

Connections

The EESLPD Office at UNC Charlotte Newsletter

December 2018

Volume 2: Issue 3



IN THIS ISSUE

- ▶ Message from Amanda Vestal (p. 1)
- ▶ Mentor Minute: Promoting an Inclusive Classroom Community (pp.2-4)
- ▶ Highlights from the Field (p. 5)
- ▶ Staff Spotlight: Kawanna Jackson (p. 6)
- ▶ Collaborator Corner: Kathy Smith (p. 6)

In looking for a picture for the newsletter I found two, identical, with the exception of the last word. One said “joy”, the other “happiness”, and my inquiring mind simply could not let that one go. For you, a rare glimpse into the forever curious (to a fault) and tinkering mind of Amanda Vestal. Thinking...I wonder if there is a difference between joy and happiness? I wonder why teachers introduce happy as an emotion but never joyful? I wonder why joy is something we tend to hear about only around the holiday season? I wonder why joy and happiness are so infrequently used together to express emotions? Would I rather be happy or joyful? I know when I feel happy; would I know when I feel joy? Oh my goodness, have I made sure that my own children have experienced joy in their lives? THIS is why I was a great pre-k teacher.....those kids had no option other than to have inquiring minds and to be curious about everything! Ha! After doing a little research, I did find that joy and happiness are wonderful feelings to experience, but are very different. Rachel Fearnley, author of *Psychologies* Newsletter, explains that joy is more consistent and is cultivated internally. It comes when you make peace with who you are, why you are and how you are, whereas happiness tends to be externally triggered and based on other people, things, places, thoughts, and events. In other words, happiness is a feeling based on circumstances and joy is an attitude that defies circumstances. Author Henri Nouwen explains, “Joy doesn’t simply happen to us, we have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day.” This makes me think of the ten thousand times I have explained to my children that you appreciate something so much more when you have to work for it. I will now share the same with them about joy. Of course, I want them to be happy but in life, we do not only experience happy circumstances. I want them to choose joy and to work every day to find joy, real internal joy that defies their circumstances, which they can value and appreciate because it comes from within and they worked for it. When you see children smile, wouldn’t it be great to know that they were not only happy but that they were joyful. That their happiness was from the inside out. To think that teachers could instill joy, that comes from within, that children work for and appreciate and because they know it and understand it may keep choosing it every day of their lives. That is why we do what we do. What would happen if you plant that seed?

This holiday season and beyond, I wish for you much more than happiness. I wish you joy!

Love,

Amanda

Promoting an Inclusive Classroom Community

According to a joint position statement from the Division of Early Childhood (DEC) and NAEYC, inclusion promotes “a sense of belonging and membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning” for all children and their families (2009). Additionally, inclusion helps to ensure that all children participate meaningfully while learning and interacting within a classroom community that acknowledges each child and family’s interests and strengths. Brillante (NAEYC, 2017), states that we must see the child first; before we see the disability. Best practices for young children are best practices for *all young children*.

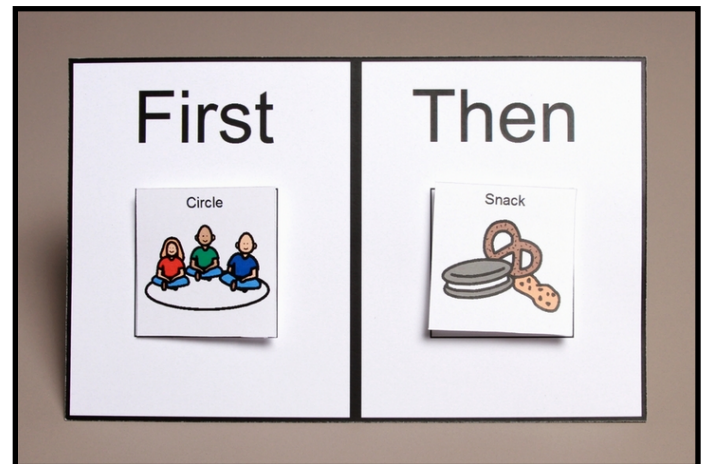
Teachers with B-K licensure have course work and background knowledge of child development and familiarity with various strategies and accommodations to support the success of all children with and without identified disabilities in their classroom. Teachers are encouraged to continue to seek out research based strategies and literature, pursue on-going professional development opportunities; and communicate and collaborate with specialists to support their growth and confidence to effectively support children with varying needs.

Guiding questions to ask teachers might include:

- How do you provide for the needs of all children, even those children who do not have an identified disability or are in the process of referral?
- How do you support children with identified special needs and developmental delays in your classroom?
- How do you modify and adapt lessons for children in your classroom?
- How might the classroom environment/arrangement (noise level, clutter, stimulation, materials) hinder the success of all children?
- What priorities do you have for your children with special needs? What are families’ goals for their child? And how do they align with each other and the goals of your curriculum?
- How do you prepare and provide information for the (IEP support) team?
- What resources are available in your community to support children with special needs and how might you access these resources?
- How do you use Foundations to support children with special needs and/or determine if referral needs to be made?
- How do you and your co-teaching team collaborate to support all children throughout the day?
- What plan do you have for collaboration with specialists and what does this look like?
- What does your collaboration with families look like?



This calm down area includes a variety of strategies and materials with varied sensory inputs



A "First-Then" card is used as a visual support for transitions and/or to engage children in less preferred activities

Mentor Minute (cont.)

Classroom strategies to promote inclusion include:

- Creating a safe, risk-free environment that supports children's attempts (i.e.-breaking down routines and directions into smaller steps as needed)
- Creating a caring classroom community that promotes children's independence and success
- Providing a schedule that is structured , but predictable
- Developing social stories, visual schedules, intentional transitions, and predictable routines
- Providing individual schedules and individual guidance as needed (i.e.-"First, Then" strategy)
- Accommodating for preferential seating with varied input (close proximity, personal space, concrete boundaries)
- Modifying the environment so that it is accessible to all (materials low, room for wheelchairs, additional easels)
- Promoting authentic friendships with peers and social competence
- Using children's books to promote children's understanding of others
- Providing support/objects to aid in conversation with others
- Planning modifications and accommodations based on individual need(s)



A laundry basket provides concrete boundaries for personal space



A personalized social story helps support a child through daily routines



Individual visual schedules are created for children as needed

Mentor Minute (cont.)

Teacher strategies to promote inclusion include:

- Learning from specialists, asking questions, seeking input/resources
- Engaging in professional advocacy for child by starting referral process
- Being familiar with the referral/IEP process and time line and community resources available
- Advocating to be part of IEP team; asking families and specialists to share IEP
- Collaborating with referral/IEP team to share strategies of specialized support
- Utilizing NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development as a resource: using developmental indicators to guide instruction, assessment, and referral
- Celebrating all successes (big & small) with family and support team
- Knowing each child, his/her individual strengths, interests, and needs (i.e.: noise level comfort, level of stimulation, environment/routine needs)
- Advocating for specialists to provide services in the classroom so that a model of integrated therapy can be provided to teacher
- Using a variety of methods for instruction (visuals, modeling, pairing with a peer)
- Making strong connections with families
- Having high expectations for all children



Inclusive classrooms allow for engaged learning for all children

Additional resources about Promoting Inclusion can be found below:

- [Every Child Belongs: Welcoming a Child with a Disability \(NAEYC article\)](#)
- [Division for Early Childhood: The Council for Exceptional Children \(website\)](#)
- [Connect Modules \(from the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute\)](#)

Please be sure to also visit the [EESLPD Useful Resources](#) tab of our website to explore the Inclusion section under Mentor/Evaluator Additional Resources

Special thanks to Gail Hicks whom served as a guest contributor to this month's Mentor Minute

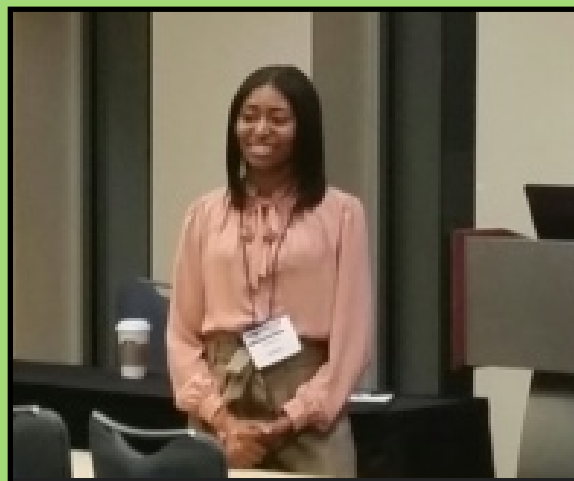
"Highlights from the Field"

Heather Taylor shares, "I am very proud to 'highlight' our valuable colleague, Kawanna Jackson. She presented with me at the 2018 NCAeYC conference in Raleigh, NC a couple of weeks ago. I presented about the EESLPD Office Conceptual Framework, Quality Assurance and Reliability Project and Kawanna presented about her role as Mentor/Evaluator. She was the 'highlight' of the presentation and provided the audience with rich examples from the field. The audience resonated with her shared experiences of working in the early childhood field. The attendees were vocal about sharing their own experiences and informed us of how important our work is in supporting early childhood educators in nonpublic sites. Kawanna began with asking everyone to close their eyes and remember what their first year of teaching was like...powerful. The session was a great success and while Kawanna has many talents, one of them is definitely presenting!"

How Do EESLPD Office Mentors/Evaluators Support Early Childhood Educators?

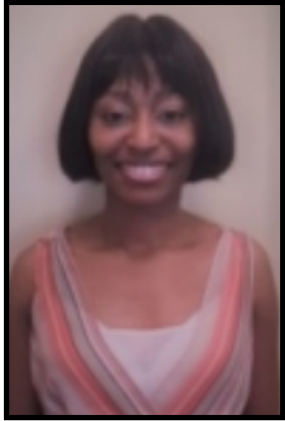


Kawanna Jackson
EESLPD Office
Mentor & Evaluator
UNC Charlotte



Crystal Thomas shares, "Beginning as a Mentor/Evaluator within the EESLPD office a couple of months back has been a change for me, from the twenty-two years spent in the classroom. As a new teacher, I spent time early on as a mentee. I feel like I learned so much from those lead teachers and relied on their experiences. Then later in my career, I was seen as the mentor or a model teacher. In working with teachers I would think back to my first years and remember how things felt, how things seemed to be moving so quickly and if I would be able to keep up with the demands. I remember going to my mentors, having conversations with them, and leaving with a feeling of confidence that I could accomplish anything for my children. I do sometimes now put myself in these teachers' shoes as a new mentor and remember what it means to need support. Mentoring is not always easy. What works for one teacher might not work for another. Well-intended suggestions can easily sound a lot like negative criticism. Building those relationships is so important. As a mentor, we tell our teachers that we are a team and to rely and lean on their support people. Never have I felt the support that lives within our EESLPD family. Just as many teachers starting out need the support of a team, our group embraces the mentoring methodology. I have truly been blessed to receive cheerleading from the EESLPD family and in turn be able to share the confidence and to cheerlead for my teachers. I can simply call and ask a colleague for their thoughts, strategies, and/or ideas to help support a teacher. I have had veteran staff share self-created tools for organization, communication, ideas on how to build those professional relationships or maybe to just have a colleague check on me and ask how it is going. I am able to leave these conversations with my colleagues being able to feel like I can support my teachers with anything they need. We all have the same common goal and that is seeing our teachers grow and develop so that they can in turn support our children's growth and development. Recently, I saw a sign that read, **'Teachers who love teaching, teach children to love learning.'** (Unknown). With our support, teachers creatively use what they already know to make sense out of new situations. It is the sense of exploration that can drive a teacher to push forward, become a risk-taker and discover new understandings. The same can be said for me as a mentor. Through social collaborations, observations, and experiments, I am able to lean on my team (EESLPD staff), and grow with the goal of helping my teachers grow in their profession."

STAFF SPOTLIGHT



Kawanna Jackson is a Mentor/Evaluator from Region 3 whom lives in the Charlotte area. She has worked with the EESLPD Office since September 2017. When asked what she likes most about her role, she expresses, "I love supporting teachers and watching them grow in the profession."

Her favorite children's book is *Whistle for Willie* by Ezra Jack Keats because, "There's such a lesson about persistence in that story!"

Kawanna enjoys various activities outside of work and shares, "I love the creative arts. It's my outlet so I'm always dabbling in the arts whether it's poetry, acting, singing or dance. I'm also the oldest of 6 siblings. (I have a blended family and I'm the only child between my mom and dad.) My brothers and sisters seem to always look to me for advise whether directly or indirectly. I just try to lead by example in my personal and professional life."

COLLABORATOR CORNER

Kathy Smith is the Executive Director of Burke County Smart Start, Inc. She has partnered with the EESLPD Office for 2 years. When asked what she likes best about her work with the EESLPD, she says, " My husband has a tag line on his email that says, 'Where there is no communication, there is no relationship.' I believe building relationships with teachers is the most important part of mentoring. Working one-on-one with other teachers and getting to know them is what I enjoy the most. Many times, I go into a classroom to discuss an issue or concern that a teacher has and come away learning so much in return. It is never just one-sided. Every teacher has a unique skill set and personality. There is no one 'right' way to mentor, and I am learning that with each new teacher I encounter."

Her favorite children's book is *Green Eggs and Ham*. She reminisces, "I remember reading Green Eggs and Ham as a child and then again to my children. I read the book to my preschool class as well. I have many parts of the book memorized, and I used it as an object lesson for my own children. When they did not want to eat certain foods, I would say, ' You do not like broccoli you say...try it, try it and you may.' Dr. Seuss was a great nutritionist, pediatrician, psychologist, and author."

Kathy enjoys time outside of work and shares, "I love to sing. Although I am too old for American Idol and not good enough for the Voice, I sound great in my car. My two favorite memories are singing in Canada in a band and singing the National Anthem for the Crawdad's, our minor-league baseball team. Finally, I enjoy car karaoke with my daughter, Faith."

