

TriBeCa Community School Newsletter

December 4, 2009

Next week's snack:

Tricia Williams (chefanator@mac.com), a certified holistic nutritionist and chef (also a parent in our school!) plans and prepares our snack. For next week, the menu is (snack may change without notice):

Monday: Honey Wheat Carrot Cake

Tuesday: Bananas

Wednesday: Rainbow Carrots and

Humus

Thursday: Jennifer's Greenmarket Picks

Friday: Brainy Brownie Bites

Nutrition Tip: Did you know that apple have more Vitamin C than oranges? Oranges just have more marketing dollars behind them.

In this newsletter we choose to share with you our faculty's reflection of the NAEYC Annual Conference that took place this past November in Washington DC. Recognized for being the largest early childhood conference in the world, this yearly event draws about 20,000 attendees, coming together to share, learn, and reflect on anything and everything that relates to young children. Below (organized in alphabetical order by educator's name), you will find tidbits of our experiences, and we are hopeful that you will see the value of this experience. We urge you to take the time and read everyone's thoughts, not only your child's teachers. We would love to get your feedback and suggestions. *side note: because some teachers discuss the work of Vivian Paley, We think it would be beneficial for you to obtain some background information of Vivian's work. For 37 years, Vivian Paley, PhD., taught preschool children, mostly in the Lab School at the University of Chicago- Not so far from the same room where John Dewey wrote his progressive views about education, schooling, and life. To read about Paley:*
<http://www.press.uchicago.edu/Misc/Chicago/644871.html>

Alice

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The NAEYC Conference was a great experience. During my 5 days in Washington, D.C., I had the opportunity to deepen my knowledge on themes that I already cultivate and love- such as literacy studies and oral reading

strategies. I also had the opportunity to approach some new ideas and more contemporary research that I hope will enrich my work in the class. To make the most out of this experience, I attempted to expand my horizons by selecting some workshops about themes that are less familiar to me.

One such seminar was titled “Early Childhood Science. Lessons From A Museum-Based Program”, and focused on possible ways to bring nature in the classroom and different methods to promote science investigation. The presenters, reporting different experiences and showing videos and photos, stretched the idea that during a science project, a constant combination between learning about nature (from books and documents), learning from nature (through interaction), and imagining nature (using fantasy), are needed. I really want to try to apply some of these strategies within our class in Room 1, since we already have begun an investigation on snails. The workshop titled “The Play Experience: Diverse Perspectives and Different Roles of the Hands, Heart, and Mind”, focused on the importance of open-ended materials. The seminar was truly interesting. Working both individually and as a small group, the presenters gave us the opportunity to experiment freely with different recycled materials. With our hands, we perceive how everyday objects can become an expressive tool to create new experiences and discover the physical property of our environment. In Room 1, we already use a lot of open-ended materials (i.e materials that can be used in many ways, materials that do not have only one correct way of using), but if you have the opportunity, at home, try to let your child play freely with rocks, buttons, bottles or pieces of fabric. Such an experience actually increases and stimulates fine motor skills, symbolic thinking, mathematical processes, sensorial discrimination skills, imagination and creativity. The presenters illustrated also how some schools and educational programs

have implemented many recycling projects, creating a local collaboration with the families and the shops nearby. I think that building this kind of connection with the community could be a great challenge for the Tribeca Community School, and I hope to find the time and the energy to start a small recycling project sometime during the year.

The workshop “*Implementing Vivian Paley’s Storytelling Curriculum: How and Why it Stands Up In Today’s Age Accountability*” was a great source of inspiration. The presenters reported the experiences of the “Classroom Storytelling Project” and the “School Literacy and Culture Project”- two projects that really documented and tested the benefits of using the practice of storytelling (dictation) and story acting (dramatization) within the class routine. During the workshop, the presenters supported their method by illustrating theories and research from the last 30 years, offering a large and very interesting bibliography. They also explained didactical strategies, and gave helpful advice and suggestions (how to “let the story start”, how to organize the time and the space, how to help children with language problems to participate at the storytelling activity, how to respond to a violent story, how to document the process...). Their story telling curriculum required only a clipboard, a pencil, a teacher and a child with a story, but the benefits seemed enormous. Through the storytelling dictation, the children learn to be more intentional, develop imaginative thinking, get familiar with narrative forms and the convention of prints, and learn self-regulation, and social skills. I definitely want to implement this experience in our class.

Erin

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One of my favorite workshops was *“Implementing Vivian Paley’s storytelling curriculum: How and why it stands up in thoday’s age of accountability,”* which was presented in part by one of my former professors and an important mentor, Patsy Cooper. She is the author a new book called *“The Classrooms All Young Children Need: Lessons in Teaching from Vivian Paley.”* In this workshop, Patsy and her colleagues presented the findings from over 20 years of work and research in the practice of classroom storytelling. Storytelling in the classroom involves students dictating stories to a teacher and later acting them out with their classmates. The benefits of story telling are numerous, but two that were particularly interesting to me centered on getting to know the students more deeply, and the enormous growth their literacy skills.

Storytelling allows teachers to know their students more intimately because it’s a time when children can tell stories about anything they want, allowing us a glimpse into each individual’s thoughts, fears, wishes, ideas, etc. It dawned on me that even in our school, where deeply value hearing what the children think more than we value the “right” answer, I should increase the opportunities when we ask them what THEY want to talk about.

Regarding the literacy component, storytelling draws the children into the process of writing in a way that is more engaging than directly teaching concepts of print and story, such as words, spacing, punctuation, title, author and characters. For example, as the children watch adults write their words

on paper, they begin to understand the one-to-one correspondence of spoken word to written word.

I think storytelling could be a wonderful component to any classroom, and participating in this workshop inspired me to learn about more organic approaches to developing literacy skills in early childhood.

Motivated by the large number of boys in our classroom, I attended a lecture called *“The Boy Crisis: Supporting Boys through Active Learning.”* I was surprised to learn how different boys and girls are and subsequently, how changing our practice can provide better outcomes for boys and their teachers. For example, many early childhood classrooms discourage rough play because someone could get hurt. But once one understands that biologically, this is the way that many boys connect with each other, and develop relationships, rather than discourage it, teachers need to find ways to support this type of play to make it safe for everyone. We need to work with our boys to make it possible for those who crave physical contact to engage in that, while helping them develop an awareness of when, how, and with whom it’s appropriate. The presenters also discussed how visual and auditory processing is differs between boys and girls, and the implications for teaching. One example focused on the common practice of asking children look at us when we are speaking to them. Because boys’ eyes tend to ‘track and follow’, rather than to focus on details like girls, they may actually be more distracted as they watch our mouths move or our facial expressions change. A better strategy, the presenters suggested, is to stand next to them when speaking. I found this

presentation so captivating and important that I decided to obtain the literature that was shared, and further my support of all the children in my class.

Hillary

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The NAEYC conference was both enlightening and impressive. Throughout the time I spent in D.C. I was fortunate enough to see presentations by many authors and educators I have studied in the past. These included Italian delegates Lella Gandini, and Amelia Gambetti. During a presentation entitled "*Insights and Inspirations from Reggio Emilia*" Gandini presented a number of long term investigations inspired by the work of Reggio Emilia, but taking place at schools across North America. This work was truly inspiring, and being able to see other schools that share the same philosophy as TCS gave lots of ideas for future work in our own classrooms.

One particular story that struck a cord with me was one involving the community in an under-privileged area of Arizona. The story shared showed a community atelier, where students from multiple facilities, along with community members, shared and created art together. The images shown during the presentation showed the beautifully created space, and followed a long term weaving project. Here, children worked with their families to create a large, colorful, woven fabric. This work with families and community inspired me to do more in my own classroom, and motivated me to write my proposal for

next year's presentation on urban communities.

It was also my pleasure to visit with, and see presentations from teachers I have worked with in the past. Being back with professors I learned so much from previously, reminded me why I do what I do. Hearing all of the dedicated professionals speak at NAEYC was inspirational on so many levels, and it made me want to be a better teacher.

I also attended a presentation that spoke about bringing natural materials into the classroom. This presentation showed non-traditional set-ups that brought the outside inside. After seeing these set-ups I re-evaluated my own classroom space, and am excited to make changes to bring more of the natural world in. I hope to incorporate stumps, and other large natural materials into the classroom soon.

Overall, the NAEYC conference was a wonderful professional development event. Having a window into other schools for a few hours each day brought fresh ideas to the table for all of us. I look forward to attending this conference, and others like it in the future.

Kristen

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The NAEYC Annual Conference was truly a wonderful opportunity for me to learn from several experts in the field of early childhood education, as I continue to progress in my own teaching. I had the opportunity to choose from many, many seminars that were offered. I focused specifically on what I believed I would like to improve in our classroom. For example, sessions included ways in which to incorporate science learning in

a social constructivist setting, ways in which to provide more movement and sensory related experiences in classroom routines, and the value of encouraging child to child communication.

A Reggio Emilia inspired school in California, presented on the importance of children having an identity within the school. The presentation validated much of we do at TriBeCa Community School, in terms of making the children visible in the classroom (family books, identity wall panels, posted and ongoing documentation). Similar work in another Reggio-inspired lab school at Virginia Tech focused on science in the classroom. The presenters spoke of the importance of understanding the children's theories as the center of instruction. Further, teachers are able to view the children as already coming to the investigation with their own thoughts, rather than an empty vessel that teachers may fill with information. I believe the real work comes in weaving the children's theories into a meaningful experience that provides an opportunity to learn and grow as a community.

One of the most interesting seminars at the conference was a presentation by NYU professor, Patsy Cooper, who focused on a literacy curriculum- based on the work of Vivian Paley. It is a storytelling/ story acting exploration where children dictate detailed stories to be transcribed by a teacher. Members of the class then act out the stories, and the performance is managed by the storyteller. The way the presentation was framed was that this kind of work, actually holds up in assessment-based, achievement oriented world.

Specifically in terms of divergent thinking—managing multiple characters,

a plot, and directing other children as they act, incorporates important critical thinking skills. Further, in terms of language development, children's vocabulary, sentence structure, and choice of words is targeted and tracked over time as children's written stories are collected.

One presentation regarding inquiry-based learning through scientific study, encouraged teachers to include children in the documentation that the teachers do daily. This documentation, while important in science-related studies (data, observations) is also important in many other areas of our room. We hope to provide children with opportunities to document ongoing work that they are doing. For example, if a child creates a pattern with pattern blocks, they may record which blocks they used (drawing it) or take a photo of their work so that they may replicate it another day. This will allow children to take ownership over the work that they do and encourage them to come back to it.

A presentation by Lella Gandini and Amelia Gambetti, whose work in bringing the Reggio Emilia philosophy to North America, was inspiring. While I have read a great deal about the schools in Reggio Emilia, Italy and "hows and whys" of the philosophy, this presentation made it all come alive. The presenters showed a series of photographs and documentation of long-term investigations in Reggio Emilia schools. They focused on the importance of documenting children's work not only for our planning purposes, or for visual displays, but for the children to be constantly reflecting on their work in order to think critically about their past work and have a basis for continuing work.

While I did not address all of the sessions I attended in this newsletter, I truly enjoyed the opportunity to learn from experts and engage in meaningful professional development.

Lana

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The week spent in Washington DC was filled with both great new awareness and some minor disappointments. Some presenters inspired new insights with eye opening implications for the world of education while others offered very little information beyond the scope of traditional teacher training programs. Never the less, I know that I have walked away with an abundance of information that has refined my pedagogical viewpoints and strengthened my ability to promote inquiry in the classroom.

One interesting workshop I attended was on Vivian Paley's story telling technique. The dictation and reenactment of stories by young children was not something that I had previously had experience with, and so, I was somewhat intrigued by the process. The model provides an assessment tool for emergent writers, an outlet for children to express themselves through the telling and dramatization of their stories, as well as promotes literacy by immersing children in the concept of print. This encouraged me to provide additional models of writing in our classroom. I began to think about how intently our students look when we write their names on their paintings and drawings. Many of our students have begun to show us their understanding of print by telling us that they wrote their name, and asking about

the print in books and around the classroom. In order to foster their development, we continue to model reading and writing in a natural and fluid way.

The most important thing to remember however, is that the learning of a skill should not come at the expense of other developmentally rich experiences.

"Becoming a thinking reader requires great imagination. Decoding is a much easier task" was said by the presenter, and was a reoccurring theme through out many of the workshops I attended. I write this to remind us that play is a valuable tool for teaching children to read and write. Through symbolic play, children draw literacy connections and begin to understand the structure of stories. While children engaged in play may not seem like they are learning, they are actually making sense of their environment, problem solving, learning to socially engage, and building story lines that will eventually transfer into literacy skills.

Another presenter of a workshop on reflective teaching focused on the restrictions that we provide for children. Before limiting an experience, she encourages the teachers in her social constructive school to ask themselves if the student is engaged in something that that may harm themselves or others, and whether the activity at hand may lead to a developmentally rich experience. As a teacher, I often feel that this is the most difficult part of teaching. Often times, I find myself wanting to stop a child when I figure out that they are actually doing something with great intentionality, and so I quickly swallow my words and encourage them to carry on. It is a delicate balance of

providing some important social boundaries while conveying that their (the students') ideas are important and meaningful. This is a balance that I continue to learn each day in the classroom and it was extremely helpful to hear about the experiences of other teachers, directors, and prominent figures in the world of early education.

Lauren

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The trip to Washington D.C. for the NAEYC conference was an educational experience that provided me with plenty of inspiration for Room 5. I enjoyed most of the sessions that I attended, and I learned many new ways in which other schools are presenting and using their environment and materials.

When planning my schedule, I tried to choose the sessions that discussed the Reggio Emilia philosophy and how it's being implemented into North American preschool classrooms. One of my favorite sessions was from the lab school at the University of Vermont (BTW- here, at TCS, we have 2 teachers who graduated from the program there). The presenter provided photos and videos of work being done with two year olds and natural materials. I was impressed with the variety of materials available that varied in size and texture, such as huge tree stumps and avocados. The teachers at the school displayed a great respect for both children and nature, and they provided endless examples of how children can learn in an environment that is rich with natural materials. I began to think of the possibilities that are available in the TriBeCa community and how we can further challenge

ourselves to provide the children with more natural materials in Room 5. Another motivating session that I attended included the concept of using the video camera for a deeper understanding of classroom experiences. Some of the video work presented was from my previous school in Boulder, and I had the pleasure of listening to two of my former professors. The session consisted of a panel of five speakers that provided video analysis for several classroom clips. They described the best way to take "quality" video and how to use the footage to better understand children's theories. I also learned that taking a quality video relied on many factors such as the level and clarity of background noise. The panelists recommended reviewing important videos numerous times and trying to see the experience through the eyes of the different people in the shot. I was introduced to a new method of labeling and "tagging" important video clips, and I look forward to sharing this information and process with colleagues.

The greatest part of the trip for me was the fact that I was able to learn alongside my colleagues and share information from the different sessions together. It was interesting to listen to the other teachers' perspectives and how information discussed related to their students' age group. We were all excited to share our newfound knowledge with each other and we collaborated on ideas and possibilities for the future. I feel that the week at NAEYC truly bonded the TriBeCa Community School teachers into a team of learners, and I look forward to rest of the year together.

Laurie

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In November, I had the privilege of attending the NAEYC Annual Conference, held in Washington D.C. Hundreds of unique workshops were available for professionals to attend. Daily, I carefully selected topics of interest and any seminars that I felt would expand my own knowledge of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. I connected deeply to several seminars.

With background and interest in music arts, I specifically sought out workshops that might be beneficial in that domain, finding: *"Moving and Learning with the Arts"* and *"Making Music an Essential Part of Your Curriculum"*. From these sessions and others, it was interesting to see how many schools for young children do not share the same beliefs as I when it comes to education-musical or general. Most speakers presented ideas or activities that could aid in bringing a class together for fun in music and movement. In these presentations, children were expected to mimic a leading teacher's words and actions or move in ways that a creative movement song instructed them to. Workshops such as these helped me to connect with my own beliefs even stronger: children have the right and capabilities to explore and find their own learning within a given experience. In many ways, the roles should be reversed, with the teacher taking initiative off of the child's interests. Hence, this gave me the inspiration to write my own NAEYC 2010 presentation proposal.

In another workshop, *"Making Observation an Everyday Practice"* attendees discussed the benefits of seeing, inferring, documenting, and then

making choices from observations. This is what we do regularly here at TCS, as part of our philosophy. And- from participating in this workshop and the entire NAEYC conference, I realized that this is something we do very well. *"To Be Known: Education that Connects Each Other"* was a workshop that discussed the individual child and family who can contribute to their school community in their own way. As a teacher of Room 1, I feel a strong connection to each child and have come to know a great deal about their own unique personalities. Email contacts, day to day chats, school workshops, family binders and Identity Wall posters have helped us all to learn more about each other. Our relationships only continue to grow!

The workshop "Planning For Cross-Campus Collaborative Research" discussed connecting with others and building a bigger community that shares your philosophy. I realize now that my time at NAEYC was not so much about learning new things, but rather making that connection with others working the same field as I and sharing our experiences aloud. Most often, we shared much of the same knowledge and ideas. I saw the convention as an opportunity to verbalize my/our beliefs and simply feel this support and connection outside.

Line

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During the NAEYC Conference and Expo, I attended several presentations that not only added to my knowledge on pedagogical practice, but also inspired me deeply not only on a professional level, but also touched me on a personal level. Most importantly, it made me

rethink and reevaluate, how we look upon education at TriBeCa Community School, and in what areas we can become better in terms of setting professional goals for ourselves and each other in order to continue to create meaningful learning environments for children that supports their development.

One of the presentations that really stood out was: *Insights and inspirations from Reggio Emilia: Stories of teachers and children from North America*. First and foremost, I really took in Leila Gandini's passion for the Reggio Emilia approach and her simple and precise description of using pedagogical documentation as a language to honor children's thoughts, ideas and "progettazione" (hypothesis) about themselves and the world they live in.

Here is a quote of what she said: "Teachers that use documentation see that children are moving forward with their own learning".

Furthermore the presentation with Lynn Hill from Rainbow Riders Childcare Center supported by pictures, showing the long-term exploration named: *"Think Like a Bunny"*, with preschool children building relationship with elderly people living in their community gave a honest and detailed insight in what long-term explorations should be about.

Rather than focusing on that the children and elderly people in the community managed to build relationship with each other and what creative experiences they had when they were together. Lynn Hill took us on a journey sharing their experiences and the process of how the children and elderly people responded differently to the common space that the teachers had prepared and set up for them at the school. She told us that the elderly

people were scared of leaving their homes and didn't feel comfortable in the room, and that the children initially didn't seem to show much interest in and care for the elderly people.

Instead of eliminating the experience the teachers reflected over their own practice and tried to come up with new strategies of how to support the children and elderly people in building community with each other. Through careful observation and discussion, the teacher's realized that they, in the attempt to make a common space for the children and elderly people at the school had forgotten to take the time to listen to them and have their conversations, thoughts and ideas as a starting point for the experience. The teachers decided to take a step back, and let the children come and visit the elderly people in their homes and hereby let them share their everyday life with the children. That turned out to be the starting point for a real community bonding experience with the children and the elderly people.

Throughout the presentation, I had goose bumps, and I realized that what I really could bring with me back to the school and in my work with children is an internalized understanding of the importance to continue to listen to, and pay attention to children's conversations among each other and with us and that real long-term investigations/ experiences take time to develop.

Marisa

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I had a wonderful experience attending various workshops and hanging out with my co-teachers! One of the workshop that I found inspiring was *"Implementing*

Vivan Palye's Storytelling Curriculum: How and Why It Stands Up in Today's Age of Accountability." This was lead by a professor from NYU. One of my favorite quotes from the session was "take time to grow up." This brought me to tears, because at times, I feel we try to rush children in learning. The workshop taught me that storytelling and story-acting activities can be successful in developing children's literacy skills. I truly, truly enjoyed this workshop! I also went to two workshops on Reggio Emilia. My first was *"Insights and Inspirations From Reggio Emilia: Stories of Teachers and Children From North America."* Once again, this was a powerful workshop. One of the teachers, Lynn Hill, from Riders Child Center gave a moving presentation. Her school interacted with senior citizens who were fighting early stages of dementia. It was so beautiful to see photos of children interacting with seniors. It was delightful to see the children teaching the seniors, and the seniors teaching children. I have always loved the elderly, and would love to explore the possibility of future collaboration between TCS and the elderly.

One workshop that was close to my heart was *"Music, Movement, Drama and Books: A Developmental Approach for Engaging in the Whole Child of the Arts."* I truly enjoyed this workshop, since I graduated college with a degree in theater, and have always loved the arts since I was a child. I sang songs and learned some unique lessons that I am bringing into my classroom.

My last Reggio Emilia workshop was *"Working in the Reggio Way"* The presenter is the author of a book by the same title, which is a basic introduction

to the Reggio philosophy with an American educator perspective.

On a fun note some of the teachers and I went out and explored D.C., we've all become really close and great friends. We also had the opportunity to meet President Obama.....kidding! Maybe next time.

Monique

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This years NAEYC conference was a learning experience. I took part in many workshops, which specifically spoke about the philosophies of the Reggio approach. Viewing examples of schools in Reggio by many presenters' work was very inspiring. Julianne Wurm led a wonderful session on Reggio and spoke about her own experiences at a school while being an intern there. Currently, Julianne teaches education at City College and is writing her dissertation on the Reggio approach. Towards the end of her presentation, we watched videos of children engaged in social settings, and we brainstormed for possible future provocations for those children. The idea for collaboration was simple, but she was the only presenter who introduced the idea of analyzing observations as part of her presentation. Observations are an important part of the Reggio approach and I found it helpful to watch videos with my peers.

As my role as the atelierista at TriBeCa Community School is different from the co teachers, I wanted to attend as many lectures on art education as possible. I went to one titled Becoming Your Own Ateleirista. The lecturers focused on process based artwork and the difference between process and product

work. Many attendees in the audience were teachers who were trying to develop an understanding for the obvious differences in traditional art teaching from the Reggio approach. After the lecture was over, and I analyzed what was presented there vs. what was left out, it was clear to me what my proposal for presentation for next year's NAEYC conference should be: Process Art.

An important aspect of the conference was spending time with my peers outside of the school setting. As a teacher at TriBeCa Community School, there is a great deal of collaboration necessary, and coming together at the conference allowed a deeper understanding of each other and what we value as teachers. Each of us have our own talents and experiences that we bring to the table, and spending the week together created debates that wouldn't normally take place in the classroom setting.

Renya

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Role of Lab Schools as a Model for Inquiry-Based Practice:

This session was in reference to two lab schools (the University of Vermont, and the University of New Hampshire) and their unique child centered teaching programs. This program also identified the significant role lab schools play in developing teachers as researchers. The lecture discussed the long process of becoming a social constructivist thinker/teacher, and the very demanding act that in order to teach in a social-constructivist manner, one must abandon their perceptions, and position

oneself in the perspective of an ever-learner.

What I learned, and plan to implement: This session emphasized the significance of building relationships: that it is depth over breath, referring to staying with the same group over a long period of time to develop deeper relationships with children, parents, families, and teachers. This session also emphasized the significance of documentation and the process of inquiry, as well as how these processes transformed these two programs tremendously. These two programs analyzed the students through the process of developing an identity as a teacher researcher and through what it means to document. In this investigation, the panel of presenters explained the long process of deconstructing previous thinking: letting go of past conceptions of what it means to be a teacher. In this process, the students encounter fear of letting go, and fear of embarking in this new direction.

Although I am proficient with these concepts, it was inspiring to hear these processes and analysis. In terms of implementing what I learned: I plan to use my better understanding of this cycle of teaching to help support my own thinking, and other teachers through this long process of what it means to be a social constructivist teacher and how to develop a dynamic community.

Elements of Power in Building Relationships:

This session discussed the importance of "Power." A few thought provoking questions included: Who has power?

Who has privilege? How do you exercise power? How do you resolve power struggles?

What I learned, and plan to implement:
The main emphasis of this session was not to pass judgment on whether power is good or bad. Rather, presenters asked attendees to be acknowledge of the power one have, and how one uses it. Power can be broken into:
- Power with (collaboration),
- Power over (domination),
- Power for (advocacy work).
This presentation inspired me to be more aware of this concept of power, and to ultimately find a way to use power in a partnership with others, built on respect.

Conference Impression:
The NAEYC conference is beneficial for professional development due to the many opportunities to obtain current research, and providing the opportunity to come in contact with many knowledgeable professionals in the field. This year, I had the opportunity to present a 1 hr session on the contribution of mixed-age grouping. This presentation's objective was to provide compelling information regarding the significance of mixed-age grouping, and its' positive contribution to children's social-emotional development through research and documentation, and providing a closer look at how mixed age grouping contributes to building community among children, parents, and educators. Presenting was an exciting opportunity for me. Many of my observers asked comprehensive questions or comments, indicating that they were gathering and interpreting the information provided, and adding their own insight.

Ryan

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I had the opportunity to hear Lilian Katz discuss her theories about increasing the intellectual content of children's discourse. She discussed what she refers to as intellectual emergencies (and it is the title of her latest book co-written with her son,), when children ask adults questions that do not have clear answers. Adults can turn these emergencies into opportunities for rich discussion. A relationship of substance is based on rich content. Katz also highlighted the value of encouraging children to appreciate and celebrate one another's talents, to take pleasure in classmates' accomplishments. Katz explained how teachers can support in depth long-term investigations, a practice that largely characterizes the work we do in our classroom. She suggested helping children take their observations and theories to the next level by asking them what they want to find out about a specific object or occurrence. From there, children form questions that become the basis for their inquiries. She encourages teachers to challenge children's thinking, and ask the children to explain their own position with some rationale, backing up their statements with data/ understanding.

In search of inspiration for the ever evolving physical layout of our classroom, I attended a workshop called Classrooms by Design and was reminded of the profound impact an intentionally designed and laid out environment has on every aspect of classroom life. Repetition, formalization, dynamic variation and exaggeration are examples of aesthetic capacities that can alter the mood of the room and change the course of the day. I left with

a renewed sense of intentionality for classroom setup and concrete tools for assessing the efficacy of the environment.

At a workshop titled *Implementing Vivian Paley's Storytelling Curriculum*, Patricia Cooper from NYU shared a literacy curriculum she implemented at Rice University that she proved with scientific evidence based data to offer competitive advances in literacy without sacrifice to other developmental concerns. This curriculum involves children dictating original stories, teachers recording them verbatim, the author selecting classmates for the roles in the story, and finally, a performance. The story-acting curriculum allows children understand the power of print through the thrill of seeing their words come alive. It also promotes Katz' idea of encouraging children to celebrate and share in each other's accomplishments.

To get some strategies on movement activities in the classroom, I attended a workshop on incorporating movements and exercises borrowed from occupational therapy and yoga and designed to help all children feel both focuses and relaxed at school.

I attended a lecture about incorporating engineering in an early childhood context. The presenters highlighted the benefits of projects that follow the three steps of engineering:

- 1- Set a goal,
- 2- create a plan,
- 3- revise or change the plan as necessary.

Engineering projects allow children to problem-solve, collaborate and develop meta-cognitive skills as they revise their original plans.

At a workshop titled *Food the Reggio Way*, strategies were presented

by teachers from a school in Louisiana who took inspiration for their school lunch program from a visit to Reggio Emilia, Italy. They put together a team with a chef and a dietician to create healthy, handmade communal meals featuring produce and herbs grown with the children.

At a workshop titled *Executive Functions and School Readiness: Neuroscience research and what it tells us about Beginning Self-Regulation*, presenters discussed how self-regulation is the practice of inhibiting the first reaction and involves controlling anxiety after an error is made, maintaining composure in stressful situations, ability to delay gratification, using the working memory and cognitive flexibility. The presenters explained that dramatic play is excellent for developing self-regulation, as it allows children to gain control over their environment as well as learn regulation by following and internalizing the rules for behavior as dictated by play scenarios.

Shira

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Last week at NAEYC was an incredibly valuable experience to learn about of new, emerging and revisited research on so many facets of child development and education. Many of the ideas discussed came in the form of simple suggestions to increase daily, meaningful learning experiences for children, both at school and home.

One major topic at the conference was the value of play for children. Play has been shown to increase children's social, cognitive and physical development. Besides giving children

the opportunity to negotiate, speak, share, and move, play is used as a means to increase children's success in content areas. Blowing bubbles with children, and then asking, "how did that happen?" is just as much play as it is science. Using building blocks to count, group, and arrange space speaks to math skills, and dramatic play can be a true link to literacy enhancement. Watch how your child plays: what does he or she imagine being? Find or create small tokens of language that are related to his or her play, and let your child use these as he or she imagines. For example, if your child pretends to be a doctor, make sure there is a small pad for writing prescriptions, books on bodies and health, and visuals with pictures and words. Exposure to words, drawing, or scribbling from left to right, contributes to a child's journey of literacy.

In general, word exposure for children is incredibly significant for academic success. Studies have found that children of professional families who are introduced to thousands of more words than children from non-professional homes were significantly more prepared for literacy. Therefore, speaking with your child about daily topics: what he or she did at school, any observed changes in the community, or your travel plans for the holiday, will help ready him or her for literacy success.

Another strategy to increase preparedness for literature is to talk with children about books as they read them. The best way to approach this is through open-ended questions (ones that have many possible answers) about what they are thinking, as they read. Avoid asking questions with one-word

answers, such as "what is the boy holding," but rather "why do you think the boy on this book cover is holding a kitten?" An opportunity to think about his or her reading will add a layer of interest and investment for your child.

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The NAEYC Annual Conference and Expo continue to offer opportunities for reflection and growth. In addition to attending various presentations, it also supports the ongoing relationships I have developed throughout the years with many professionals and scholars in the field of early education.

Regularly, I enjoy meeting Lilian Katz, a dear friend of mine, and a recognized scholar in the field. Often, I am challenged by her words and wisdom, and one day over lunch (at PS7; if you're in DC- a great place!), we shared the latest in our professional and personal lives. Lilian's unique ability to express issues in such straight forward-matter of fact approach- attracted many educators to her writings and presentations. However, those same practices (i.e. putting matters in such straight forward- matter of fact approach) also pushed some educators away. How fascinating to have such a unique ability! In her latest book, *Intellectual Emergencies*

http://secure.ccie.com/catalog/product_info.php?%20%20products_id=4000527

Lilian outlines parallels and reciprocal lessons from her professional life and her family life. I consider this book to be the most non-academic piece Lilian wrote, yet the most relevant book for the academia! There, Lilian asserts: "*Being*

honest when evaluating a student's work does not imply any kind of insulting or humiliating response to a child's efforts. Rather, it implies conveying in dignified and serious tones how a piece of work or other kind of effort might have been better or relevant criteria, or could be improved in specific ways, or even redone.” Working in a social-constructivist environment, often shakes our own comfort level- after all: how many individuals are really comfortable in looking in the mirror with the constructivist premise of-“how can we make this better?”

Lilian's work also distinguishes between knowing vs. understanding, as well as asking genuine questions in order to get meaningful replies (“so if I mix it, what will happen?” and “what makes you think so?”) vs. asking interrogating queries (i.e. avoid asking: “what color is this?” and “what shape is this”). Instead of the very common practice of adults asking rhetorical questions as well as adults asking questions they already know the answers to, Lilian offers to be genuine/ sincere (isn't it obvious?), and if necessary, state respectfully: “I want to know if you know....”

At the convention center, I met Diane Levin (co-author of: *So Sexy So Soon*), and learned about the latest work that she does with T.R.U.C.E (<http://www.truceteachers.org/>). I urge parents to learn more about her work and the work of TRUCE.

On Saturday morning I presented a session about the use of technology in our school. I was surprised to learn that attendees woke up so early on a

Saturday! There, I shared how we use the equipment that we have to capture play and children's investigations, how we use the data for planning, for parents workshops, children's portfolios, and more. I shared specifics of equipment, software, saving strategies, and other practical advice so that conference goers may implement similar practices in their own setting.

Additionally, I met with Judy Helm, who presented a session on the significance of the physical environment. Over breakfast, I was able to show her the session I presented at a previous conference about a similar topic, and since we are already familiar with each other's work, we agreed on writing a proposal together for next year's NAEYC conference to be held in California.

To learn about Judy's books:

http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=ntt_atr_dp_sr_1?encoding=UTF8&sort=relevancerank&search-alias=books&field-author=Judy%20Harris%20Helm

All staff members are now in the process of writing their own proposals for presentations, and by the end of the school year we will know which (if any!) will be accepted. This year, Renya (RM1) presented a session about the topic of mixed age grouping. I am very proud of Renya who independently spoke in-front of educators. Her selection of videos, the careful wording that she is a pro with, and how she handled the questions posed by the audience, positioned her on a platform with talented, intellectual educator. Kudos!