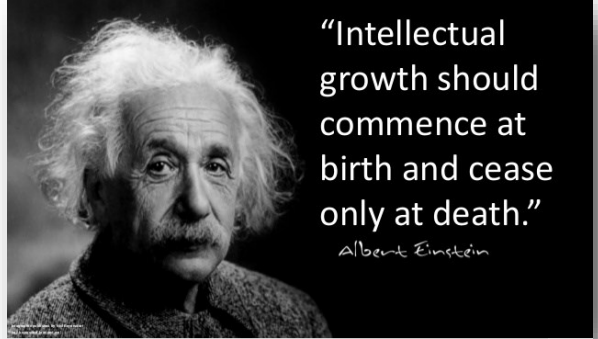


# CONNECTIONS

Early Educator Support Office, Monthly Newsletter

## In this issue:

- Message from Amanda
- Mentor Minute:  
Embracing Diversity
- Collaborator Corner:  
Helena Vanhorn
- Highlights from the Field
- Mark Your Calendar



Erika Osmundson (2016) explains, “The truth is that those who dislike the thought of professional development may only be looking at the opportunity at face value and not the bigger picture.” Let’s leave face value to the coins and stamps. Are you with me? Instead, let’s always have the bigger picture in mind- strive to understand it, embrace it, epitomize it, and let it ground our actions and reactions. What is our big picture? How is our big picture carried out through the goals of professional growth and development?

Let’s take a look at a few statements from Section V-The Big Picture, in our Resource Manual (2016):

“Evaluators can have an important impact on professional practice in our state by providing relevant data, which in the context of quality mentoring and support, help create high-quality and responsive classroom environments served by high-quality Pre-K/ Kindergarten teachers.” (p.36)

“Our job as mentors and evaluators is to become as familiar as we can with the standards, the rubric, and the evaluation process, and to understand the unique contextual challenges that each North Carolina teacher faces. If we are to accurately interpret what we observe in each classroom, and therefore place all teachers on the rubric with equal validity, we need to pay close attention to the contextual features of each setting.” (p.36)

“In order to have the maximum positive impact on the quality of early childhood teaching, evaluators need to fully engage in training, preparation, and practice to develop their own professional skills as observers and evaluators.” (p.37)

The big picture, or overarching goal, of the entire evaluation process is to support and scaffold a career long journey of self-discovery and professional growth....for children? educators? us? All of the above! Engaged learning on *our* part influences the growth and learning of those we serve, in-turn influencing the growth and learning of young children. Being the best we can be, in hopes it is reciprocated in this way should always be reason enough.

When we give ourselves over to the process, to the betterment of ourselves- all for the big picture- so many reap the benefits through (a) confidence and credibility, as the act of learning provides new perspective and increased expertise, (b) efficiency in teaching and learning new skills, (c) the ability to influence and lead by using knowledge learned and confidence gained, providing a tool for more meaningful contributions to the team, (d) creating an outlet to brainstorm and seek feedback with and from one another, (e) battling complacency and the status quo, and (f) becoming enlightened through our own journey of self-discovery and professional growth (Osmundson, 2016).

Thank you for continuing to be part of this incredible process and for your continued commitment to the bigger picture. Your willingness to be your best makes us all better.

Amanda

# MENTOR MINUTE

## Embracing Diversity in the Early Childhood Classroom

Guest Contributors: Cheryo Johnson, Mariel Gardner, Kyle Worley

Masteropieri, M. & Scruggs, T. (2018) define diversity in the early childhood classroom as encompassing all of the differences that people possess and includes differences in race, language, gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, nationality, exceptionalities, abilities, and geographical placement. Diversity consists of qualities that make individuals dissimilar and that bring to the classroom their individual experiences, abilities, talents, and character traits. Cultural diversity is fundamental to understanding children and families, their traditions, communication, education and background; acknowledging both similarities and differences and recognizing different perspectives. Furthermore, teachers who embrace diversity create an exciting, dynamic classroom and provide opportunities for children to understand, respect, and value each other's similarities and differences. The importance and value of diversity is noted throughout the *Rubric for Evaluating North Carolina Teachers*, the *Resource Manual* (2016) and *NC Foundations* (2013) as integral to a child's development and learning. Many examples are highlighted in these resources to support teachers in deepening their understanding and implementation of diversity into the classroom and their teaching practice.



Banks (1999), comments that culture shapes not only our values and beliefs, but also our gender roles, family structures, languages, dress, food, etiquette, approaches to disabilities, child-rearing practices, and even our expectations for children's behavior. In this way, culture creates diversity. A teacher's behavior in the classroom is a key factor in helping all children reach their potential, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, religion, language, or exceptionality. Teachers have an important role in integrating multicultural education into their classroom and have influence over the curriculum with their values, perspectives, and teaching styles.



Teachers must consider how their own biases (both implicit and explicit) impact their interactions with children and understanding of a situation. The "learning environment and its materials reflect what you do and do not value by what is present and what is omitted" (NAEYC Position Statement: Advancing Equity in Early Childhood Education, 2019). By ignoring young children's attention to these differences, we as professionals unintentionally contribute to the prejudice and stereotypes that they gather from society. In fact, young children's racial beliefs are heavily influenced by their environments (Winkler, 2009).

Reid, J.L., Scott-Little, C. & Kagan, S. (2019), maintain that culture influences both "what" and "how" children learn, or their approaches to learning (concentration and attention, initiative and persistence, and curiosity and exploration). Children build on their cultural experiences in unique ways to develop new understandings and approaches to new situations in order to make meaning of their world and daily experiences. The authors further state that teachers need a deep understanding of how culture and learning are inherently intertwined. Children's culture, language and learning are "woven into, not added onto, the existing curriculum, so it is a change in perspective rather than an elaborate new curriculum" (Derman-Sparks, L. & Ramsey, P., 2007., as cited in Lee, H. 2012).



# GUIDING QUESTIONS

## Guiding Questions Mentors/Evaluators might use with Teachers:

- How are you **intentionally** incorporating diversity of the children into your classroom, on-going lessons, and teaching practice?
- What are some ways that you are incorporating diversity into informal conversations and class discussions?
- Tell us more about the diversity and cultures represented by the children and families of your classroom.
- How does your classroom reflect the diversity of its members?
- How are you bringing in the diversity of others into your classroom and teaching?
- How does your knowledge of diversity influence your teaching strategies, materials, activities, etc.?
- How can you represent and embrace diversity continually in the classroom? (routines, transitions, conversations). Can you share more about any of these you have implemented?
- Why is it important to promote and embrace diversity in the classroom?
- How do you work with culturally and linguistically diverse families in your classroom?
- What challenges do you encounter when teaching a diverse group of children and partnering with their families? What strategies have you used that have been successful?

## *Useful and Relevant Resources*



Funds of Knowledge (2:17 minute video) on importance of learning from our families [HYPERLINK](#) (right click title and open)

NC Teaching Standards Module 2 [HYPERLINK](#) (right click title and open)

Valuing Diversity: Developing a Deeper Understanding of All Young Children's Behavior [HYPERLINK](#) (right click title and open)

Support Diversity, Conversations, and Play. Teaching Young Children. Vol. (2). [HYPERLINK](#) (right click title and open)

Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves, Second Edition

“What About People Like Me?” Teaching Preschoolers About Segregation and “Peace Heroes” [HYPERLINK](#) (right click title and open)

Howard, T. (2018). Capitalizing on Culture, Engaging Young Learners in Diverse Classrooms. Young Children, Vol. 73 (2).

Kamdar, K. (2019). Connecting Culture and Play: Practical Strategies for Educators. Vol. 12 (3)

NAEYC (2019). Now Read This! Books that Support Diversity, Conversations, and Play. Teaching Young Children. Vol. (2).

## Strategies for Supporting Teachers



Lee (2012) emphasizes the importance of early childhood educators being reflective of different cultures, but recognizes that educators may not have knowledge and training on how to incorporate diverse cultures and languages into their on-going planning and lessons. Valuing the diversity of children and families is more than labeling classroom materials in different languages or placing a map on the wall or globe on a shelf. The following strategies are an important first step in introducing diversity into a classroom environment. Teachers must be intentional in planning on-going experiences that are meaningful to children.

### Strategies to consider:

- Intentionally seek out diverse books/authors throughout the class year. (Utilize your local librarian as needed for support). Include books that represent a wide range of voices in the curriculum; teach literature from authors of color. Examine historical narratives to see which voices are missing. (For example, a discussion about the civil rights movement can examine how it intersects with gender, equality, immigration, and the stories of Latino, Asian, African-American, Caucasian and Native American peoples).
- Build relationships with children and their families by intentionally learning about their backgrounds, traditions/customs, socio-economic situation, academic status, and children's interests and learning styles.
- Utilize transitions, routines, and conversations throughout the day to promote diversity.
- Use positive language and reinforce non-typical stereotypes; respond effectively to inappropriate comments or actions. Encourage children to include all of their friends if you see division forming based on differences.
- Promote opportunities for families to connect to school and each other (food drive, recyclables for classroom use, host a parent event, encourage families to share their talents/expertise with class, enlist families support in learning about their culture and language; create class newsletters and activity calendars, and take-home projects).
- Introduce adaptive technologies to support the needs of children with diverse learning styles.
- Use peer grouping to pair children of different abilities and languages with each other to meet the needs of both children (creating opportunities to extend and challenge ALL children).
- Encourage use of different teaching strategies to meet the needs of the cultural and unique needs of children.
- Encourage all children's participation in class routines, learning activities, and discussions; being aware of children's different learning styles (provide support and accommodations as needed).
- Encourage artwork on the walls that reflects children's lives (my family, my home, what I see on the way to school, birthday traditions, ways I travel to school, foods my family eats, sports, etc.)
- Classroom materials are labeled in the language of the children in the classroom. Teacher intentionally communicates in language of children (learning a few key words or using in classroom environment).
- Promote non-stereotypical learning experiences (books, research, photos).
- Model, support and promote acceptance and inclusion of all abilities (glasses, hearing aids, adaptive equipment, wheelchair, and disabilities).
- Purposefully plan opportunities for children to play together to promote language (blocks, dramatic play scenarios).



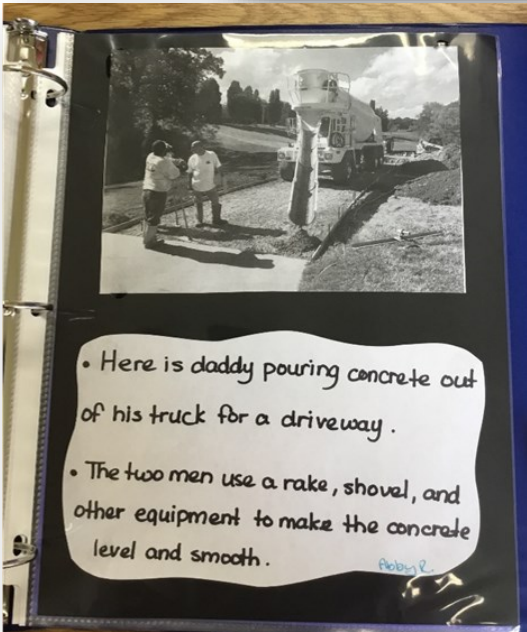
## Question of the day.

# What do you like to do with a friend?



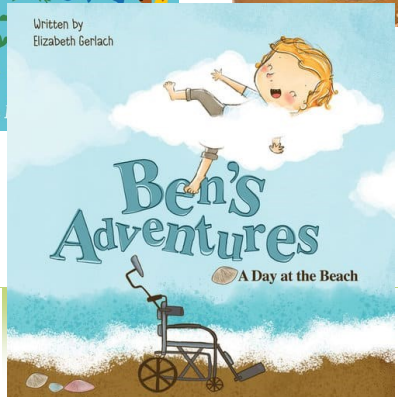
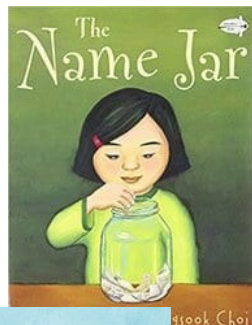
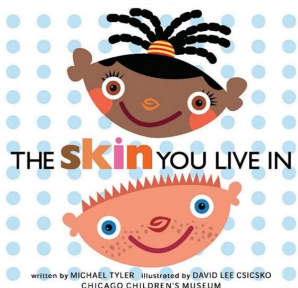
The teacher used, The Question of the day to encourage children to draw pictures and tell "What they like to do with a friend."

Children were encouraged to use open ended materials in art to create where they lived. R. used popsicle sticks to create the apartment building where he lived.



The teacher invited families to share their different jobs with the classroom and then put together into a class book for the classroom.

## Books with great messages-





Diverse books in library  
(Braille books, books in Spanish, books about different abilities, books about culturally diverse people, etc.)



The Spanish-Language Newspaper, La Noticia newspaper was added to the dramatic play area.

Children created their own center tags by drawing pictures of themselves and writing their names.



Teacher intentionally used Spanish language in learning about trees; children's pictures reflect diversity of children's drawing and writing abilities and their representation of trees. All are celebrated. Foundation goals are on display.



## COLLABORATOR CORNER



Rhonda Hamby introduces us to Helena Vanhorn, Preschool Program Coordinator with Caldwell County Schools. She has been in the Early Childhood field for 26 years and partnered with the Early Educator Support Office for five years. Caldwell County Schools is the NCPK Contractor for the Pre-K program.

“Working as a partner allows us to provide the same kind of support to both community and public classrooms. This helps ensure consistency in instruction within our county for all children.” Caldwell County has a very transient population; with children who may move from a school-based classroom to Head Start or from a community classroom to a school classroom. All NCPK classroom teachers attend profes-

sional development and Professional Learning Communities together, no matter what sector they are employed by, which has created a camaraderie and mutual respect between teachers. Ms. Vanhorn’s favorite children’s book is *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein and shares that she loves “the many messages it teaches - environmental awareness, love, giving of oneself, and altruism. It’s a simple book with depth that even young children can grasp.” Something that you may not know about Ms. Vanhorn is that “my great grandmother taught me to crochet, which I use to center myself and relieve stress.” Congratulations Ms. Vanhorn for being featured in our Collaborator’s Corner this month!



## Highlights from the Field

Phoebe and Mistie highlight this month’s educator who began her work in early childhood education in 2006, but is new this program year to receiving services from the Early Education Support Office. She is excited to visit a demonstration site with her mentor, Phoebe Seiler, and they will be attending the area’s newly created PLC together this week.



The teacher and her mentor Phoebe.

Welcome to the Early Educator Support Program!





## Highlights from the field continued-

One of her strengths is her ability to stand back and support independent play. She knows it takes a lot of work at the beginning of the year to get the children ready, but now she can see how her students are engaged and working on more independent problem-solving. Her time as a facilitator is spent listening to conversations and uses center observational sheets to document what play is happening in centers. This data guides the teacher in modifying the centers weekly; and she often extends the main idea for as long as the children remain interested.

During a recent visit to the classroom, it was evident that children's interests were being used to create a vet's office in the dramatic play area. The children made the office sign; and as they discovered things they needed to add, the teacher helped children problem-solve solutions. The children realized that pets need carriers and discussed ideas during group time to solve this problem. Discussions during mealtimes, daily drawing journals, and KWL charts are used to better understand what the children want to learn and what direction the teacher's planning should take to support their investigations.



The teacher leans in close to the child, engaging in conversations during her play.



Office sheets were created and added by the teacher to the vet's office; children used the social/emotional faces to mark how each animal felt. "This dog felt worried."



# Looking Ahead

Mark Your Calendar

## February

- Unannounced Observation 3 completed in NCEES for SPI / LE / Residency teachers by the **20th**
- Unannounced Observation 2 completed in NCEES for SPII teachers by the **20th**
- Mid-Year PDPs should be completed in NCEES for ALL teachers by the **26th**

## March

- Mid-Year PDPs locked in NCEES for ALL teacher by the **6th**
- Unannounced Observation 3 should be locked in NCEES for SPI / LE / Residency teachers by the **13th**
- Unannounced Observation 2 should be locked in NCEES for SPII teachers by the **13th**
- End of Year Procedures virtual meeting (all staff and partners) on Monday, March **16th** from **12:30 – 1:30** (WebEx link below)

<https://uncc.webex.com/uncc/j.php?>

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- Full Staff Team Meeting on 16th (staff only) 3:00-5:00 (WebEx link below)

<https://uncc.webex.com/uncc/j.php?>

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- Mindful Coaching in Burlington on March **24th**

# March 2020

**Sun Mon Tue Wed Thu Fri Sat**

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| 1  | 2   | 3   | 4  | 5  | 6*  | 7  |
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| 22 | 23  | 24* | 25 | 26 | 27  | 28 |
| 29 | 30  | 31  |    |    |     |    |