

EARLY CHILDHOOD ALLY

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TWO GOATS AND A KID

That's the group text name for K'Sandra, Sommer and. I always get a chuckle when I get a message from them. I was geeked that they joined ECA for a Q & A this month, answering questions many of you had shared on Early Childhood Diversity, Equity, Justice and Inclusion.

I appreciated their honesty when they answered this question.

An experienced team of preschool teachers asked - - we have a primarily Caucasian group of children this year. We don't want to lose track of their heritage or traditions but want to broaden their view.

Any suggestions?

- Create an environment that is affirming of the identity of each individual. When we think about our identity we need to look at race, ethnicity, family structure, language and setting up an anti-bias classroom.
- Explore the cultures and backgrounds of all members of the class, including teachers. We bring ALL of who we are and our experiences to the classroom.
- Mirrors and Windows-Look at the cultures of those closest to you. Are there other cultures in the center/class next door?
- Let your environment teach-Third teacher- Persona dolls, guests from the community, the materials and books you select AND actually READ aloud. As educators we all have the responsibility of creating culturally responsive classrooms. You don't get a pass because you don't have children of color in your program. Seek out diverse experiences for your children.
- Let me be honest- In this day and age if you are in a program that only serves one section of the population you have some questions that you need to ask. Ask yourself- How can my center/site be more diverse? What recruitment strategies does our program use? What families or groups may we unintentionally be excluding? How can we be more diverse?

If you haven't had a chance to check it out, here's the link. The Q&A is posted on November 22nd. www.instagram.com/earlychildhoodally. I also have attached an Embrace Race Action Guide on Talking to Young Children about Race. I have found action guides such as these useful.

Let me know what other questions you have!

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RESPECT CARE TEACHING WISDOM

Do you get twice weekly emails from Julie at RESPECT Care Teaching? She is in an Early Head Start mixed age classroom as a Faculty member at the Grand Rapids Community College Early Childhood Learning Laboratory. The emails often share the journey they are on in the classroom. It's delightful to get a peek into her room and how small everyday shifts make a huge impact.

Do you get twice weekly emails from Julie at RESPECT Care Teaching? She is in an Early Head Start mixed age classroom as a Faculty member at the Grand Rapids Community College Early Childhood Learning Laboratory.

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Here is a favorite recent one I thought was timely.

Many care teachers will begin engaging children in art experiences over the next few months to produce a gift for the people in children's lives. This is a great opportunity for reflection and to figure out your why.

- Why are you choosing the activity that you are?
- Because it's cute?
- To "please" the parents?
- What is your intention?

Engaging in product art can:

- limit creativity
- teach children to have fixed mindsets
- impact children's self esteem as they compare their work other children's work

Engaging in process art can:

- promote creativity
- allow for individual expression
- give children an experience that crosses several domains of development
- offer the gift of curiosity

I will not argue that product art like handprint wreaths, footprint angels, handprint turkeys, and cut out painted pumpkins aren't cute. They are. But, who are they really for? Who does most of the work in these projects? When you are taking the time to "complete" the project so that you can send it home as a gift, how much time are you taking away from other opportunities you could be engaging with children in a valuable way?

Voyage Michigan Interview

In early November I was featured in the Voyage Michigan magazine as a Daily Inspiration story. It was delightful to share about Early Childhood in a format that is more mainstream. If you are interested to read the interview here is the link: voyagemichigan.com/interview/daily-inspiration-meet-janeann-benson/

RESPECT CARE TEACHING WISDOM CONT.

There are ways to turn process art into gifts too.

- Allow for free exploration of materials, take photos of the child engaging, and frame the photo with the artwork.
- For older children, take a photo of the child and have them decorate the frame.
- Use canvas for painting, take photos of the children engaging and modge podge the photos onto the front of the canvas.
- Have the children paint on several pieces of cardstock that are cut in half, when they are dry, fold them over and put them with a stack of envelopes. Then encourage families to use them as cards for other people.

The goal with art, in my mind, is respect and creativity. You will never see product art coming out of my classroom....no matter how much people beg or talk about how much they miss the childcare they used to attend because they always sent home handprint art. It will not happen, I know my why.

If I am working with older children who are finger painting and want to explore what their handprints look like when they put them on paper then we'll consider it a win for both parties. I can continue to follow children's lead and families can have paintings that include handprints. Mind you that won't ever be the only thing it includes, unless that is what a child chooses to do.

The bottom line: All parts of our day should be screaming, "I respect this child for who they are and what they are capable of doing right now, on their own."

I want you to consider this...when you choose to get out art materials with young children - especially infants and toddlers...are you engaging in something that you are doing with the child or to the child?

You can sign up for Julie Sizemore newsletter and see what professional development she is offering by visiting her website at www.careteaching.com



JOYFUL ACTIVISM

I always feel like I stumble upon something just when it's needed. This podcast on Joyful Activism (Episode 248) with Asha talking with Karen Walrond is an awesome example.

Karen is the author of "The Lightmaker's Manifesto: How to Work For Changes Without Losing Your Joy." It was refreshing to hear about working for change that we truly believe in being joyful and restorative.

As someone who has worked daily for change throughout my career I have had more moments in the past year that have felt very heavy. So, being reminded to look for the simple ways we can embrace the lightmaker within is just the message I needed.

On a side note she also is on Brené Brown's podcast (2 part episode) this fall too. I happened upon that too. It's worth the listen if you want to go deeper. Isn't it always deeper with Miss Brown?

MAGIC THREE

Do you use the Magic Three formula? If you are getting started with Loose Parts, or when you need an injection of 'new' give it a try!

Simply pick three items and set them out as an invitation to play.

Remember you don't need to think about the three materials matching or if they work well together. Remember it's magic!

The idea is to offer something different, perhaps unusual, to spark the children's thinking.

Some ideas:

- Yarn, curtain rings and play dough...
- Water, feathers and plastic cups...
- Tin foil, sticks and buttons...
- Straws, rocks and sand....
- Cotton balls, flat jewels and wood cubes...

Who knows what children will come up with using the Magic Three!



LOOSE PARTS TRAINING

In November I participated in a six day Loose Parts Training that was intense...good intense. There were several workshops available each day and because I selected the free option you had 24 hours to view them. I set an intention to watch two a day.

From a participant's perspective there were many excellent features. The first being a Daily Reflecting on Your Depth of Practice workbook. I believe in my core that taking the time to reflect about why we do what we do will make an enormous impact on not only our lives as educators but the lives of families/caregivers and children.

The workbook uses the Design in Mind (DIM) Depth of Practice Thinking. The framework creates an assessment tool to stretch ourselves in creating and responsive learning within our communities of practice.

The guide has you look at where you are at on a scale from 1 to 5.

Example: One is Duplicative Practice which would include using ideas you saw on Pinterest, Instagram, etc. Five on the scale is Regenerative when you feel comfortable generating ideas on Loose Parts and reflecting.

The guide has you reflect what the main idea from the workshop was and how you new knowledge you need. If you are interested in seeing the form send me an email and I will send it to you.

TEN LOOSE PARTS TAKEAWAYS

1. The more variables we offer children with loose parts, the more complex their play is.
2. We can't let our concern with safety stop us from creating opportunities for children to explore loose parts.
3. Educators need to remain curious each day in their classroom. The more engaged they are with the curriculum and planning experiences such as loose parts the more satisfied teachers are.
4. Loose parts can support assessment and standards. We need to build from children's strengths for a more balanced curriculum. Observation is critical during loose parts play.
5. Just start using loose parts. Ask families, community for specific donations. Stay organized - think about sharing with other rooms.
6. We need to question play equity. Are there loose parts in all classrooms?
7. Support the idea of Tinker Fairs and/or Loose Parts experiences that include family and children engagement.
8. Loose parts facilitation is critical and having an early childhood educator who supports play is essential.
9. Loose parts can absolutely be used with infants and toddlers. We need to make sure we are encouraging this with professional development and highlighting best practices.
10. Loose parts should be introduced in many different spaces/environments. This would include on tables, floors, standing up, inside and outside.

TEN LOOSE PARTS TAKEAWAYS CONT.

The presenters were from all over the world which I loved. It gave a more international perspective instead of just a Western view.

I also brainstormed a list of loose parts we have used over the years. (Attached)
Let me know what other materials you have used to add them to the list.

I am very curious how you use loose parts in your program, home or classroom. What is the best part of using them? What are some of the barriers?



ARE YOU
NEW HERE?
WE ARE SO
GLAD YOU
HAVE JOINED
US, WELCOME!

A little bit about me, I am the founder of Early Childhood Ally (ECA) and have been in the field for 40 years as a teacher, coach, mentor and director. I started the Early Childhood Ally Instagram page just over two years ago with the support of my family and friends, especially my daughter Jazzy.

My partner Herm and I live primarily in our cottage in the Manistee National Forest after 30 years of living in Midtown Grand Rapids. I have two daughters Britany who works and lives in East Lansing with her partner Nick. Jazzy lives and works in Grand Rapids. I do travel into Grand Rapids often for work and to see my grandchildren Rosalie and Alex with my bonus daughter Ashleigh.

I spent over 20 years at Grand Rapids Community College leading and directing the Early Childhood Learning Laboratory, an accredited, star rated program in the heart of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Over the past year I transitioned to semi-retirement and am loving working as the Lead Coach for our Play and Learn grant. If you are interested in following along with that work you can check it out on Instagram through Play and Learn GRCC. I coach and mentor a handful of Directors which is incredibly rewarding.

As a long time advocate of all issues impacting the field of early childhood I have more time to devote to my passion. If you are interested in specific content don't be shy and reach out and let me know. I am always eager to hear what you all need.