

Connections

The EESLPD Office at UNC Charlotte Newsletter

March 2019

Volume 2 Issue 6

Congratulations



On Wednesday, March 13th, Dr. Rich Lambert was awarded the Harshini V. de Silva Graduate Mentor Award. The ceremony was beautiful, powerful, and the room was full of those who Rich has positively influenced across the span of his professional career. Based upon his reaction and words, he was honored and will cherish having the opportunity to share such a wonderful experience with his colleagues and family.

The Harshini V. de Silva Graduate Mentor Award was established in 2001 in memory of Dr. de Silva, an associate professor of biology. The award is presented annually to a faculty member who best exemplifies Dr. de Silva's deep commitment to the academic and professional development of graduate students.

Dr. Lambert serves as a professor of Educational Leadership, Director of the Center for Educational Measurement and Evaluation, Editor of *NHSA Dialog: The Research-to-Practice Journal for the Early Education Field*, and as Principal Investigator for grant funded programs and research totaling over \$20 million in external funding.



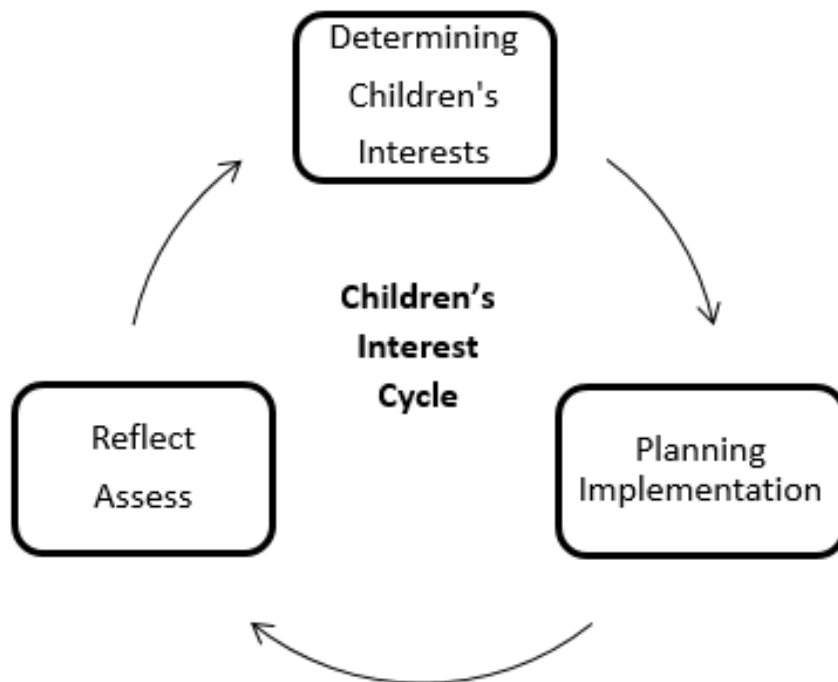
He currently serves as Principal Investigator for the EESLPD Office at UNC Charlotte and finds himself in good company as one of the creators of our program's framework. In the role of mentor, Dr. Lambert has generously shared his knowledge and enthusiasm with a number of graduate assistants, teachers, colleagues, staff, and other mentees.



Congratulations Rich! We are so proud and fortunate to have you as a champion of this work!

Determining and Using Children's Interests to Plan

Children's interests are discovered by listening to children, observing what they are engaged in, and talking with children. Teachers can also encourage children's interests by suggesting ideas, introducing new items and experiences or offering authentic opportunities for children to explore. Helm (2008) shares that "when children are engaged, they are excited and intensely involved in learning experiences that are meaningful to them; they take responsibility for their own learning and feel energized." Learning is easier for children when new knowledge is connected to what they already know.



Determining Children's Interests requires knowledge of individual children, observational skills, confidence in asking thought provoking questions, and intentional decision making. Teachers promote conversations with children by listening to them, validating what they have to say, expanding on their language and supporting them in making connections. Strasser & Bresson state, "knowing when and how to ask good questions requires preparation" (2017). Observing children in their play, who they are playing with, and any challenges they are experiencing will help to formulate questions to learn more about what interests them and how to extend their learning.

*Guiding questions to ask teachers about **determining children's interests**:*

- What are some classroom practices that help you to discover children's interests?
- What do children's actions and behaviors demonstrate about their interests and levels of engagement?
- How can discovering children's interests support learning in ways that are developmentally appropriate, relevant and engaging?
- Are children's interests evident during child directed learning experiences?
- How can the development and use of children's interests be considered as a classroom management tool?
- What are some strategies for involving families in learning about the interests of their children?



While talking about the weather, a couple of children mentioned watching The Weather Channel with their family. The class decided to create their own in the Dramatic Play area. The teacher brought her camera and tripod, and the children took videos of each other sharing the weather forecast.



Children independently decided to create blueprints for their buildings in blocks.

Planning and Implementation: Planning for instruction based on children's interests creates strong, trusting connections that build relationships and promote learning. Teachers use their knowledge of what children need to learn (NC Foundations for Early Learning and Development) and where children are developmentally, as guides to planning learning experiences that incorporate children's interests within units of study or as stand-alone learning opportunities. Building on children's preferences and evolving interests includes looking for potential materials that can be added to learning centers as well as to daily activities.

*Guiding questions to ask teachers about **planning and implementation:***

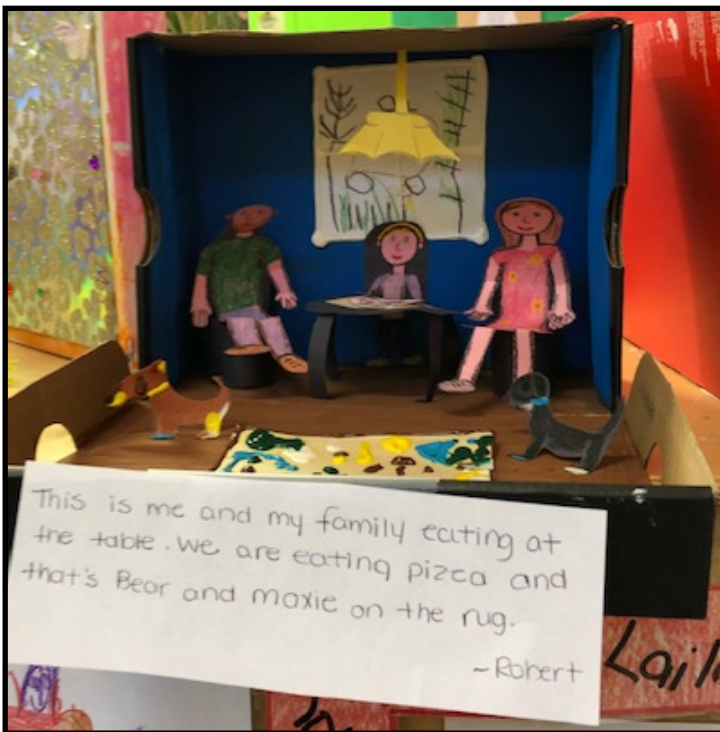
- What connection can you make between embedding children's interests and greater engagement in learning experiences throughout the classroom?
- How can you consistently build upon the interests and experiences of children when planning instruction? How might you note these on your lesson plans?
- How can you use Foundations and its Guiding Principles, goals, Developmental Indicators, and Strategies for Preschoolers to support children's interests throughout the classroom?
- How can you use children's interests to support planning for peer partners and learning teams?
- How can children's interests be embedded within topics of study?
- How do you know when it is time to change, rotate or add materials to learning centers?
- How might you track or keep up with what happens as a result of your planning?

The Children's Interest Cycle begins again.....

Challenges that teachers have experienced in using their children's interests as a way to guide planning:

- **"I won't have the money, supplies, or books to support all their ideas or interests."**
Children's interests are diverse and based on their own experiences. Utilizing resources from your local library, the students' families, community partners, other teachers, or even creating them with the children in the classroom are all ways to begin to create interesting resources. Sending out a letter ahead of time for support allows families and community members to become more involved.
- **"I don't know anything about this."** As teachers of young children, we often face topics that we do not have any prior information about. This would be a great time to say, "I don't know, let's find out together!" Encourage research by the children at home with their families, and begin planning and developing ideas together during group, meal, or center time.
- **"What if their interest is... (too broad, too limited, not interesting to everyone)?"**
Some very important aspects of being an early childhood educator are flexibility and planning.

Some topics may hold the children's interest for a few days, but some may last months. Some topics need to be expanded, but others may need to be more focused. Animals, for instance, is a comprehensive topic, but it could be explored through documentation, class discussion, observation, and listening to what the students might want to investigate.



Families were asked to use a shoe box to create a Family Interest Box, showing what the family likes to do together. This family likes to eat pizza together.

Additional strategies and discussion points about determining children's interests can be found by clicking [here](#).

Resources:

- Helm, J. (2008). Got Standards? Don't give up on Engaged Learning. *Young Children*, v63 n4
- Strasser, J. and Bresson, M. (2017). *Big Questions for Young Minds: Extending Children's Thinking*. NAEYC: Washington, DC.
- Please be sure to also visit the [EESLPD Useful Resources](#) tab of our website to explore the Children's Interests section under Mentor/Evaluator Additional Resources

Special thanks to Joanie Oliphant & Mistie Cogbill, our guest contributors to this month's Mentor Minute

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

Stephanie Bridges is the Regional Lead for Region 3. She has worked the EESLPD Office (and previously with TLU) for a total of 10 years.

She shares, "What I like best about working with the EESLPD is being able to work with patient, kind, warm, enthusiastic, and caring teachers who are dedicated to feeding children's curiosities and teaching them how to be learners for a lifetime. Supporting teachers through their processes of developing and expanding their skills and building on their practices is rewarding work. I know that I am making difference in the lives of young children, their families, and their schools when I see the challenging and nurturing environments that their PreK teachers created as a result of my support and their tireless efforts and work."



Stephanie expresses, "It's too hard to choose only one favorite book, but if I had to I suppose it would be Oh, the Places You'll Go!, by none other than Dr. Suess. My parents read this to me as a child, my father read parts of it to me and my husband at our wedding, and my husband and I read it to our children. Why?: It's whimsical, inspirational, and made me feel like I could do anything (and hope it is doing the same for our children).

About her personal life, she shares , "I spent my youngest years in Reidsville, NC until age 13 and then spent my teenage and young adult years in Charlotte. I have been married to my high school sweetheart for 25 years and we live in Cornelius, NC. I am a wife, a mother of two humans as well as our sweet Pomeranian-Dachshund mix named Fritz. I am a learner, a reader, a card game player, a cook (I enjoy trying!) , a chocolate and coffee lover, and a recently discovered puzzle doer. Mike, my husband of whom I adore, and I have two amazing and beautiful (yes, I am a bit biased) children. Mike and I used to spend a majority of our time in a ballet studio or theater applauding Elizabeth, our pre-professional ballerina at the time, who is now studying international business for a year in Japan. These days, you can typically find us cheering for Michael on a Lacrosse field or listening to him play video games (he's a pretty serious video gamer).

I have always had a passion for working with young children and have had the honor of working with them, their families, their teachers, their therapists, and their communities for 25 years as a NC PreK Teacher, CDSA Service Coordinator, and now as an EESLPD Mentor/Evaluator and Regional Lead."

COLLABORATOR CORNER



Nicola "Nicky" Passarello is a partnering Evaluator and Regional Intervention Specialist for SWCDC (Southwestern Child Development Commission). She has served as a partner with our office for 4 years.

When asked what she likes best about working with the EESLPD, Nicky says, "assisting teachers and watching them grow in their teaching skills."

She mentions that it is difficult to pick just one great children's book and says, "There are too many to name! I really like all children's books. Why?-All of them have valuable teachable moments to share with children."

About life outside of work, Nicky shares, "I enjoy embroidery, reading and spending time with my large family (4 younger sisters, mom, nephews, and niece). I have just really become a great aunt!"

"Highlights from the Field"

Marisel shares, "One of the most satisfying things about my job as a mentor and evaluator is to see dedicated teachers who are always thinking of creative ways to motivate their students and provide them with a space they can enjoy while they learn. It is very nice to enter a classroom in which the different learning centers, materials, props, activities, etc. have been planned with a clear purpose and intentionally.

The classroom environment is fundamental in promoting relevant learning experiences for the children, both individually and in groups. The learning centers and materials should be well defined and intentionally planned. The materials and activities in each center should be based on children's interest, developmentally appropriate, data driven and routed in assessment goals.

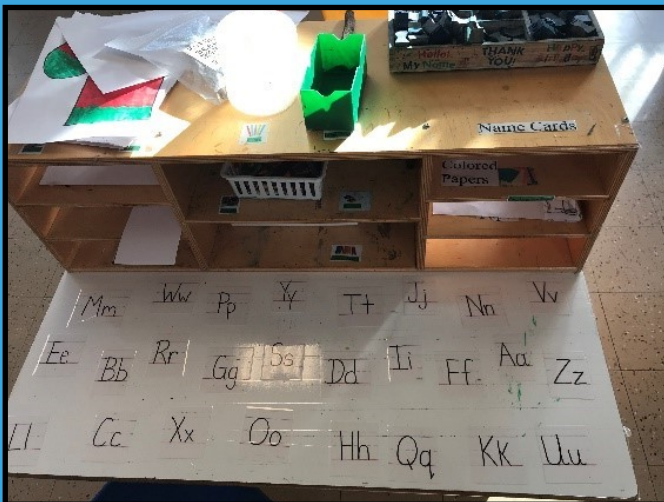
During one of my conversations with a teacher who is very intentional in this aspect, she shared with me that she involves her children in the classroom transformation process, and this creates great excitement and motivation to start a new unit of study. The children are eager to discover new activities, new materials, and new challenges. Every time I visit this teacher, I get very excited myself and look forward to seeing her classroom and all the awesome activities, materials, and props she has ready."



Children reference a picture and blueprint of the building where their classroom is located as they build



Children helped plan & construct this reading area



Upper and lower case letters are added to writing center in random order as a writing support



A Chica Chica Boom Boom tree is used during a letter recognition activity that is differentiated for each child

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

April 2019

April 1st

Region 2 (East) Team Meeting 9:30am-12:30pm at Alamance Partnership for Children

April 2nd

Region 2 (West) Team Meeting 9:30am-12:30pm at Smart Start of Forsyth County

April 3rd

Region 3 Team Meeting 9am-12pm at Kannapolis Library

April 4th

Region 1 Team Meeting 1pm-4pm at Buncombe Partnership for Children

