

Connections

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I am a perfectionist. I am a perfectionist who internally defies being a perfectionist and lives a life trying to embrace what actually does exist, many imperfections. In his 2017 article, Josh Spector writes, “When we’re willing to put something imperfect in the world, we force ourselves to realize the only thing holding us back is our fear—and that can be overcome.” What the writings of Josh Spector and many self-help authors have helped me realize over the years is that we cannot use perfection as a cover for our own fears. If we convince ourselves that we have to do everything at a standard that does not exist, we set ourselves up for feelings of uncertainty that we should actually embrace rather than fear. Uncertainty leaves room for change, for growth and progress, while perfection removes our ability to be in the learning zone. I have also come to realize that when I allow myself to be vulnerable and to lean into my own fears of being seen as uncertain or imperfect, I tend to make stronger connections with the people around me. This is because what makes us imperfect is much more relatable to other people. When we reveal our imperfections, it allows others to let go of their own fears of not being able to meet a nonexistent standard. It allows others to feel confident about their own feelings of uncertainty and more willing to accept uncertainty as a valuable thing rather than a fear of being imperfect. According to Josh Spector (2017), our imperfections humanize us and our creations, and they encourage people to connect with us in ways they’ll never connect with things that appear perfect.

Do you ever feel a level of uncertainty in your professional role? Do you reflect on why you feel that way, practicing metacognition, during those times? Have you considered that your moments of uncertainty are actually a catalyst for growth and learning? Do you consider that in your moments of uncertainty there is a level of freedom and flexibility, or professional judgement that actually make us stronger?

“Perhaps this is what this season is all about: Trusting in the unknowns, finding gold in the little things, trading fear of what’s uncertain for freedom to thrive within.” – Morgan Harper Nichols

Happy reflecting!

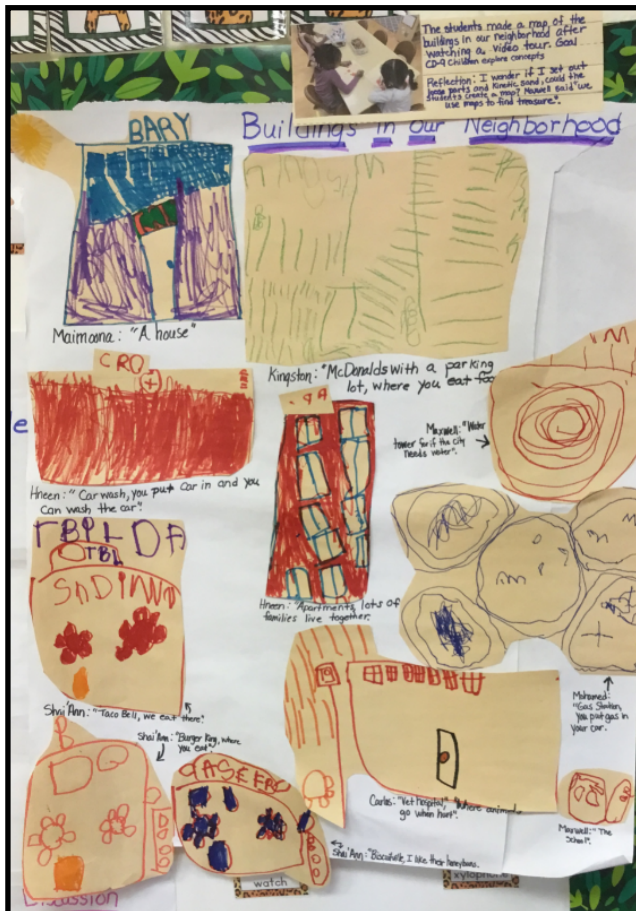
Amanda

Community Connections

Establishing connections among children, families and communities, is an important focus for educators of preschool children. A savvy early childhood professional is intentional about planning and implementing strategies, opportunities, and activities that promote a sense of communal living. "Community" can be described as a group of people who live in the same place, and share any number of different characteristics. It can also be described as a feeling of friendship resulting from shared interests and goals. When we take the steps to promote a sense of unity and connectedness, the results will be a caring community of learners, (Watson, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, (1979), offers a framework for understanding human relationships and the role that environmental influences have on shaping them. This is really important when we consider the experiences that teachers plan in preschool classrooms. In correlation with his theory, family, school and local community form reciprocal relationships between the child and his environment that have an immediate and direct impact on a preschooler's social development. When children feel appreciated and valued, and are given opportunities to play, be active and have meaningful roles in their microsystem environments, they will become confident in their ability to actively contribute to the classroom community.

The National Education Association affirms the popular proverb, *it takes a village to raise a child*, and that "the whole community has an essential role to play in the growth and development of its young people," (NEA, 2008). Teachers and schools who partner with families and communities send a powerful message to children. "It's one that says you are important. You are loved. You belong. And it's a message that, with it, holds the strength to empower every child in the world," (Children's Bureau, 2019).



After children participated in a city-wide scavenger hunt, they construct a 3-D replica of a building that was the answer to one of the questions on the list

After watching a video tour of the local neighborhood, children create a neighborhood map

Mentor Minute (cont.)

Children need many opportunities to practice the skills and dispositions that are conducive to communal living. Early childhood teachers should take steps to establish a sense of community in their classrooms, so that children can practice the principles of social competence often.

Teachers promote a sense of community in the classroom by:

- Encouraging children to share ownership of the classroom (Classroom jobs, work-it-out area, creating opportunities for children to collaborate and work together)
- Promoting interdependence by encouraging children to give and receive help from one another (Tying shoes, zipping coats, or buttoning jackets)
- Allowing the children to make group decisions by voting (Use small objects like Legos, for the children to cast a “ballot” to demonstrate the democratic process. Teachers may also want to embed math concepts)
- Learning key words related to on-going topic of study (family = familia, ball = bola)
- Creating a family bulletin board (Family displays, “Thank you Board”, “Did you know board?”)

Teachers extend classroom community with families by:

- Developing a class survey to learn about each child’s family
- Creating a welcoming classroom to children and families
- Providing opportunities for families to support their child at drop- off (sign their name, question of the day or short task)
- Providing opportunities for families and their culture to be represented in the classroom and school (photo displays, books, artifacts, languages, empty packages/containers of food items from home)
- Developing open communications with families (seek out language translations, if needed)
- Creating meaningful opportunities to connect learning in the classroom with opportunities for learning at home (Draw a picture of your family, read to your child, count the windows in your house, etc.)



Intentionally providing opportunities for cooperation and collaboration among children promotes sense of community



Guest speakers from community, business, and civic organizations are invited to visit the classroom, and share their expertise. Here a classroom visitor shares a gross motor activity with the children

Mentor Minute (cont.)

Teachers promote connections with community by:

- Taking pictures of community buildings (displaying in the room/block/art/writing areas) to promote children's interest and connection to their community
- Planning trips or inviting guest speakers to classroom, seek out resources from community (take out containers/props from local restaurant, grocery store loyalty card applications/weekly sale flyers, fast food restaurants, post office, etc.)
- Seeking out and becoming familiar with local businesses in a community when visits are not possible (planned phone call from classroom, written questions from children, or teacher created pictures to share with class)
- Using the local community library as a resource. (Books related to lessons or a child's interests, books that reflect diversity, sharing announcements about free and low cost programs, community publications, and encouraging families to apply for a library card). Lowe's Building Supplies and Home Depot offer free "make and take" projects for children and their families
- Contacting businesses in the area for out dated or discontinued materials that you can use to promote learning for your children. Many times businesses will donate scrap fabric, scrap paper, trade magazines, or materials that can be used for loose parts activities
- Considering opportunities for interacting with residents of nursing homes, or assisted living facilities. (Children can draw pictures, write notes, or even have play dates with them)
- Checking with civic groups about volunteer opportunities that may benefit your students (Groups like gardening clubs, Girl Scouts, or high school organizations may share their time and talents in your classroom.)



Monthly "play dates" with residents at assisted living facilities in the community



Field trip to Master Gardener's program at Guilford County Extension Service; partnership with Sedgefield Garden Club

Resources:

- Children's Bureau website , 2019. Benefits of community involvement in early childhood.
- NEA Policy Brief, 2008. Parent, family, community involvement in education.
- Watson, M., 2017. Exploring the concept of community in relation to Early Years practice.

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

Special thanks to Angela Wilson whom served as a guest contributor to this month's Mentor Minute

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Rhonda Hamby is a Mentor/Evaluator from Region 1 whom lives in Granite Falls. She started collaborating with the EESLPD office as partner in 2016 and became a full time staff member in September 2017.

When asked what she likes best about work with EESLPD, Rhonda says, "My favorite part is building relationships with the teachers and celebrating their professional growth. Teachers work so diligently to create an environment that supports children's learning. It is a joy to help them see the positive effects they have on the children and families in their classrooms. I view my role as an encourager, supporter, and guide. My goal is to help teachers see their own strengths and blossom from there. I also cherish time spent with my EESLPD team family. I am thankful for the love and support from my colleagues and I have learned so much since joining the team. "

Her favorite children's book is *Love You Forever* by Robert Munsch, "because it is such a touching story and highlights the love between a parent and a child."

Outside of work, Rhonda enjoys time with her family and engaging in various hobbies. She shares, "the joy of my life is my family. I have been married for 31 years and we have 2 children, Ryan (27) and Crystal (30). We also have 3 grandchildren (Madalynn, Ryder, and Lucy) and our 4th grandchild is due in August. My husband and I have served as youth leaders at our church since 2015. I so enjoy the enthusiasm of the youth and their laughter can be contagious. I enjoy spending quality time with my family camping in the mountains where we just take time to enjoy the outdoors and unwinding from our busy schedules. I am the happiest when I am with my family and friends. I feel very blessed. "



COLLABORATOR CORNER

Janet Harris is a Coach with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools and has partnered with our office for 2 years. When asked what she likes about working with the EESLPD, she shares, "I enjoy working alongside others who are equally passionate about early childhood. I am grateful for the opportunity to support teachers as they are honing the skills necessary to provide the positive and nurturing environment young children need to thrive. "

Her favorite children's book is *The Little Red Hen* because, "apparently, the hen and I share the 'I'll do it myself' gene. "

Something that others may not know about Janet is that she and her daughter share the same birthday.



"Highlights from the Field"

Tara shares, "As we work in the field to highlight and emphasize the importance of using NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development, I continue to seek ways to support teachers as they use it to plan and meet the needs of the children they serve. A critical component of integrating NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development is sharing it with families to encourage their understanding of their child's development and learning. During a recent post conference, I asked the teacher how she was using NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development in her classroom. I was so excited when she shared her most recent end-of-study newsletter with me. The children had just finished a project-based investigation of Roads. The newsletter included photos of learning activities children engaged in throughout the study. What impressed me most was the inclusion of NC Foundations goals across all five domains. This was an effective, creative and engaging way to educate families about the connection between planned classroom activities and NC Foundations for Learning and Development. In addition, the newsletter provided families with exposure to the specific goals the teacher intentionally provided opportunity for children to develop within."

Our Neighborhood Map.

Working hard in the Art center cutting, gluing, and creating our own neighborhood map.



Goal HPD-5: Children develop small muscle control and hand-eye coordination to manipulate objects and work with tools.

Goal CD-4: Children demonstrate appreciation for different forms of artistic expression.



Working on an engine in Dramatic play.

Using a box, pipe cleaners, and imaginations to create an engine for our car. It is in good working condition, and has been used as a ramp.



Goal CD-5: Children demonstrate self-expression and creativity in a variety of forms and contexts, including play, and visual arts.

Goal LDC-2: Children participate in conversations with peers and adults in one-on-one, small group interactions.



Block center/Construction Zone

We have construction zone buckets, cars, road signs, and road blocks in the block center. The children made roadblocks, garages for broken cars, put up road signs, and sorted out the different road items.



Goal CD-11: Children compare, sort, group, organize, and measure objects and create patterns in their environment.

Goal ESD-4: Children form relationships and interact positively with other children.

Goal APL-4: Children demonstrate creativity, imagination, and inventiveness.



"Highlights from the Field" (Cont.)

Kyle shares, "I have had the privilege of serving as the mentor for a wonderful teacher for last two years. This teacher already had some amazing skills as a teacher before beginning with the EESLPD. She has 18 children as many of our teachers do, but you would never know that 8 of the children have extensive behavioral support needs. At the beginning of each year, this teacher focuses on building a classroom community. The variety of social/emotional strategies she consistently demonstrates in her classroom is amazing. She mentions, 'at the beginning of the year, I introduced the solutions cards gradually. We do one a week. By this time of year, they can get the cards on their own.' While in her classroom, you can observe children working out their problems by using different strategies that she has available. You can also see children self regulating their emotions by using breathing techniques, yoga cards, or many of the other material she has introduced to her classroom. During a recent visit, a child pointed out, 'Those are our yoga cards to help us calm down!' The strategies she is teaching these children will continue to support them throughout their lives. She has also worked with the families in getting them the materials to support the same strategies at home. What an amazing difference she is making not only the children but the families as well. I am so proud of her for the hard work and dedication she has for the children and families in her classroom!!"



MARK YOUR CALENDAR

March 2019

Mar. 5th

Full Team Meeting 2pm-4pm

Mar. 7th

Mid-year PDPs locked in NCEES

Mar. 14th

Observation 3 locked in NCEES/Homebase (SPI/LE licensed)

Observation 2 locked in NCEES/Homebase (SPII licensed)

Mar. 19th

Mindful Coaching Training 9:30am-4:00pm

Mar. 25th

End Of Year Procedures Webinar 12pm-1pm

End Of Year Procedures Webinar 3pm-4pm

Mar. 26th-28th

Pyramid Model Institute

