focused on a child's problems and often overlook his/hers progress. By recording the child's progress each week, teachers are able to notice even the smallest improvement that the child has made which motivates both parties.

Children in our classroom all loved their positive reinforcer books. We made one for the entire class, in which each week we featured one or two children, as well as two separate ones for David and Adam, who needed personalized intervention books. A positive reinforcer book is just like a behavior contract, but easier to understand and more meaningful to young children. Children loved seeing themselves in books and writing stories about themselves. The children would often read and refer

to their books during free play, and some children even conducted dramatic plays according to the books. At the end of the semester, children were able to make their own books. These books not only promote positive behaviors, but also develop literacy skills, increase children's self-confidence, and help them become authors at an early age.

Improve Self-Regulation Skill with a "Quiet Corner" and "Breaks"

Another common cause of behavior problems is difficulty with impulse control. Some children react quickly and aggressively to situations that cause frustration. In the previous anecdote, Adam was not able to control his impulses when he encountered a frustrating situation, so in order to express his feelings he screamed and threw toys. Children who lack self-regulation skills often become frustrated easily and so they throw tantrums and instigate conflicts with peers. Bodrova and Leong (2006) report that the "lack of social-emotional regulation is associated with aggression, lack of social skills, emotional outburst, inattention, and feeling of being overwhelmed" (p. 204). This prevents them from being socially included in the classroom community and learning the necessary skills to be a part of it.

In order to help children like Adam and David develop better impulse control; we set up a "quiet corner" in the classroom where children could retreat to when they were frustrated, sad, or scared. The quiet corner is set up in a low traffic and relatively isolated area. If necessary, noise-canceling headphones can be provided in the "quiet corner," however, stimulating toys should

not be placed in or near the area. For children who needed it, we also provided punching bags (beanbags) as sensory relief for aggression (for more information on this topic please see Schaefer & Mattei, 2005).

Breaks and quiet corners should not be used as a way to give time-outs. Children should be able to decide when to go in and leave the quiet corner. Teachers may suggest the use of a quiet corner to a child when he or she needs it, but should not in any circumstances demand a child to go to the quiet corner.

Conclusion

As early childhood teachers, you may have already realized that the children in your classroom are more diverse than ever. A general education classroom often has children with IEPs, children who speak languages other than English, and those who are from different cultural backgrounds. However, physically enrolling children in a classroom does not guarantee that they will be able to be part of the classroom community. In order to help all children, including the ones who demonstrate challenging behaviors, it is critical to keep the classroom an inclusive and welcoming learning community.

The strategies introduced in this article are easy to implement and require only a small amount of planning. These strategies not only help teachers manage the classroom, but also help teachers to see the sparkle in every child and to find the joy and confidence in teaching children with a variety of abilities and from diversified background. We sincerely hope all teachers realize that all classrooms can be truly inclusive, and that all teaching should tend to each child's need.

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Estrategias Prácticas para Reducir los Comportamientos Desafiantes en el Aula Preescolar

Challenging behaviors can happen to children with a variety of abilities in all kinds of settings, and children's early experiences as members of classroom communities serve as the foundation on which lifelong patterns of social behaviors are constructed. Helping children with challenging behaviors become fully included is essential for them to grow and thrive in the future.

Hui S. Jiang, M.A. & Sarah Y. Jones, M.A.

Cada día durante el tiempo de juego libre en un aula preescolar inclusiva, David (todos los nombres son seudónimos), a 4 años de edad, marcha hacia el centro de los bloques, saca todos los bloques de la plataforma y los esparce alrededor en el piso. Algunos bloques de largo se apilan y los derriba. El aula se llena con el ruido de los bloques golpeando el suelo. Constantes recordatorios verbales de la maestra están siendo ignorados por David. Otros niños no pueden jugar en la zona debido a que David usa todos los bloques, incluso grita a quienes intenten tocar uno. Sin embargo, durante la limpieza, David huye y deja a las maestras y otros niños que recojan los bloques. David es incapaz de jugar cooperativamente con sus compañeros y a menudo socialmente es rechazado en juego de otros niños.

Photo by Elizabeth Nichols

El intercambio y el juego cooperativo son cruciales para el éxito de un aula

¿Te suena esto familiar? ¿Tienes un niño en tu aula como David? Según Raver y Knitzer (2002), uno de cada diez niños presentan comportamientos desafiantes en clase, y esto se traduce en los altos índices de expulsión preescolar debido a problemas de comportamiento (Gilliam, 2005). En este estudio, "comportamiento desafiante" para un niño en edad preescolar puede definirse como cualquier comportamiento que sea abrumador y que reta el sentido de competencia de un maestro, de un niño, o de una familia. Estos comportamientos también limitan la capacidad de los niños para aprovechar al máximo el ambiente de aprendizaje en el aula. Sin embargo, es imperativo que examinemos las causas de comportamiento para orientar adecuadamente al niño sin culparlo.

La posibilidad de tener un niño como David en el aula es bastante alta. Los maestros informan un número creciente de niños con comportamientos desafiantes y su creciente frustración con los efectos negativos de esas conductas en las actividades de rutina y dinámicas del aula (Campbell, 2002). También están expresando los maestros la necesidad de capacitación y asistencia en gestión de comportamientos desafiantes (Hemmeter, Corso y Cheatham, 2006). Los comportamientos desafiantes pueden suceder a los niños con una variedad de habilidades en todo tipo de entornos, y las primeras experiencias de los niños como miembros de las comunidades del aula sirven como la base sobre la cual se construyen los patrones de los comportamientos sociales de toda la vida (DEC/NAEYC, 2009). Por lo tanto, es fundamental que se incluyan a los niños con comportamientos desafiantes para su crecimiento y desarrollo en el futuro. Este artículo examina por qué los comportamientos desafiantes son grandes obstáculos para el aprendizaje y crecimiento de los niños en las aulas preescolares. Se

utilizan cuatro ejemplos reales para demostrar estrategias para prevenir y eliminar los problemas de comportamiento desafiante entre los niños en la edad preescolar. Todas las estrategias están basadas en evidencia y son fáciles de implementar por los maestros.

Abordar comportamientos desafiantes es crítico para las experiencias de aprendizaje preescolar de los niños. Recchia y Lee (2013) indican que una de las mayores consecuencias de comportamientos desafiantes sin resolver es el rechazo social. Los niños que son socialmente rechazados son capaces de "llamar la atención" en clase (en una manera disruptive), involucrarse en conflictos con sus compañeros, o retirar cualquier interacción social. Estos comportamientos desafiantes, a su vez, más entorpecen la integración social y causan más rechazos. Incumplimiento es otra forma común de problemas de conducta desafiante (Miles y Wilder, 2009). La investigación indica que el incumplimiento afecta a los niños negativamente y correlaciona a tener luchas de desarrollo académico y social. Además, según Loeber y Kalb (2003), uno de los más importantes indicadores de "school readiness" para niños de preescolar y de jardín de infantes es el cumplimiento de normas dentro del aula, según lo evidenciado siguiendo las indicaciones de la maestra. Conroy, Dunlap, Clarke y Alter (2005) mencionan que los comportamientos desafiantes no solo interrumpen la dinámica del aula, pero si abordan estos comportamientos probablemente los niños se deteriorarán, llevando a una diagnosis del trastorno emocional del comportamiento o trastorno emocional.

A pesar del amplio reconocimiento de la necesidad de eliminar compor-

tamientos desafiantes y ayudar a los niños y maestros, algunas estrategias prácticas son aplicables a los maestros de preescolar debido a la falta de adecuada formación y planificación. Según una literatura detallada sobre las prácticas utilizadas para remediar problemas de comportamiento por Conroy et al (2005), ha habido una creciente cantidad de investigaciones que se centran en intervenciones de comportamiento positivo, que es un término general que se utiliza para un grupo de estrategias de intervención que son "altamente individualizado, ... y diseñado para prevenir la aparición de los comportamientos problemáticos" (p. 165). Sin embargo, la mayoría de las estrategias sugeridas no son fácil para que los maestros las apliquen porque requieren entrenamientos altamente especializados o implementaciones oportunas y sistemáticas, como el análisis del comportamiento

En un aula con enfoque de inclusión no hay "normas. "

aplicado. Además, la mayoría de los estudios sobre el manejo de comportamiento no describen cómo los resultados de sus análisis del comportamiento llevaron al diseño de las estrategias de intervención, esto habría ayudado mucho a los maestros en la aplicación de intervenciones en situaciones similares. Por otra parte, sólo una pequeña parte de las intervenciones examinadas se centró en cómo los niños se comportan antes de que demuestran comportamientos problemáticos, lo que indica que la mayoría de las ofertas de investig-

ación son con las consecuencias de los problemas de conducta, pero no lo suficiente la atención se ha dirigido a la forma de prevenir que sucendan los comportamientos desafiantes en el primer lugar.

En el otoño de 2013, los autores de este artículo tuvieron la oportunidad de trabajar como profesores en dos aulas inclusivas con niños preescolares de 3 y 4-años de edad en un programa de Head Start en la ciudad de Nueva York. Allí los autores tuvieron el privilegio de conocer y enseñar a los niños como David. Después de presenciar la sistemática exclusión de algunos niños dentro de las aulas y las estrategias complejas, no descriptivas, y no realistas en estudios académicos, los autores decidieron investigar e implementar estrategias prácticas para reducir al mínimo los comportamientos desafiantes y su impacto negativo en los niños y los maestros en las aulas preescolares en las que estaban trabajando.

Esta investigación está basada en y dirigida a maestros de preescolares que a menudo no tienen una ayudante personal u otras formas de asistencia, y que deben tomar total responsabilidad de todos los niños, los comportamientos desafiantes incluidos. En este artículo, los autores introducen cuatro escenarios de comportamientos problemáticos y ofrecen algunas estrategias y herramientas prácticas que se aplicaron para superar los obstáculos que se encontraron en las aulas. Estas estrategias son simples y se han demostrado eficaces en general para los niños con problemas consistentes de conducta, y no requieren ninguna formación especializada y sólo una pequeña cantidad de tiempo de planificación.

Estrategias para Prevenir Comportamientos Desafiantes

Adam es un niño de 3 años que ha estado en su salón de clase preescolar por más de seis meses. Juega a bien durante el tiempo de juego y ha hecho algunos amigos en el aula. Sin embargo, él nunca participa en las reuniones de clase. Cada mañana, la maestra lo tiene que engatusar a la zona de reunión, sentarse a su lado y seguir recordándole a permanecer sentado. Una mañana, mientras que Adam se sentó al lado de su maestra durante la reunión mañana, estaba siendo particularmente perturbador. Dejaba mover su cuerpo y hacer observaciones incoherentes y repetitivas sobre un tren, y seguia constantemente interrumpiendo las actividades de la reunión de mañana. Cuando llegó el momento de recoger el trabajo de aula del día en la carta de trabajo, Adam repentinamente se fue lejos de la zona de reunión viéndose muy frustrado. El maestro le dijo, "viene a recoger tu trabajo, Adam! ¿Qué quires hacer hoy?" Adam gritó, "No, yo la odio! ¡Te odio! ¡Odio la escuela!" mientras lanza a lo lejos piezas de Legos en la tabla de trabajo. La meastra asistente tuvo que levantarse y detenerlo físicamente antes que lastimara a los otros niños. Adam nunca volvió a unirse a la reunión de mañana.

¿Algo familiar ocurrido en tu aula? ¿Que ha desencadenado el comportamiento de Adam y cómo se puede prevenir que suceda en primer lugar? Para responder a estas preguntas, primero tenemos que averiguar por qué Adam se comporta de la manera que lo hace, y la función que el comportamiento sirve. La observación

Trabajando muy cerca con los niños y entendiendo sus sus diferencias culturales es vital para un aula inclusiva

sistemática a largo plazo, el análisis de Adam y el comportamiento de otros niños ha informado a los autores que las dos razones más comunes por qué los niños participan en comportamientos no deseados son para escapar de las actividades no deseadas o para acceder a atención o artículos tangibles, ambos fuertemente relacionados con habilidades de comunicación de los niños (La-Pan, 2014). Cuando un niño quiere evitar una situación incómoda, para interactuar con un maestro o un compañero, o jugar con un juguete favorito, pero no sabe cómo utilizar sus palabras o el lenguaje corporal para comunicarse, es más probable que utilizen otras formas que se sean inadecuadas para expresarse. Sabiendo esto, hemos desarrollado las siguientes estrategias para evitar estos comportamientos desafiantes antes de que ocurran.

Lo que Adam hizo en la anécdota anterior fue un comportamiento de escape típico. Para averiguar por qué se escapó de la reunión de la mañana en ese momento cuando los niños empezaron a recoger sus trabajos del día, los maestros se reunieron con

Adam después de la hora de la siesta cuando él estaba más tranquilo para hablar de lo que sucedió durante la reunión de la mañana.

Maestra: Adam, te fuiste y lanzaste los Legos a nosotros esta mañana. ¿Qué pasó? ¿No te gusta la actividad de la carta de trabajo?

Adam: ¿Qué jo-car? No me gusta la cosa de 'Jo-car'. ¡Yo la odio!

Maestra: No. Es nuestra 'carta de trabajo,' Adam.

Adam: ¡No me importa!

Esta breve conversación con Adam nos ha informado por qué se escapó de la reunión de mañana: no tenía el conocimiento necesario para saber cuál es la actividad de la carta de trabajo, ni tampoco le habían enseñado lo que era la tabla de trabajo. Adam no sabía lo que estaba sucediendo o lo que debía que hacer y eso dio lugar a su frustración e incluso le ha dado un sentido de fracaso. Adam se fue porque no entendía y quería cubrir su desconocimiento. Esto nos condujo a crear la primera estrategia para ayudar a Adam.

Enseñanza de las "normas"

Los maestros que han enseñado por mucho tiempo tienden a hacer suposiciones acerca de lo que los niños deben de conocer cuando llegan a sus aulas de clase. Sin embargo, los niños tienen una variedad de habilidades y pueden venir de diferentes orígenes y culturas por lo cual puede ser que no tengan "conocimiento de las normas" sobretodo en el aula escolar.

Por ejemplo, en una de las aulas de los autores, una chica llamada Prishala fuertemente se negó a comer el desayuno cuando cuando se le sirvió cereal. Las maestras no entendían por qué, así que le hicieron muchas preguntas, modelando cómo comer con una cuchara y tenía incluso su mejor amiga sentada junto a ella durante el desayuno, pero nada funcionó. Más tarde, nos dimos cuenta que la familia de Prishala venía de un país en África del Norte, donde ella nunca había comido cereales para el desayuno, así que no sabía qué era el cereal. Si fuéramos más sensibles a su cultura y su vida, sus comportamientos desafiantes se pudieran haber evitado. Como maestras, es difícil evitar hacer suposiciones basadas en nuestras propias experiencias y las normas culturales acerca de lo que pensamos que nuestros niños deberían saber. Para ayudar a romper esta barrera, hicimos una lista de verificación de conocimientos de norma acerca de las suposiciones que hacemos como maestros y lo que estamos ignorando (ver la Tabla 1).

Cuando probamos la lista de comprobación en nuestras aulas, los resultados fueron sorprendentes. Muchos niños no sabían que los maestros cambian las expectativas de ellos dependiendo del ambiente y las rutinas del aula. No sabían que era lo que tenían que hacer durante el recreo y el tiempo de estar juntos y a menudo se confundían. Nos dimos cuenta que David no sabía cómo cruzar las piernas de la manera que se dicen en inglés "crisscross apple sauce." James nunca cantó junto con la clase porque no sabía las canciones tradicionales infantiles que muchos niños en los Estados Unidos aprenden antes de entrar a preescolar, y Samantha no era consciente del hecho de que ella podía mirar imágenes en los estantes para ver las instrucciones de como y donde se guardan los juguetes durante el tiempo de la limpieza. Por no saber el "conocimiento de la norma", los niños se pueden ver como si se estuvieran portando mal cuando en realidad el comportamiento se debe a estar frustrados o inseguros. Mientras que algunos niños pueden capturar bastante rápidamente, otros niños puede necesitar instrucciones claras y más tiempo para aprender estos "conocimientos de la norma".

También, un gran número de niños en las escuelas son de diversos orígenes culturales y étnicos, y "algunos niños nunca están expuestos a culturas dominantes y las prácticas que son tan prominentemente valoradas en las escuelas antes de entrar en la configuración de educación temprana" (Mitchell y Souto-Manning, 2010, p. 269). Por ejemplo,

Table 1: La Lista de Verificación de Conocimientos de Normas

¿Todos los niños de su clase sabe estas competencias básicas?
• **Expectativas del profesor durante las rutinas**   ◊ ¿Los niños saben cuales son las reglas del aula?   ◊ ¿Hay maneras de ayudarles a recordar y seguir estas reglas?
• **Materiales del aula**   ◊ La mayoría de los niños entran al aula sabiendo canciones infantiles tradicionales estadounidenses como Twinkle Twinkle Little Start e Itsy Bitsy Spider. Sin embargo, no todos los niños lo aprenden en casa.   ◊ A menudo ponemos rótulos para el horario diario, los trabajos del aula y los cumpleaños de los niños. ¿Crees que todos los niños saben leerlos?   ◊ ¿Todos los niños saben cómo usar los juguetes en el aula? Puede ser que algunos niños no no hayan visto los Legos, fichas de domino o rompecabezas antes.
• **Las habilidades de auto-ayuda**   ◊ ¿Saben todos los niños como comer con los utensilios que les proporcionan en el aula?   ◊ ¿Saben todos los niños cómo lavarse las manos, la forma de usar el inodoro, o cómo configurar su camita antes de la siesta de la manera que se usa en los Estados Unidos?
• **Normas culturales**   ◊ ¿Todos los niños estadounidenses celebran los días festivos? ¿Conocen lo es Halloween o El Día de Acción de Gracias?   ◊ ¿Comen el mismo tipo de comida que proporciona la escuela en su casa?

no todos los niños saben canciones infantiles clásicas (en inglés) como Twinkle Twinkle Little Star o han jugado con los juguetes típicos como los Legos. Por otra parte, muchos no celebran Halloween o El Día de Acción de Gracias y no conocen la comida americana. Educadores de la temprana infancia deben ser culturalmente conscientes sin hacer suposiciones de lo que ya saben los niños y ser sensibles a los antecedentes culturales de ellos.

El enseñar las "normas" nos ayudó a prevenir muchos comportamientos negativos y nos dio la oportunidad de volver a pensar y aprender lo que son las "normas". En una aula inclusiva donde todos los niños son diferentes y únicos, no hay ninguna "norma". Reconociendo la singularidad de todos los niños ayudan a construir una comunidad más fuerte del aula.

Facilitando las transiciones

George es un niño de 4 años de edad. Aunque ha estado en este preescolar más de un año, todavía tiene una gran dificultad para hacer transiciones de una actividad a otra. Las maestras a menudo tienen que darle muchas indicaciones para permanecer en la tarea, y aún así, no lo puede hacer. Muchas veces esto resulta en retrasos en el aula. Una vez durante la reunión de la mañana, George retrasó la clase porque cantaba la canción 'Buenos Días' continuamente y sin parar aunque ya no era tiempo de cantarla. Su maestra le dijo, "No podemos ir al parque si sigues cantando. Necesitamos estar listos para escuchar." Este comentario sólo mantuvo a George sin cantar durante un minuto. George continuó cantando después. Para ignorar los avisos de la maestra, se cubrió sus oídos y cantó incluso más fuerte. Su maestra le dijo, "George, voy a pedirte que te sientes conmigo porque no escuchas mis palabras. Tenemos que estar listos para ir al parque." La maestra le tuvo que hablar a George tres veces antes de que le pusiera atención. George volvió a interrumpir la clase cuando se fue deslizando sobre sus compañeros para poderse sentar en en el regazo de la maestra.

¿Cuánto tiempo utilizas en transiciones durante el día? Trata de calcular la cantidad de tiempo que pasas cada día en las transiciones. Puede ser fácil subestimar la cantidad de tiempo gastado durante los períodos de transición. Comportamientos desafiantes a menudo ocurren durante las transiciones, cuando los niños se sienten tensionados porque no saben qué hacer, frustrados porque tienen que dejar sus juguetes favoritos o se abruman por el nivel de ruido y el desorden del aula. Según Hemmeter, Ostrosky, Artman y Kinder (2008) "el diseño de un programa que minimiza las transiciones y maximiza el tiempo los niños participan en actividades apropiadas es el primer paso en la reducción de comportamientos desafiantes" (p. 3).

Utiliza música y movimiento durante las transiciones. Música y movimiento tienen una poderosa influencia en los niños pequeños. Para tener una transición eficáz después de la hora del círculo, como maestros casi siempre hacemos un tren en donde cada niño se toman de los hombros para llevar colectivamente a la siguiente actividad. Esto ayuda a ponerlos en diversos lugares del aula ya sea en sus cajitas (cubbies), en las mesas de grupo pequeños o afuera. Esta línea ayuda a los niños que lleguen a sus lugares rápidamente en una forma divertida.

Ayudante de movimiento. Otra herramienta que ayuda a la transición de niños a un área diferente de la clase es tener un "ayudante de movimiento." Un "ayudante de movimiento" es uno de los puestos de trabajo para los niños. Durante las transiciones, llamamos al ayudante de movimiento primero y lo invitamos a hacer un movimiento que luego el resto de la clase tenía que hacer de la misma manera cu-

Photo by Nancy Alexander

Las transiciones apacibles reducen el estrés en los niños y reducen la posibilidad del comportamiento disruptivo

Table 2 Un Ejemplo de un Libro Positivo Renforzador: *¡A David le Gusta Jugar!*

Semana 1	• Preparando el escenario • Indicando la primera meta de comportamiento: Trabajar con un amigo	"David es un amigo en el aula # 1. Sus juguetes favoritos son los Legos y los bloques. Él es muy bueno en la construcción de granjas de animales. Nos preguntamos si podía enseñar a un amigo cómo construir una granja de animales la próxima semana ".
Semana 2	• Reconocer el progreso de David en la meta anterior. • Establecer la siguiente meta: Aprender como compartir juguetes.	"El martes, David y Marc juegan con los bloques y los animales de la granja. Aunque hay cierto desacuerdo entre ellos, hicieron una hermosa finca con la ayuda de la maestra. Están trabajando muy duro tratando de compartir los juguetes ".
Semana 3	• Continuar reforzando los objetivos anteriores • Establecimiento de nuevos objetivos: unirse a recoger el aula	"El miércoles pasado, cuando Meimei no tenía un tren para jugar, David compartió uno de sus trenes con Meimei. ¡David se ha vuelto un buen amigo! Vamos a ver si a David le ayudará a Meimei y a otro amigo a recoger la próxima semana! "
Semana 4	• Reconocer el progreso de David, no importa cuán pequeño. • Continuar el establecimiento de la meta anterior: La limpieza.	"David guardó dos bloques triangulares el lunes anteriormente había dicho que estaba demasiado cansado. Meimei y Tony le ayudaron a recoger el resto de los bloques. ¡La limpieza es una actividad tan divertida por la cual podemos aprender mucho de él! ¡Esperamos que David no pierda esta maravillosa oportunidad de aprender la próxima semana! "
Nota: Este ejemplo solo muestra el texto de las primeras cuatro semanas de un libro. Un libro real incluiria fotografías que ilustraran comportamientos positivos de parte del niño. La maestra tambien puede incluir un pequeño dibujo en la esquina de cada página ilustrando la meta de comportamiento de cada semana.		

ando los llamamos uno por uno. Por ejemplo, la maestra dice en voz alta, "Maggie, eres el ayudante de movimiento hoy. Nos muestras cómo te vas a mover." Maggie da grandes pasos, pisa su área y la maestra le dice, "Qué pies tan gigantes y fuertes tienes, Maggie! ¿Quién más está listo para que nos pueda mostrar sus pies gigantes y fuertes?" Esta estrategia puede ayudar a hacer transiciones más eficaces y atractivas.

Proporcionar indicaciones visuales de lo que deben hacer. Algunos niños tienen un momento difícil durante la transición porque no saben qué hacer mientras que todo el mundo parece muy ocupado. Para aliviar su frustración, se utilizaron imágenes y contadores de tiempo para darle claras instrucciones a los niños. Como no todos los niños entendieron el horario ilustrado del aula, e incluso aun si lo entendieron,

el horario de clase a menudo tenía más de diez actividades, de las que fácilmente se puede perder la pista. Cuando reemplazamos los dibujos abstractos en nuestra programación del aula con fotos reales de la clase ayudó a muchos niños. También hemos creado un nuevo trabajo del aula, llamado a "el monitor de programa." Este niño es responsable de mover un clip en el programa a la siguiente actividad antes de que cualquier transición que se produce. El monitor de programa era un trabajo muy popular entre los niños. Para sensibilizar a maestros y estudiantes de la cantidad de tiempo que pasamos en cada transición, utilizamos un gran reloj de arena durante todos los períodos de transición. Al hacerlo, los niños pudieron visualmente permanecer en la tarea durante las transiciones y se animaron cuando eran capaces de ser más rápidos que la vez anterior.

Minimizar el tiempo de espera. Los niños son activos por naturaleza. Como maestros, tenemos que reconocer su instinto natural para moverse. Cuando los niños tienen que esperar a otros para alistarse son más propensos a participar en algunas actividades que parecen inapropiadas o inaceptables a los maestros. Una buena manera de prevenir tales conductas es de entretener a los niños con canciones, historias y movimientos. Si la maestra está ocupada durante las transiciones y no tiene tiempo para guiar a niños en canto o movimientos, hay muchas actividades que pueden ser iniciadas por los niños. Si la maestra no conoce mucho acerca de los juegos de niños, ella le puede pedir a su clase que escojan un juego mientras están esperando, ¡ya que todos son expertos!

Estrategias para Minimizar los Comportamientos Desfiantes

Las estrategias que se indicaron anteriormente pueden utilizarse para evitar que los problemas de comportamiento sucedan en primer lugar. Sin embargo, no todo se puede prevenir sobretodo cuando un niño ya presenta conductas desafiantes, como David. Como se mencionó al principio de este artículo, los maestros deben de desarrollar estrategias positivas para sustituir los comportamientos desafiantes.

La negociación de un contrato de conducta es una estrategia de uso frecuente por los profesores con los niños que tienen problemas de comportamiento significativos. Sin embargo, un contrato de comportamiento no funciona tan bien con niños muy pequeños. Además, programas como Head Start y programas como High Scope creen que la motivación interna debe utilizarse exclusivamente y por lo tanto no promueven el uso de cualquier recompensa externa o sistema de fichas (Whiltshire, 2013).

Así entonces, ¿cómo motivamos los niños a cambiar sus comportamientos? Además de usar la atención y la alabanza constante, ¿existe otra forma que constantemente recuerda a los niños de sus objetivos de comportamiento y las expectativas de la maestra? Una estrategia que hemos probado es haciendo uso de un libro reforzador positivo (ver la Tabla 2) dentro del aula. El resultado resultó prometedor.

Libros de refuerzo positivo

Un libro de refuerzo positivo es fácil de crear, son divertidos de usar y eficaz en la eliminación de comportamientos indeseables y mejorar muchos otros aspectos del aprendizaje de los niños. Es un libro de extensión del aula hecho por la maestra. Cada semana el profesor negocia una meta de comportamiento con uno o más niños en el aula, toma fotografías de ellos exhibiendo el objetivo de comportamiento y registra en el libro (ese comportamiento). La maestra agrega una página para cada niño cada semana, que incluye una foto de los mismos mostrando un comportamiento positivo, un breve texto describiendo la imagen y una meta para la próxima semana. Los maestros pueden hacer un libro con todos los niños o incluso separar libros para cada alumno que necesita uno. La Tabla 2 muestra el texto de las primeras semanas del libro de reforzador positivo de David, *A David le Gusta Jugar*. Como clase, pudimos leer y discutir el libro una vez por semana, y con David, lo leíamos diariamente. El libro permitió que las expectativas de la maestra de David fueran fácil de entender y recordar, proporcionado atención positiva para él, y lo más importante, nos ayudó a observar el progreso de David cada semana. Cuando un niño demuestra comportamientos desafiantes consistentes como los de David, las maestras puede ser excesivamente centradas en los problemas de un niño y a menudo pasan por alto su progreso. Al registrar el progreso del niño cada semana, los maestros son capaces de percibir incluso la más pequeña mejora que el niño ha hecho que motiva a ambas partes.

A los niños de nuestra clase les encantó el libro reforzador positivo. Hicimos uno para toda la clase, y cada semana se contó con uno o dos niños, así como dos separadas para David y Adam, que necesitaron libros personalizados de intervención.

Un libro reforzador positivo es igual que un contrato de comportamiento, pero más fácil de entender y más significativo para los niños pequeños. A los niños les encantó verse a sí mismos en los libros y escribir historias sobre sí mismos. Los niños a menudo les gusta leer y referir en sus libros durante el juego libre, y algunos niños incluso han llevado a cabo obras de teatro dramáticas sobre las historias de los libros. Al final del semestre, los niños fueron capaces de hacer sus propios libros. Estos libros no sólo promueven comportamientos positivos, sino también desarrollan habilidades de alfabetización, aumentar la confianza en sí mismos de los niños, y les ayuda a convertirse en autores a una edad temprana.

Mejorar la habilidad de autorregulación con un "rincón tranquilo" y "descansos"

Otra causa común de problemas de conducta es la dificultad con el control de los impulsos. Algunos niños reaccionan a menudo rápidamente y agresivamente a las situaciones que causan frustración. En la anécdota anterior, Adam no fue capaz de controlar sus impulsos cuando se encontró con una situación frustrante, con el fin de expresar sus sentimientos gritó y lanzó juguetes. Los niños que carecen de habilidades de autorregulación a menudo se frustran fácilmente y así lanzan rabietas e instigan conflictos con sus compañeros. Bodrova y Leong (2006) reportan que la "falta de regulación socio-emocional está asociada con la agresión, la falta de habilidades sociales, arrebato emocional, falta de atención y sensación de ser abrumado" (p. 204). Esto les impide estar socialmente dentro de la comunidad del aula y el aprendizaje de las habilidades necesarias para ser parte de él.

Con el fin de ayudar a los niños como Adam y David a desarrollar mejor el control de los impulsos; hemos creado un "rincón tranquilo" en el aula donde los niños se podían retirar cuando estaban frustrados, tristes o asustados. El rincón está configurado en una zona relativamente aislada y con poco tráfico. Si es necesario, auriculares que cancelan el ruido pueden ser proporcionados en el "rincón tranquilo", sin embargo, no se deben de colocar juguetes estimulantes cerca de esta zona. Para los niños que lo necesitaban, también proporcionamos sacos de boxeos (beanbags) como ayuda sensorial para la aggression (para más información sobre este tema vea Schaefer & Mattei, 2005).

Descansos y rincones no puede usarse como una manera de castigar (lo que comunmente en inglés se llama "time out"). Los niños deben ser capaces de decidir cuándo entrar y salir del rincón. Los maestros pueden sugerir el uso de un rincón a un niño cuando él o ella lo necesita, pero sobre ninguna circunstancia se debe exigir al niño que vaya al rincón tranquilo.

Conclusión

Como maestros de la primera infancia, puede que ya se hayan dado cuenta que el grupo de niños en el aula es cada vez más diverso que nunca. Un aula de educación general a menudo tiene niños con Planes Individuales de Educación, niños que hablan idiomas distintos del inglés y los que son de diferentes orígenes culturales. Sin embargo, físicamente inscribir niños en un aula no garantiza que podrán ser parte de la comunidad del aula. Con el fin de ayudar a todos los niños, incluidos los que demuestran comportamientos desafi-

antes, es fundamental mantener el aula como una comunidad de aprendizaje inclusiva y acogedora.

Las estrategias introducidas en este artículo son fáciles de implementar y requieren sólo una pequeña cantidad de planificación. Estas estrategias no sólo ayudan a los maestros manejar el aula, pero también los ayuda a ver la chispa de cada niño y a encontrar la alegría y la confianza en la enseñanza de los niños con una variedad de habilidades y de fondo diversificado. Esperamos sinceramente que todos los maestros se den cuenta que todas las aulas pueden ser verdaderamente inclusivas y que toda enseñanza debe enfocarse en las necesidades de cada niño.

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Professional Development that Promotes Powerful Interactions: Using Teacher Book Clubs to Reflect on Quality in Teacher-Child Relationships

Teachers work best when they can collaborate and have time to reflect about their methods with other teachers. Professional book clubs are a good way to encourage teachers to work together and share their experiences.

Kelley Mayer White, Ph.D.

For a majority of teachers, traditional professional development workshops lack relevancy (Burbank, Kauchak, & Bates, 2010; Lieberman, 1995) and leave teachers on their own to implement what was learned. Workshops are frequently structured in ways in which teachers are seen simply as recipients of information handed down by trainers (a more passive role) versus those who reflect on and construct their own knowledge. Furthermore, decisions regarding the content of the professional development are often made by administrators and, therefore do not always reflect more immediate needs of teachers. When combined, these factors often leave teachers less interested and less personally invested in professional development.

In order to be most effective, Darling-Hammond (1996; 2005) argues that professional development should involve learning that is sustained and supported over time. Teachers need opportunities to reflect on their own work in collaboration with other teachers who may be able to provide alternative viewpoints and challenge one another's thinking. Research has shown professional development that actively involves teachers can be very effective (Birman, Desimone, Porter, & Garet, 2000; Burbank & Kauchak, 2003; Buysse, Sparkman, & Wesley, 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Lang & Fox, 2004; Saavedra, 1996).

Professional (or teacher) book clubs are one model of professional development in which teachers are actively involved and learning is sustained over time. Book clubs generally involve a small group of teachers coming together to discuss a common text. In most book clubs, knowledge is co-created, as teachers have an opportunity to discuss issues of importance as they make their way through the text. While a book club may have a designated facilitator, often discussions follow the lead of the teachers' interests and ideas. This separates a book club from more traditional professional development models often led by a presenter.

Previous Research on Book Clubs

Previous research on book clubs has shown them to be a powerful source of professional development for teachers (Burbank, et al., 2010; Dail, McGee, & Edwards, 2009; Gardiner, Cumming-Potvin, & Hesterman, 2013). Gardiner and colleagues (2013) used a book club approach to help preschool teachers develop greater knowledge of best practices for new literacies. This qualitative study followed seven teachers who met as a book club five times over six months. They read multiple selections given the major aim of the professional development was to help participants become more familiar with multimodal resources and digital texts. In general, participants appreciated the book club format given it met multiple times over an extended period of time, versus traditional professional development workshops that often meet once and provide no follow up (Gardiner, et al., 2013). They also liked the book club because it required them to be active learners instead

"Collaboration with peers can make a better educational experience for teachers and for children."

Photo by Nancy Alexander

Previous Research on Teacher-Child Relationships

Teacher-child relationships are important for children's learning and development in early schooling. Preschool and kindergarten children in relationships regarded as higher in closeness exhibit stronger social skills and better relationships with peers and subsequent teachers (Birch & Ladd, 1998; Howes, Hamilton, & Philipsen, 1998; Howes, Philipsen & Peisner-Feinberg, 2000). Closeness in the preschool teacher-child relationship is also associated with better work habits in elementary school (Baker, 2006; Hamre & Pianta, 2001) and with higher scores on language and literacy assessments (Baker, 2006; Burchinal et al., 2000). Children in relationships regarded as high in conflict report liking school less (Birch & Ladd, 1997) and experience more frustration and less tolerance (Pianta, Nimetz, & Bennett, 1997). These children also demonstrate more problem behaviors and sometimes experience setbacks in developing social competence (Pianta et al., 2005). As such teachers must be knowledgeable and informed in order to better interact with their students, particularly those who are very young.

Research on existing models of professional development aimed at improving teacher-child relationship quality often involves intensive coaching. For example, preschool teachers provided with web-based consultation in the use of Banking Time (time spent one on one with students in a child-directed activity), were able to develop relationships with students regarded as higher in closeness (Driscoll, Wang, Mashburn, & Pianta, 2011). Similarly,

of simply listening to a facilitator. Investigators noticed how collaborative the group became and observed multiple examples of participants scaffolding one another's learning, which led to changes in practice. For example, one teacher shared how she was using a new iPad app and then others offered ideas for how she might extend the lesson to further engage her students. Participants also commented that having time to think about and reflect on what was learned in between book club meetings was beneficial.

Beyond increasing their knowledge of effective instructional strategies, book clubs can be used to transform teachers' beliefs about what is important for young children. Dail and colleagues (2009) formed a community book club comprised of preschool teachers, parents and community members with the goal of increasing participants' engagement in reading. The group met 11 times over two years; each time they read one children's book and one young adult or adult novel. As a result of the book club, participating teachers and parents reported reading more often, wanting their children (or stu-

dents) to read more, and purchasing more books for their children (Dail, et al., 2009). Participants also reported making (and sharing) more personal connections with texts and reported engaging in discussions about books with others more frequently, serving as great models for the children in their care.

Book clubs provide a powerful opportunity for teachers to reflect on their individual practice in a supportive context. Burbank and colleagues (2010) facilitated book clubs with both preservice and practicing teachers. Participants chose from one of several books and met weekly across the semester. Results indicated book club meetings provided teachers with opportunities to critically reflect on their practice and provided motivation to try new instructional strategies. The participants felt the book club enabled them to discuss larger educational issues in a non-threatening environment (Burbank, et al., 2010). Given the sense of community created in a book club, oftentimes participants also report higher satisfaction with this type of professional development (Smith & Galbraith, 2011).

teachers using Teacher-Child Interaction Therapy (TCIT; a model in which teachers are coached directly by psychologists in how to appropriately address children's problem behaviors) saw decreases in children's disruptive behaviors and increases in compliance (McIntosh, Rizza & Bliss, 2000). They were also observed to have more positive interactions with children following use of the intervention.

While interventions such as those mentioned above have been successful in improving the quality of teacher-child interactions, book clubs may be another option for teachers seeking to improve their practice. Yet, few studies evaluate the use of this approach for early childhood teachers. Furthermore, given the complexity of social relationships, improving teacher-child relationship quality is not something that can be done overnight or by simply following a training manual. In order to be most effective, teachers would need time to critically examine their existing relationships and individual interactions with students and then reflect over time and with the support of others. In this article, I will share the results of a small research study aimed at evaluating the efficacy of a professional book club for improving teacher-child relationship quality in preschool classrooms.

The Book Club Study

Participants

Five preschool teachers from four different schools participated in the book club, which was facilitated by the author of this article (who is also a college professor). All but one of the teachers were working with four-year-old children, the fifth teacher taught a class of three year-olds. Each teacher signed up for the book club voluntarily in response to advertisements sent to their schools. All five teachers were White females teaching in classrooms that served more than 80% African American students located within a large school district in the Southeastern United States.

> **Previous research on book clubs says they are powerful professional development tools.**

Plan for Book Club Meetings

The plan for the book club was drawn from practices identified as effective in research on professional development, including how the discussion was facilitated, how the group functioned over time, and how the environment was set up for book club meetings (Pelletier, 1993; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi & Gallagher, 2007). The book club facilitator began each meeting somewhat informally. As teachers arrived, they each discussed their day. Then, the facilitator asked participants to discuss what they found most interesting about the assigned section(s) of the text. In general, the conversation flowed well because teachers naturally built on one another's comments, sharing ideas and supporting one another as needed.

The book club met every other week for 12 weeks and the participants read two books, *The Power of Observation* by Jablon, Dombro, and Dichtelmiller (2007) and *Powerful Interactions: How to Connect with Children to Extend their Learning by Dombro*, Jablon, and Stetson (2011). The facilitator created the schedule for the readings with input from the group. Book club meetings lasted approximately one hour each time. Meeting multiple times over the course of several months provided a source of support for a longer period than most traditional methods of professional development.

Collecting Information

Data included transcripts from individual teacher interviews conducted at the conclusion of the book club. The interview included 12 questions aimed at capturing each individual's perspective on the efficacy of the book club as a source of professional development. The principal investigator also took detailed notes during each book club meeting, often recording direct quotes from participants. The principal investigator, using a coding system generated through multiple readings of the interview transcripts and book club meeting notes, analyzed data qualitatively. A graduate assistant and another expert in the field to validate the coding scheme used then reviewed data analysis. All were in agreement with how the data was analyzed.

Results

Impact of Book Club

Data from teacher interviews and book club discussions indicated the biggest change in instructional practice came in participants taking more time to reflect on their practice. More specifically, the book club readings and discussions helped them critically think about their interactions with individual students and how those interactions shaped

children's learning and behavior. For example, the idea of needing to "quiet the static" (Dombro et al., 2011) in order to focus on individual children really resonated with several of the teachers. They realized their responses to children's challenging behavior set the tone in the classroom and wanted to be more cognizant of that.

It was also apparent that the teachers were becoming more aware of their own interaction styles and temperaments and how these influenced their relationships with individual students (and families, for that matter). One teacher noted how she had realized her own interests in the arts and in literacy kept her from making strong connections with the "block builders" in her room. She made an attempt to sit with those children and observe their work more often so she could better connect with them. Another teacher mentioned how she was hoping to change her approach to a young girl in her room regardless of the challenges she faced with the child's mother. This teacher found that her interactions with the child's mother were limiting the teacher's ability to connect with the child. As a result of the reading and book club discussion, she vowed to start putting aside her thoughts about the parent in an effort to better connect with the child.

As a result of the book club, teachers also became more intentional in their teaching, a key characteristic of effective early childhood teachers. Intentional teachers are those who act purposefully, plan thoughtfully and are goal oriented (Epstein, 2007). In particular, the book club teachers became more intentional in their efforts to build stronger relationships with students. Several times they mentioned foregoing planned activities in order to "stay in the moment" with children and connect with them. They also, as a result of a variety of strategies shared by one another, began using a variety of tools to help their students connect with one another. For example, one teacher mentioned her use of a class flowerpot. Each time children were noticed doing something kind for one another the teacher added a flower to the pot. Eventually children were allowed to give flowers to one another in order to honor a peer's kindness. This strategy worked well for the teacher who described it, so several of the other book club members expressed enthusiasm about trying it in their own classrooms. Another teacher mentioned how she tried to take advantage of snack and mealtimes as opportunities to get to know students better. Because her classroom used "family-style" dining and stayed in the classroom to eat, she was able to sit with her students and have informal conversations with them. She decided to make an intentional effort to sit beside the line leader each day, so that she would have an opportunity to take turns sitting with each child in her class. In subsequent meetings, she described learning invaluable things about her students' individual interests and family lives and she discussed how she would use this information to inform her interactions with them.

> ## *Learning from others helped teachers feel more connected to the profession.*

Teachers in this study also became more intentional in their use of language. Several indicated finding more opportunities to introduce and use more advanced vocabulary. They were becoming less afraid of using "big words" with young children. The book's emphasis on seeing children as "thinkers" also had an impact on these teachers (Dombro, et al., 2011). At least two of them mentioned specific instances in which they found opportunities to model their own thinking and encouraged students to further discuss their thinking in relation to problems presented in class. For example, they described moments in which they told students to "put their thinking caps on while talking through a problem." Another mentioned her attempt to better capitalize on children's curiosity. She told a story about a student who had asked her where rice came from. She then decided to bring in several materials for the children to explore in order to help them understand the process and its connection to local culture.

Teachers were choosing to focus more on children's strengths as a result of the book club. Several began viewing children's behavior challenges as opportunities for learning. Part of this resulted from the support the teachers provided to one another. It was important for them to realize they were not alone in feeling frustrated by particular behaviors. It also seemed to help them think of each day or week as an opportunity to start over with a child. One teacher told a story of a student in her class who was rather challenging to control. He was described as impulsive and seemed to go out of his way to be the center of attention. Yet, over the course of the book club, this teacher began focusing more on his strengths and began finding

opportunities to highlight them. When she did this, she mentioned, "he became much happier" at school.

Finally, after participating in the book club, teachers also indicated they were feeling more confident in defending developmentally appropriate practice in discussions with administrators. Armed with new knowledge of the importance of powerful interactions, it seemed the teachers began to feel a stronger need to advocate for space to include these in their daily routines. In the final interview, one teacher said, "I was encouraged that it's okay to slow down and focus on the kids. I knew this was appropriate but now I have the research to back it up." They also felt better prepared to educate parents. For example, after reading about providing appropriate wait time after asking a question, one teacher decided to talk with her students' parents about the topic. She had noticed several parents were providing answers to children rather than waiting for them to formulate their own answers. With parent conferences approaching, she decided she was going to include this as a topic of conversation during each conference.

Efficacy of Book Club

When asked about the efficacy of the book club as a model of professional development the theme that was most prevalent across teachers was the notion that the book club provided a sense of community that was really missing from their work with teachers at their own sites. Teachers found it extremely helpful to collaborate with one another and share ideas that furthered their understanding and application of points made in the texts they read. Furthermore, they benefited from

Photo by Nancy Alexander

"Understanding that they were not alone in the challenges of teaching was very helpful to the research participants."

hearing each other's perspectives on ideas presented in the texts. In her final interview, one teacher said "each person brought something different to the table so the book club allowed us to learn more than a prescribed seminar." During book club discussions, participants often provided encouragement and support to one another, especially when someone had a challenging day. In the final interview, one teacher stated, "It was reassuring to listen to other teachers who are experiencing the same challenges. It made me feel less alone." The book club discussion also allowed them to work through individual problems they were having in their classrooms.

These teachers also appreciated that the book club provided them with professional development that was individualized and applied. Many of the other professional development opportunities provided to them were not always appropriate for their grade level. Since a majority of the teachers in the group were housed in public elementary

schools, content of the other sessions often addressed the needs of older children. Participants found the opportunity to discuss and problem solve issues they were having with individual students and families to be beneficial. Other professional development offerings do not always provide teachers with an opportunity to discuss what is being learned. Instead, teachers are largely expected to sit back and listen while a trainer does the talking. The book club allowed them to take away what they needed. Since the discussions largely followed the lead of the teachers and what they found interesting, in many ways, the group directed their own learning.

Teachers found the book club model to be more practical and timely than other professional development experiences they had participated in. Given that the book club met during the school year, teachers were able to immediately apply what was learned the next day/week in their classes and then could report back to the group at the next

meeting. Most of the professional development sessions they had experienced in the past were delivered prior to the start of school and did not always provide an opportunity for teachers to later discuss implementation of what was introduced.

Conclusion

Consistent with previous research (Burbank, et al., 2010; Dail, et al., 2009; Gardiner et al., 2013), results indicated the book club described in this study served as an effective form of professional development for participants. In general, teachers became more reflective, more intentional and were able to learn new strategies for use in their classrooms. They also found time to collaborate with teachers across sites to be extremely valuable. This is consistent with previous research indicating teachers appreciate opportunities to collaborate with colleagues working in situations similar to their own (Burbank, et al., 2010). While some places offer district-wide professional development opportunities, often these are single workshops that do not allow teachers to form lasting relationships with one another. One of the greatest benefits to a professional book club is the sense of community created by such an approach (Burbank, et al., 2010), as was seen in the present study. Administrators should provide opportunities for teachers in their individual schools or centers to collaborate with others across sites whenever possible.

The opportunity to learn from others who were working in a similar context helped teachers in the current study feel more connected to the profession. Several in the group became stronger advocates for developmentally appropriate practices, especially those focused on relationship building. Armed with new knowledge on the importance of teacher-child relationships for children's academic and social-emotional development, the teachers felt better able to justify making time for relationship building in discussions with their administrators.

In responding to interview questions about the efficacy of this type of professional development, teachers appreciated the timeliness and practicality of the book club model. This is consistent with previous research on book clubs (Gardiner, et al., 2013). In general, it seems traditional professional development models do not always prove valuable for all teachers. It is clear we need to pay more attention to individual teachers' professional development needs and then offer multiple options for teachers to pursue topics of interest in a variety of formats. If the true purpose of professional development is to change teacher practice, then we need to make sure we provide teachers with time and space to reflect on what they are doing, giving them time to assess the impact change has on their own students. This is the only way to create lasting change. Teachers need to see for themselves how change in practice leads to improved student outcomes, including increased closeness in teacher-child relationships.

Finally, while the current study led to important insight, clearly more research is needed on this topic. Future studies should pay particular attention to the long-term impact of this type of professional development for early childhood teachers. If professional development is effective it leads to long-term change. Yet, too often we assess teachers shortly after the professional development has concluded but not a year or two out to see if what was learned led to lasting change. Furthermore, additional research is needed to determine which teacher characteristics are most influential in determining the success of this type of professional development. Perhaps, the fact that these teachers voluntarily participated in the book club says something about them. This deserves further attention in research before we can assume book clubs work well for the larger population of preschool teachers. As mentioned previously, some teachers may prefer this type of professional development and others may not. We cannot keep assuming all delivery models work for all teachers. We do not believe that to be the case for children, so why should we believe it to be true for adults? While we have more to learn about how to implement such a model with a wider audience, it would be important for those working with early childhood teachers to consider using professional book clubs as an avenue for more purposeful professional development, especially when it comes to reflecting on how to facilitate more powerful interactions with students.

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About the Authors

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The 2016 SECA Exemplary Outdoor Classroom: More of the Best!

This article was prepared by Glenda Bean, SECA Executive Director

Highland Plaza United Methodist Preschool

In 2013 SECA began a series of contests to identify and highlight the wonderful outdoor classrooms that have appeared in our early childhood programs throughout the South.

Our **first year** focused on an **overall outdoor classroom** and **Highland Plaza United Methodist Preschool in Chattanooga, TN** was selected as the recipient of our overall award. This program, through innovation, vision and just plain hard work, created a magical and educational space for young children to explore and learn. (If you'd like more information on the classrooms that were recognized in 2013, access the three issues of *Dimensions of Early Childhood, Volume 41*. You'll need your member ID to enter the "members-only" section of the website where these issues are archived.)

Our **second contest** focused on **Creating a Nature Inspired Outdoor Learning Environment on a Shoestring Budget.** This contest recognized that many early childhood programs with limited financial resources create wonderful outdoor spaces for young children. Our winner that year was **Agapeland Play Space in Marion, South Carolina.** (If you'd like more information on the classrooms that were recognized in 2014, access the three issues of *Dimensions of Early Childhood, Volume 42*.)

Agapeland Play Space

Our **final contest** focused on **Creating a Nature-Inspired Outdoor Learning Environment for Urban Spaces.** The award recipient for 2016 is a program that's truly urban…it sits within the downtown heart of Nashville, Tennessee.

The ***McKendree United Methodist Church Day Care*** is housed on the first floor of McKendree United Methodist Church's Christian Life Center, a 4 story structure. The rooftop terrace was designed for an occasional visit from the day care children but was not originally intended for daily use.   In 2011, a small committee from the church and daycare began to dream together. They prayed for a day when the children had a beautiful, stimulating, and nature-inspired space to play outdoors. You can find an article and photos about this program in *Dimensions of Early Childhood, Vol. 44, #1.*

McKendree United Methodist Church Day Care

Let's Explore!

Although we had to select a "winner" of the contest, there were more programs that had outstanding outdoor spaces.   In the last issue of *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, we featured two programs, **Pre-K 4 SA of San Antonio, Texas** and **Blossom Heights Child Development Center of Houston, Texas.** Both of these programs were located in urban areas that provided both challenges and opportunities to develop outdoor spaces. (You'll find that article and lots of photos in *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, Vol. 44, #2.)

We'll conclude this journey with snapshots of other outdoor spaces and programs that we think you will find interesting and perhaps even a model for developing your outdoor space. All have been accomplished through hard work, creativity and vision.

Virginia Chance School/Louisville, Kentucky

Information for this article excerpted from the contest application submitted by Eric Stevens and Maureen Harden-- stevens.eric@chanceschool.org & harden.maureen@chanceschool.org

Gardening, Composting and Harvesting

Students of all ages get regular opportunities to test, strengthen, and hone their gross motor abilities as they help to plant, maintain, and harvest in a flower garden and a greenhouse across the street.

One of our composters is a drum with a crank. The children enjoy the challenge of turning it to mix the compost as it gets heavier throughout the year. Other compost bins require work with a shovel or garden fork. Each classroom collects its own compost from the leftovers of snack times and lunches. They amend the soil with compost from the previous year. We cook a lot of the foods that are harvested from the greenhouse. It's a multi-disciplinary approach that provides rich and endless learning opportunities.

Creative Use of Natural Materials

Part of our playground is bordered by a fence made from slabs of wood. These are the rounded outsides of logs that are cut off at the sawmill when making lumber. The children put extra pieces to creative use. We've seen teepees, forts, and footbridges.

Each year The Virginia Chance School gets hay bales for seating, decoration, and whatnot for our Fall Festival. Afterwards they're available to the students. The older kids tote those bales as they design and build different structures. The preschool students navigate them for some climbing, crawling, running, walking, feeling, smelling fun. Later, all the children add some of the hay to the compost bins and some is used to mulch our plants.

The preschool children helped build a model of pendulums (gourds from our greenhouse) swinging from a sort of swing set frame. The older children (K – 5) helped to make the full size version for our Fall Festival. The different length pendulums swing at different frequencies setting up a wave, and then different patterns as the swinging slows down. Outdoor space is useful for large or messy projects that won't fit anywhere else.

Little Miss Mag Early Learning Center/Chattanooga, Tennessee

Information for this article excerpted from the contest application. Contact Tracy Bryant Albright, Executive Director, at TBryant@littlemissmag.org for more information

A dynamic urban setting serves as the backdrop for the Little Miss Mag Early Learning Center's Playscape in downtown Chattanooga, Tennessee. Situated between the Walnut Street Walking Bridge and the Hunter Museum of Art, this little jewel adds to the environmental beauty of 'the scenic city of the south. Little Miss Mag's Playscape connects children with nature in the heart of the city, engages them in authentic learning opportunities, and encourages a lifelong relationship with Mother Earth.

New Spaces

Just about 2 years ago, we moved from our quaint 3 classroom building, to a brand new, state of the art, center that is on the first floor of a new condominium building.

One of the joys of our new location is that we get to bring a piece of nature into the urban environment. We have been able to turn the concrete jungle into a natural outdoor classroom environment where we can focus on farming, gardening, bugs and much more. We were also able to bring pieces from our old playground and re use them in new ways. We turned concrete culverts into crawling tunnels and garden planters.

A wood carved dragonfly hovers low to the ground serving as a place to pull up, cruise around, or climb upon based on ability and development of the children.

The Art Barn is used for children to be able to be artistic outside just as they are inside. There are art materials available in convenient storage as well as a place where they can sit to create their master pieces. Colored pencils, made from branches, are available in the art barn. These neat colored pencils help the children experience nature as they color and draw.

We have a contract with Provident Life and Accident Insurance Company (UNUM) on a piece of land across from our parking lot. We have 4 raised garden beds that our classrooms visit about 3 times a week. We also work with the Master Gardeners from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga to make sure we are doing all we can with the space that we have.

The children enjoy digging, dumping and pouring in our large sand and fossil dig pit. There are fossils buried that they can discover as they dig and play.

In the musical bee hive we have 2 xylophones. One is outside the hive and one is inside. The one pictured below is made from wood. Inside we also have convenient storage with other musical instruments that are easily accessible. In this bee hive we also have honeycomb amphitheater seating so they can produce mini productions for an audience to enjoy together.

Marjorie Olsen Early Head Start/Cocoa, Florida

Information for this article excerpted from the contest application submitted by Natalie Jackson, Executive Director njackson@brevardehs.org

Getting Parents Involved

We created an entire new space for children to play centered around a hill! This space provides the opportunity for children to climb, crawl, run, roll, slide, ride trikes, pull wagons and push buggies. Since the central part of Florida is very flat we thought this was an important feature to include.

We had fill dirt hauled in and teachers I parents and volunteers helped moved it shovel by shovel to our designated hill spot. Once the hill was created we added a hill slide and laid sod.

The grassy hill is an experience in and of itself. An added gross motor play feature is the hill slide. Children are experimenting with special relations and gravity, and the softness of a sandy landing surface.

Use of Natural Materials

Sand play was added to this space. Materials included the sand house structure which provides shade and will withstand the Florida elements, lining fabric and sand, lots of sand!

Gardens were added throughout the space for flowers, fruit and vegetables. There are two orange trees and one mango tree. **Rain Barrels** allow us to use the rain water to sustain the gardens and provide water for sand play and "Car/Wagon Wash Days"

The Musical Harp Wishing well is made of wood and the children use bits of mulch to drop in the slots to create musical notes and sounds.

Jasmine vines were planted to create a *living* **Tunnel** that children can walk or ride through. The vines are steadily growing and soon will form a tunnel.

To all our winners throughout the various contests, congratulations on a job well done!

To those of you who have taken these ideas and made them your own, congratulations for ensuring the healthy development of children in your care!

To all our colleagues throughout the South, remember that our region is blessed with natural resources and beauty. Take advantage of those natural resources to enrich the lives and education of the children in your care!

Possibilities, Policies and Practices for the Future: Early Childhood Education in the South

A SECA Research Symposium • March 8, 2017 • 9:00 am-4:30 pm

The Symposium will stimulate thought and discussion as national and regional experts share with participants the challenges facing the early childhood teaching profession today as well as in the future.

Keynote Speaker

Dr. Michael Nettles, Senior Vice President and the Edmund W. Gordon Chair of the ETS Policy Evaluation & Research Center (PERC)

A native of Nashville, Tennessee, Nettles earned his bachelor's degree in political science at the University of Tennessee. He achieved two Master's degrees, one in political science and the other in higher education at Iowa State University, and a Ph.D. in education at Iowa State University.

Nettles has a national reputation as a policy researcher on educational assessment, student performance and achievement, educational equity, and higher education finance policy. His publications reflect his broad interest in public policy, student and faculty access, opportunity, achievement and assessment at both the K-12 and postsecondary levels.

Featured Luncheon Speaker

Dr. Catherine Scott-Little, University of North Carolina

Catherine Scott-Little is a Professor in the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at UNC-Greensboro, where she teaches in the Birth Through Kindergarten teacher preparation program and is the Co-Director of the Masters of Education program. Catherine's research interests include early childhood teacher education programs and state-level early childhood policies, such as early learning standards and assessment systems implemented in state-level early childhood programs. Catherine completed her undergraduate degree in Child Development and Family Relations at UNC-Greensboro and earned a Doctorate degree in Human Development at the University of Maryland at College Park.

Panel Facilitators

Dr. Cathy Grace, University of Mississippi

Dr. Cathy Grace is currently the Co-Director of The Graduate Center for the Study of Early Learning at the University of Mississippi. Dr. Grace has served as the Director of Early Childhood Policy at the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, DC and held many state and local positions during her 40+ years in the field. For 10 years she directed the Early Childhood Institute at Mississippi State University and has a publication record which reflects published books and peer-reviewed journal articles. A former first-grade teacher, she recently completed three years as a director of one of Mississippi's first state-funded pre-kindergarten collaboratives.

Panel Facilitators

Charles W. Fluharty, Rural Policy Research Institute

Chuck is the founder, President, and CEO of the Rural Policy Research Institute (RU-PRI), the only U.S. national policy institute solely dedicated to assessing the rural impacts of public policies. A Clinical Professor in the University of Iowa College of Public Health and a graduate of Yale Divinity School, he was also a German Marshall Fund Transatlantic Fellow from 2007 to 2011. Chuck is the author of numerous policy studies and journal articles, has presented dozens of Congressional testimonies and briefings.

Preliminary Agenda

- 9:00-9:30: Welcoming Coffee & Networking

- 9:30-10:30: Opening Address: *Growing and Recruiting Early Childhood Teachers: An Imperative*
  Dr. Michael Nettles

- 10:30-10:45 Break

- 10:45-11:45: *Policy, Practice and Possibilities: What's In Store for the Early Childhood Profession*

    - Dr. Cathy Grace, Facilitator

    - Dr. Michael Nettles, ETS Policy Evaluation and Research Center

    - Dr. Devon Brenner, assistant to the Vice President for Education Initiatives, Mississippi State University

    - Michelle Acardi, Public Policy Director, National Board for Professional Teaching Standards

    - Tina Routh, Director of the Division of Early Childhood Education, MS Band of Choctaw Indians

    - Dr. Linda Southward, Research Fellow & Research Professor, Social Science Research Center, Mississippi State University

- 12:00-1:30: *The Future of Early Childhood Education Teacher Programs: What Could They Look Like?*
  Luncheon with Dr. Catherine Scott-Little

- 1:45-2:45: *Communities That Have Successfully Addressed the Challenges of Implementing High Quality Early Childhood Programs*Panel

    - Chuck Fluharty, CEO, Rural Policy Research Institute, Facilitator

    - Dr. Jeff Hawkins, Executive Director, Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative

    - Dr. Dessie Bowling, Associate Director, Kentucky Valley Educational Cooperative

    - Morgana Freeman, Executive Director, Tallahatachie River Foundation

    - Eileen Beazley, Executive Director of Excel by 5

- 2:45-3:00: Break

- 3:00-4:30: *Building a Community of Early Childhood Teachers*
  Group Discussion Facilitated by Dr. Cathy Grace

CALL FOR PAPERS: THEME ISSUE

Call for contributions to *Dimensions in Early Childhood*: Theme issue on poverty. (Publication date: October 2017). Manuscripts due January 15, 2017.

Dimensions is a peer-reviewed journal published by the Southern Early Childhood Association (SECA). It includes articles and information of interest to early childhood professionals and translates "research into practice," making the latest research and early childhood data accessible to teachers and persons working in early childhood classrooms. Authors must follow the author guidelines and complete the cover letter found on the "Are You an Author?". We also need people to review manuscripts for our refereed journal. To apply to be a reviewer, fill out the application online.

Just for Students at SECA 2017

Friday/March 10, 2017 • 12:00-1:30 pm

Come join us at the newly designed student event on Friday, March 10th, for lunch and a fun filled game show atmosphere, collaboration time, door prizes and so much more.

This is an opportunity for students to get to know other students from within our organization. You will also get to meet experienced professionals serving children in a wide variety of capacities and programs.

Don't forget….we'll have lots of door prizes!

Students at SECA 2015 in New Orleans

2017 Public Policy Luncheon

Friday, March 10, 2017 ■ 12:00-1:30 pm

Charles W. Fluharty

Thinking Bigger About Smaller Places:
The Rural South

Rural America stands in the midst an amazingly disruptive milieu – socially, culturally, demographically, economically, politically. A collective impact approach, targeted to systems change, will be necessary to secure new advantages in rural areas. This is true in all sectors, but especially important in early childhood education and in efforts to address the rural social determinants of health. This presentation will address emerging rural opportunities, outline the critical importance of regional rural innovation in the lives of rural children, and suggest exemplary models worth emulation. *requires additional registration*

Charles W. Fluharty is the founder, President, and CEO of the Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI), the only U.S. national policy institute solely dedicated to assessing the rural impacts of public policies. A Clinical Professor in the College of Public Health at the University of Iowa, and a Research Professor in the Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs at the University of Missouri, he was the Founding Director of the Missouri Public Policy Institute, as well as a principal in the design and development of the eventual Truman School of Public Affairs. The author of numerous policy studies and journal articles, he has presented dozens of Congressional testimonies and briefing as well as senior policy consultation to a both government and state and local organizations.

SECA Conference 2017!

Beau Rivage Casino & Resort
Biloxi, Mississippi
March 8-11, 2017

Strategies for the New South: Equipping Professionals for the Realities of Generational Poverty