

HOME & CLASSROOM

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Imagining a Brighter Future



BRIGHTSIDE UP

COMMENTARY

HOME & CLASSROOM
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plant POWERED learning

by Afua Sarfo

There is something quite refreshing about seeing a burst of natural greenery indoors. Plants have the power to transform even the duller environment, filling a space with the green and lush vibrancy of things that grow. Bringing plants into your home or classroom is also a wonderful learning experience, one filled with occasions to care for a living thing as you watch it grow. Encouraging children to tend to growing plants within the home or classroom can help build observation skills, patience, coordination, and relationship skills, creating hands-on learning opportunities throughout the year.

The benefits of living with plants are endless. Aside from the learning opportunities, simply bringing plants into the environment can reduce stress, clean the air, add beauty and comfort, and boost mental well-being. One study even found that merely being in a room with plants can improve recovery and healing after surgery.

Simply having plants in the environment is wonderful, but as for engaging in learning, this is where we truly see some amazing opportunities for children! Finding a spot for the plant to live can be a whole-class activity, one that involves communication and negotiation skills while debating and discussing with the children looking for the best spot. Decisions will need to be

made together as to where the plant might be easily observed, fed by the sun, and accessed for watering. Children will benefit greatly from brainstorming ideas with you regarding the care and watering of their newfound plant-friend and have fun while rising to the occasion of meeting the needs of their classroom foliage. The social emotional learning that comes from tending to a living thing and taking responsibility for its care is a subtle yet rewarding experience for children.

Perhaps the most obvious learning route, and one that is well worth the effort is the science learning that tending plants can provide. Take a “before” photo of your plants and get that measuring tape out, too! This activity will create an opportunity for children to monitor the plants growth, make plans for pruning, watering, sunlight exposure, and even propagation with clippings and seeds. Repotting can also lead to a discovery and understanding of what happens beneath the surface when roots drink in water and expand beyond the capacity of their pots

Bringing plants in the classroom can provide an abundant number of benefits but also, it’s important to keep in mind that the plants that you bring into the classroom be safe and non-toxic.

SAFE VS. TOXIC PLANTS

When it comes to toxic plants, it depends on the part of the plant that is consumed. The beautiful hyacinth may look nice on the outdoor steps of your program, but if ingested it can cause nausea, vomiting and diarrhea. Rosary peas are also very similar in symptoms but additionally it can also cause death if any part is consumed. A good rule of thumb is to do your research on a plant’s toxicity and only bring into your classroom plants that are safe.

SAFE PLANTS

African Violets
Dracaena
Jade
Petunia
Spider Plant
Air Plants
Bamboo
Calathea
Ficus
Snake Plant

TOXIC PLANTS

Croton
Caladium
Morning Glory
Peace Lily
Philodendrons
Pothos
Elephant Ear
Sago Palms
Fiddle Leaf
Aloe Vera

Non-toxic plants bring in brightness, learning opportunities and more life into your classroom. Having plants take the spotlight will allow children to observe how plants play a focal point to all of humankind. Assigning tasks and responsibilities such as watering, cleaning leaves and things like debugging are all relationship building practices.

You don’t need a green thumb to experience wonderful learning opportunities using plants. Focus instead on a positive and growing mindset, and with the help of little ones, you could grow a garden and reap the benefits of its fruits and brighter future. ▲



by Kelsie Morrill

It is a common feeling that the people who decide to pursue a future within the early education field are internally motivated to make a difference in the world. The question is, what exactly fuels the desire to contribute towards the leaders of tomorrow? If you interview an education professional, you are likely to hear stories of how they felt supported, heard, or important from their own educational experiences. Despite the mental and physical exhaustion, small paycheck and even some “boo-boos” that teachers face on a daily basis, the recognition of your dedication, progress in your student’s abilities, and mutual self-confidence that grows between the teacher and student relationship is what draws the line between an employee and a leader.

As I look back at my own educational experiences and why I have decided to pursue a future focused on Play Therapy, I cannot help but to consider the amazing influences I have encountered, as well as the struggles I have faced, to be where I am today. One may say that growing up with a mother who was the director of multiple day care settings, I was destined to have a future in the education field, especially considering I already had a place in her office, at a very young age, and in my very own bean bag chair. Although waking up early every day to go to my mother’s work before going to school seemed boring and arguably frustrating at times, I could not be more grateful for this experience. Having the ability to witness my mother demonstrate her stellar professionalism with her staff, her consistently understanding demeanor with parents, and her infinite empathy while consoling children was one of the most inspiring moments that I could ever be blessed to observe.

In addition, my mother involving me in volunteering all throughout my childhood allowed me an opportunity to develop consideration for those around me and truly recognize the feeling of gratefulness, and always “rising above” as she would say, despite the challenges you may face.

Continuing towards the discussion of being grateful, I could not leave out the amazing influence that my older sister continues to demonstrate each day in my life. Not only is my sister, Jenn, a parental figure to me, but my best friend and my inspiration to work hard in order to accomplish my goals. Thinking of my sister, someone who is currently earning her PhD. as well as teaching college

These two examples of outstanding leaders are the reasons why I decided to continue my education by earning my CDA (Child Development Associate), and by attending college in hopes to earn my license as a Play Therapist. Despite the hardships that my family has encountered and are yet to face, my sister and mother are the individuals who help fuel my motivation to never lose my

...my mother involving me in volunteering all throughout my childhood allowed me an opportunity to develop consideration for those around me and truly recognize the feeling of gratefulness, and always “rising above” as she would say, despite the challenges you may face.

students like myself, I could not possibly express the volume of my admiration towards her perseverance, dedication, and authentic attitude towards continuing to learn, being a genuine person, and making the world a better place. I have learned independence, resilience, and countless attributes to ensure my success in the future due to my sister and my mother’s efforts.



Images (far left): Kelsie in her classroom | (right): Kelsie with her mom and sister

faith in abilities and especially to never settle for less than what I am capable of accomplishing. In short, without my most prominent role models setting the foundation for my future, I would not learn the importance of developing a love for learning and creating this for our future leaders. ▲

THE PATH OF PORTRAITURE

By Lauren Cohen, MA, Creative Director at the Wonder Room

SCRIBBLING

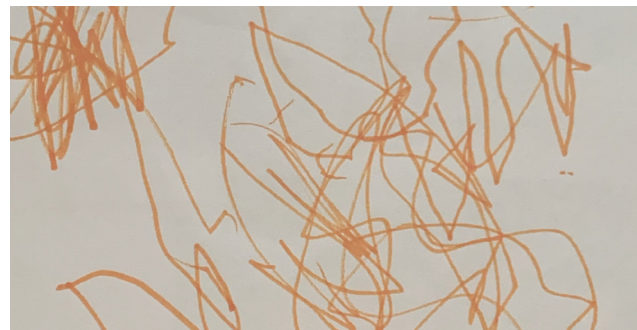
"Action is the foundational key to all success" —Pablo Picasso

All children scribble when first introduced to mark-making materials. At first, scribbling is random and mostly a result of gross motor movements. Only after the child can see that the writing tool has behaved in predictable ways, in accordance with the movements of the arm and hand, do the drawings become planned. At this point, children begin experimenting with the amount of pressure, length of lines and curves and in time, the creation of closed shapes and zig zagging lines. Drawing is an extension of movement and is exploratory and experimental.

Encouraging the Scribbler

Some children like to create in silence, others like to narrate their thinking. Follow the child's lead. If they do talk, assess whether they are

engaging in a personal narrative or wanting to communicate. If you choose to converse, ask them to elaborate on their thoughts, not about the details of their drawing. For example, if they say, "the car is going," talk about where the car might go, not where the wheels are. At this point, the child is developing thinking skills that are separate and not always matched with motor control, or even with a desire to depict something graphically for another person's future reference. In other words, when the drawing is done, the desire for that paper with the marks has ended. It's nice to keep photos of these works as a reference for development (in a portfolio, perhaps) but the child does not generally have any attachment to the work or the association of their words with the actions on the page.



Scribbling: 2 years 10 months



Scribbling: 2 years 10 months



Scribbling: 2 years 11 months



Scribbling: 3 years

PRE-SCHEMATIC

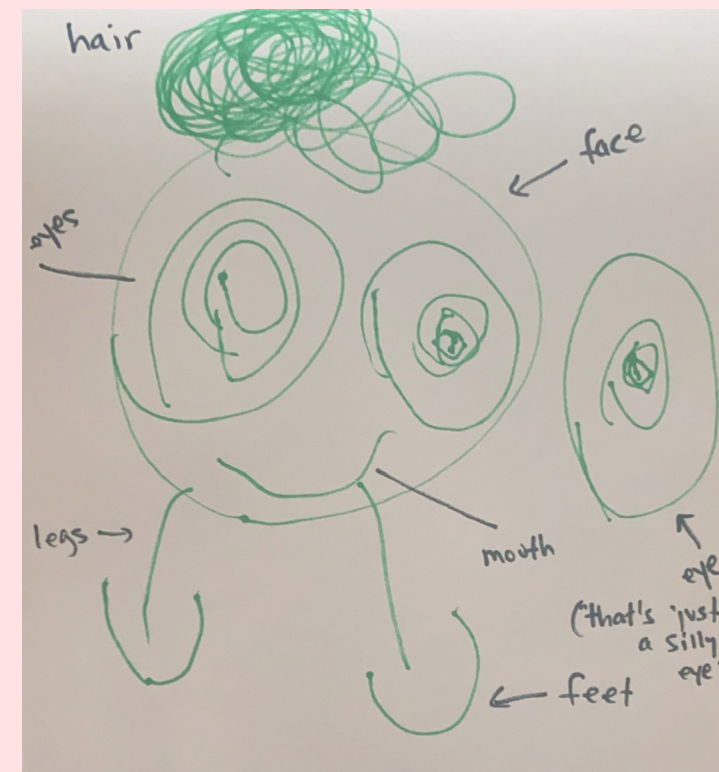
"I paint objects as I think them, not as I see them" —Pablo Picasso

Somewhere between the ages of three and four, children who have been exposed to mark-making materials will begin to draw simple representational figures. These figures are commonly referred to as "tadpole people" because they often consist of a circle with legs coming directly from the head shape. This stage is called pre-schematic, as children don't have an embedded "schema" or structure that includes all the parts to communicate an accurate form of the human face or body. There is extensive research on this type of figure and debate continues about whether the child's exclusion of certain body parts (often torsos and arms) is a result of a lack of motor ability to draw, an immaturity of perception, a desire to create a sort of shorthand, or a lack of consideration of the adult notion of communication through a lasting object like a drawing. They are in the moment, not thinking

about how the result will be used, shared or referred to. In any case, as experience and motor control grow, the parts start to develop more form and structure.

Encouraging the Pre-schematic Child

At this stage, it's nice to have a drawing table with large paper. If you can have a mirror at this spot so they can observe their own features, it's a nice addition. Having photos of people the child knows is helpful as well. Always date the pictures and if the child has some words to say while drawing (or about the drawing) it's nice to make a note of it on the back. First take a photo of the work itself with no notes, then take another shot with the words/story/information on an index card next to the photo. Then you'll have one photo with all of the data and another one that is as the child intended.



Pre-schematic: 4 years



Pre-schematic: 4 years 6 months

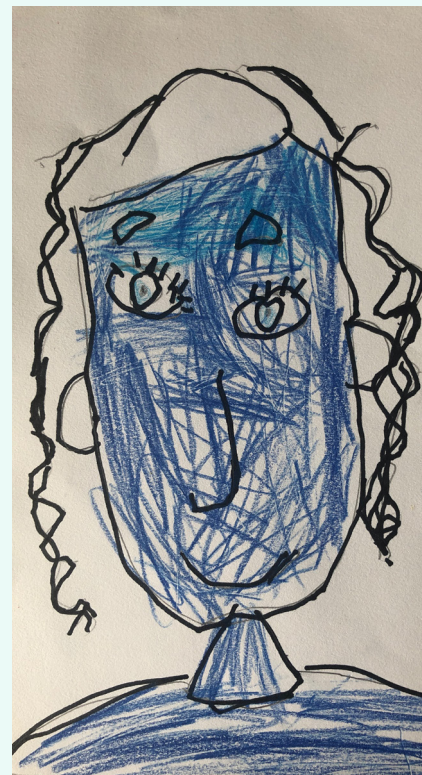
SCHEMATIC

"All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up" —Pablo Picasso

From age five or six until nine or ten, a child is in what we call the schematic stage. They have created a mental image and the people they draw all conform to that structure, for the most part. Over time, more details and structure emerge, motor control develops, and pictures look more complex. Also, in this stage, there is a baseline (you'll see that people stand on the ground) and that body parts are mostly proportional. I like to think of a schema as similar to the image of a triangle atop a square with a center door and two windows that most of us recognize and will draw as a shorthand house. The way children draw people is somewhat more individualized, but the idea of a schema comes from having this type of shorthand. Within the schema, children draw people in situations. An interesting and common adaptation is known as "x-ray pictures" where children draw both the inside and outside of something, including what the eye would not be able to see when looking at an object (like a baby inside a mom's belly, or both the furniture and the exterior of a house).

Encouraging the Schematic Child

The long joked about expression, "my kid could have done that," when looking at art in museums is emblematic of the schematic child's art. It's a period where in general, children have enough motor control to create a vision with enough accuracy to suit their standards (allowing for variation of course in both the level of motor control and the standards the child has for themselves). The joy and beauty comes from the emotion, freedom and singular focus that children are able to give to their work. That's a model that artists seek. For me, encouraging the artist in this stage means trying to understand the viewpoint of the child and supporting those ideas rather than the structure of the result. As an adult in the room, my job is to supply materials, be a listening ear and help the child get the experience and confidence in both the motor control necessary to achieve their desired results and in the openness to their own ideas as an artist. We show lots of abstract art to children at this stage and talk a lot about artists' choices.



Schematic: 6 years



Schematic: 7 years



Schematic: 7 years 6 months

REALISM

"To draw you must close your eyes and sing" —Pablo Picasso

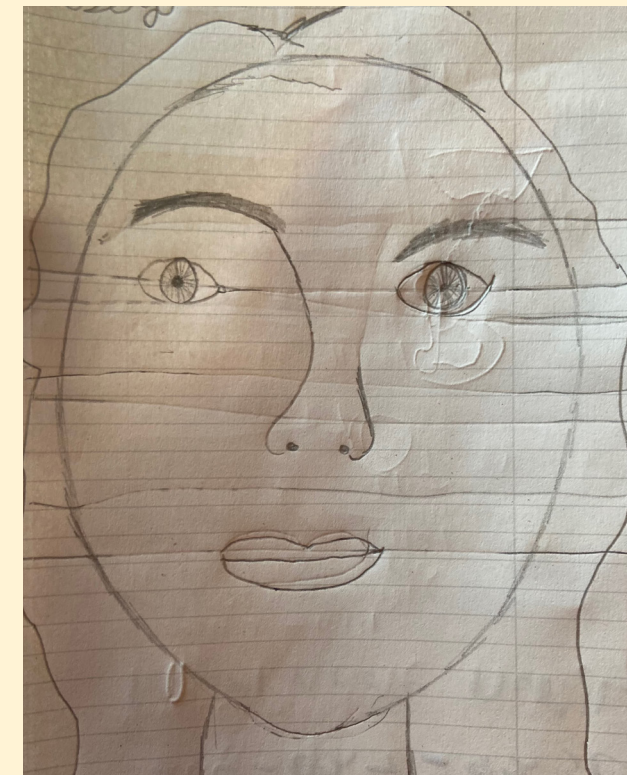
By about age ten, children become very concerned with making their art look realistic. They compare their work to others with a critical eye. This is a stage where many children decide they don't like art or are "no good at art." It requires a skilled and patient teacher to be able to teach the detail work required for perspective drawing and three-dimensional representation.

Encouraging the Realistic Artist

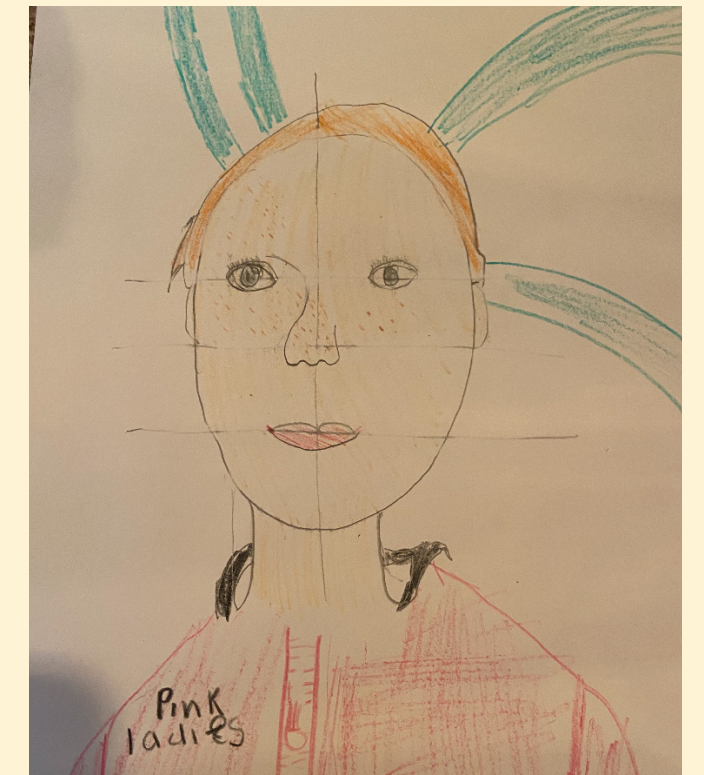
Just as I am not qualified to teach calculus to my teenager, I don't know how to teach realistic art making to children. I am not an art teacher, but I do have the capacity to have an artistic sense of wonder, just as (even without a deep knowledge of calculus), I have great curiosity about math in my everyday life. When adults say they only

draw stick figures (schemas!), it usually means they never felt comfortable once they entered the realistic stage of art. We can leave this fear behind when we keep our minds open to appreciating art and valuing what we can create with our mark-making abilities. This is a great time to encourage children to reflect instead of judge. It's a great age to do what we call "try-its" in the classroom. We take an idea or a new technique and use small pieces of scrap paper to experiment with tools and ideas. It's nice to have good paper and materials. It is also very important that not every endeavor be expected to produce a masterpiece. Most of art is just trying out ideas and repeating and changing them in small amounts to produce results that are pleasing to the creator. ▲

All of the photos displayed here are the work of one child over a period of about six years. She was just under three in the first pictures and just nine in the last. There is both progression as well as some overlap in the stages going from scribbling to pre-schematic drawing, to schematic drawing and toward realism.



Realism: 9 years



Realism: 9 years

a fresh take on BABY'S FIRST FOODS

by Maggie Hartig MS, RD, CDN, CLC & Lisa Schmitt RDN

For most of us, the easiest and most accessible way to feed little ones is to purchase store-bought jars or pouches of purées. Conventional jars are convenient, take the guess-work out of determining appropriate textures with pre-made stages of thickness, have longer shelf-lives, and don't require any additional preparation.

You might be wondering if you need to worry about heavy metals in store-bought baby food. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP), the low levels of heavy metals found

in some baby foods do pose a very small risk to children. However, exposure to any amount of heavy metals, such as lead, arsenic and mercury, can be harmful, so it's best to minimize exposures from all sources. The easiest way to do that is to simply feed children a variety of foods, and if possible, choose more fresh and whole foods over packaged, and try to limit the amount of rice-based foods like rice cereal, and fruit juice in their diets.

Families may also choose to make their own purées instead of using store-bought

varieties. You don't need to be a top chef to create delicious meals for your baby. All you need are nutritious foods, some basic cooking supplies, containers or jars to put the finished product in, and a blending device (Ex. Blender, immersion blender, food processor, food grinder, or, if you want to get fancy, an all-in-one baby food maker). Maybe consider doing a combination of both, and buy jarred food when you need the convenience, and try making your own when you have more time and ingredients on hand.

FOOD PREP TIPS

FRUITS: Soft fruits don't require cooking, just mash and serve. Pushing soft fruits through a mesh strainer or using a potato masher may be helpful to get a thinner consistency. Harder fruits such as apples and pears need to be cooked before puréeing.

VEGETABLES: Any cooking method will do, but steaming or roasting (baking) works best. Drain, mash, and then purée.

GRAINS: Grind the uncooked grain into a powder using a food processor. Then cook for about 15 minutes in water until it reaches a soupy consistency.

MEATS: Cook the meat until well-done (no red/pink color left). Use a blender or food processor to purée.

While some families opt to introduce solids in purée form, others may follow a baby-led weaning approach. Baby-led weaning, is a method of introducing solids by letting babies feed themselves with soft, easy-to-grab, finger foods instead of being spoon-fed purées. Bananas, avocado, sweet potato, plain pasta, shredded and moist meats, and egg omelets cut into pieces are all examples of good first finger foods to try for baby-led weaning.

Remember, babies are usually ready to start solid foods

between the ages of 4 to 6 months old, but many experts, including the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend waiting until 6 months. Signs a baby is ready include being able to hold their head up with control, show an active interest in foods, and the ability to move food to the back of throat instead of pushing it out with their tongue. No matter which method you chose (store-bought, homemade, or baby-led), start slow and introduce each ingredient separately before trying a combination meal. This is important for

identifying food allergies and sensitivity. Waiting 3-5 days between each new, single-ingredient food is generally enough time to gauge a baby's reaction. Once a child's tolerance is established, try different combinations of foods, and adding seasonings to enhance flavor. Remember, children should never be left alone during meal times. This not only reduces risk for choking and allows for faster reaction in case of an allergic event, it also supports a child's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive growth. ▲



NATIONAL CACFP ASSOCIATION

Apple, Spinach, Kiwi Purée

4 cups apple, 1 cup baby spinach, 1/4 cup kiwi

Peel and slice apple. Place into medium sauce pan with enough water to cover. Bring to a boil and cook for 10 minutes. Wash and thinly slice spinach. Add spinach into sauce pan with apples and cook for 30 more seconds until spinach is soft. Drain. Peel kiwi and chop into chunks. Place apples, spinach and kiwi into food processor and blend until smooth.

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NATIONAL CACFP ASSOCIATION

Blueberry, Banana, Avocado Purée

1/2 cup blueberries, 1/4 cup avocado, 1 banana, 1/4 cup yogurt

Wash blueberries. Remove peel from avocado and cut into chunks. Remove banana from peel and slice. Blend blueberries, avocado, and banana until smooth. About 2 to 3 minutes on medium. Scraping sides every 30 seconds to help purée blueberry peel. Add yogurt and blend for an additional 30 seconds. Chill until served.

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AN INTERVIEW STYLE PODCAST WITH CHILD DEVELOPMENT EXPERTS WITH
HOSTS HANNAH & RACHEL

FEATURED EPISODE



Episode #39 / VROOM

We sat down with Kandi & Patience from Child Care Aware to discuss the importance of healthy brain development of children ages 0-5; we talk about a project called Vroom which provides science based tips and tools to inspire families to turn shared everyday moments into brain building moments.

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PODCAST!

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RECIPE for INDEPENDENCE

by Bonnie Schultz, RD

Think back to your earliest cooking memory. What do you recall? Kate Smith, Brightside Up Communications Director, reminisced about helping her grandmother make apple cake. It “was out of this world delicious and such a nice experience helping her with it.” As part of a pleasant, age-appropriate experience, children gain a sense of accomplishment making food for themselves. Sure, it’s easier and faster for an adult to put food together, but shared experiences with children allow physical, social and emotional development to thrive.

In a child care program this might be as simple as assembling the entrée. Can you picture ‘build your own sandwich’, ‘fill your own taco’ or ‘stuff and wrap your burrito’ challenges? With single portion “cooking” children only touch their food. Layering a fruit yogurt and cereal parfait or mixing a creamy herb dip are other fun foods for children to put together with the ingredients on their plate. Something as

simple as spreading hummus on a cracker, then graduating to the more difficult task of spreading on a soft slice of bread builds life skills.

At home, how about breaking down steps for children to foster independence and self-esteem through doable chores such as helping pack their lunch or tasks to help prepare a meal? Sure, there will be messes, but lots of memories too.

Meal planning often starts with a grocery list, a trip to the store or a stroll to the garden. As adults we lead with our choices. My grandchildren love to be produce pickers with choices to pick which one of the sale items on the list we get. Selecting the fruit or vegetable, with guidance about ripeness and bruising, seemed to increase their curiosity to try the foods they chose.

At home, putting the groceries away can be a great learning experience. Some foods like potatoes and onions like the dark, cool conditions in

a cabinet. Others, such as tomatoes are best kept at room temperature, stem-side down until ready to use. Giving instructions to store the celery in the refrigerator can sound like coordinates in a game of Battleship, second shelf, left against the wall please. Each child’s interest and attention span is different, so I don’t expect them to help until all the groceries are away. Their cues usually give a clear indication when they’ve had enough.

When it comes time for preparing food, children seem to enjoy washing produce. To keep the water use reasonable, it helps to fill a basin or bowl with water and then the child can rinse, rub and scrub without the faucet running continuously. Swishing green leafy veggies and green beans in a bowl of water until the water is clean is probably the best way to loosen any dirt from them.

Many foods are bigger than bite size. While cutting is largely an adult job, young children may be able to break

the ends off beans or tear lettuce into bite size pieces. Adults might sometimes choose to supervise a child using a plastic knife or lettuce knife to cut soft foods. Graters are sharp, but working together with an adult, a child might start grating a carrot and then the adult takes a turn finishing the grating.

Measuring and mixing go beyond baking. Some terrific dressings for vegetables and fruits may be found at Just Say Yes to Fruits and Vegetables, <https://jsyfruitveggies.org/recipes-all/>.

Measuring portions with measuring cups or a scale helps us eyeball what’s a reasonable amount of food. *What’s a typical portion of candy vs portion of fruit? How about the size of a portion of vegetable compared to a portion of high protein food? When packing a lunch, which size container or plastic bag will fit the portion of food?*

Kitchen projects could include matching lids to containers, packaging bulk food into your own convenient individual portions, creating your own waxed paper envelopes or origami-folded cups. Who would like a surprise message? Together, creating a bunch of them and then slipping them into lunch bags lends to warm feelings come the midday meal.

Teach the science of food safety, pointing how cold packs and thermoses work. Observe fruit browning and experiment with an acidic lemon or orange juice solution to keep the apple’s creamy color. If the ripe peach is likely to bruise, what sort of protective packaging might work?

As children gain skills and experience, they’ll be more able to make and pack their entire lunch. Some adults are concerned that children will pack just junk. A guideline for a healthy lunch

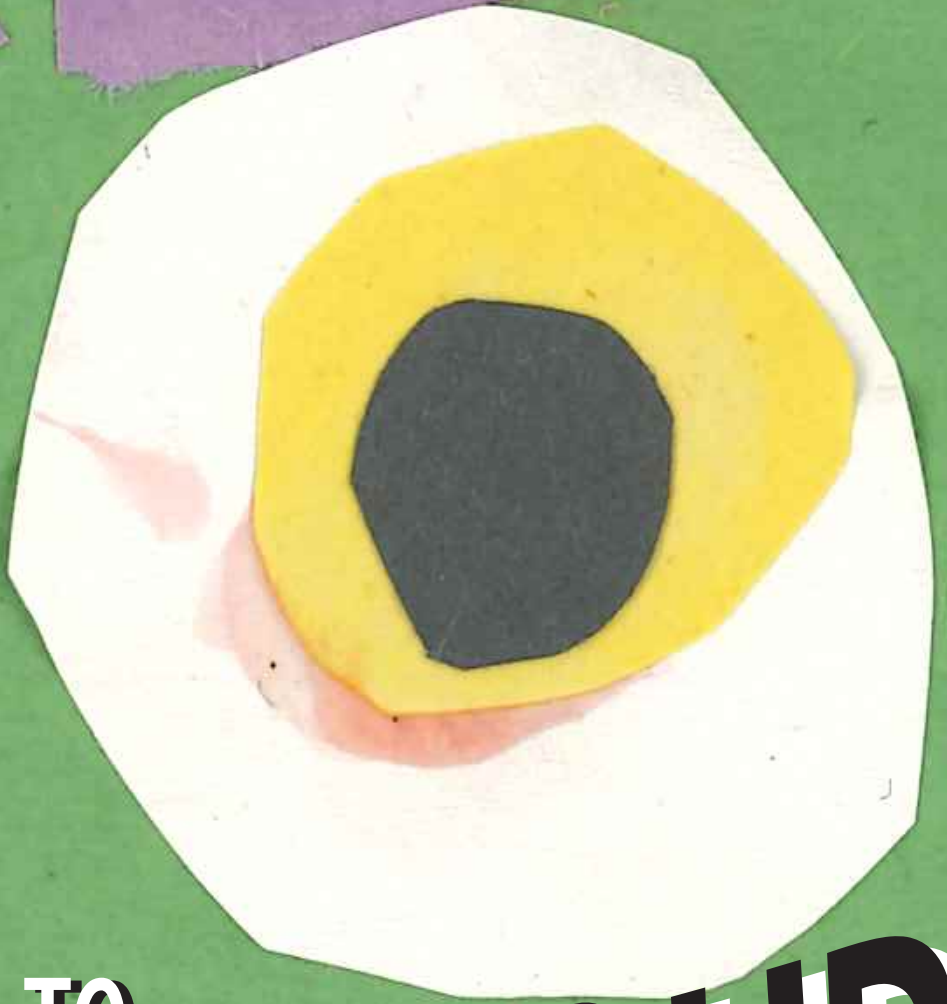
could include vegetable, fruit, whole grain, protein source, and milk. I’m all for making half my plate vegetables/fruits and half my grains whole grains. Modeling your family’ standards and spending relaxed quality time together in the kitchen go a long way towards healthy, pleasant mealtimes.

CREAMY HERB DIP
¼ cup (2 oz) plain low-fat yogurt
Pinch of onion powder
Pinch of dried dill
Pinch of salt

Serve the ingredients separately on a plate. Encourage children to examine each ingredient with their senses and add pinches of the flavorings into the yogurt.

Creamy herb dip is great served with crunchy cucumber slices or other thinly sliced tender veggies.

**THREE
SIMPLE
CHANGES TO ENCOURAGE
IMAGINATION**



BY DEBBIE MARKLAND,
EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATOR,
LEARN AS YOU PLAY

TRY THESE THREE SIMPLE CHANGES TO ENHANCE IMAGINATION, CREATIVITY, & PROBLEM SOLVING

1

IN YOUR DRAMATIC PLAY CENTER

Trade your traditional dress up outfits for fabric remnants

For years I had the generic “community helpers” dress up clothes hanging in my dramatic play center. You know the ones; the firefighter, the doctor, the mail carrier, and of course, the array of Disney princess costumes. By offering these specific dress-up items, I was not encouraging creativity, I was in fact, doing the opposite. So, I decided to switch out all of the dress up clothes with pieces of fabric. I asked for donations from friends and family and also went to the fabric store. I tried to intentionally select fabric that had prints and colors that offered a variety of ethnic vibes. I looked for African and Indian prints, as well as bold color patterns, geometric patterns, animal prints, and everything in between. I placed these new dress up materials on hooks in the dramatic play space along with some clothespins. I discovered that children would turn these pieces of fabric into capes, dresses, blankets, scarves, you name it! The options were endless and their creativity was amazing! I also loved that gender stereotypes were essentially removed and conversations about the cool prints in the fabric transpired.

2

IN YOUR PLAY KITCHEN

Swap out play food and dishes for the real thing

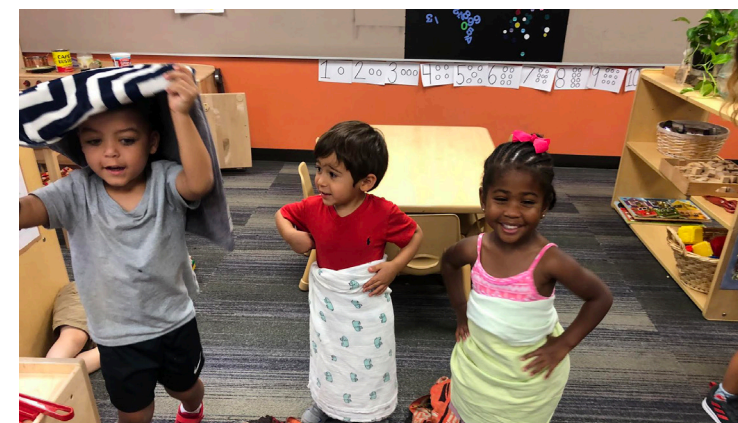
I was always frustrated when setting up my classroom play kitchen. I would go to the school’s storage room and dig through the bins. I would find nothing that looked like real food, dishes or utensils. The bananas were about 1/6 the size of real bananas, the pots were so small they couldn’t hold but 5 pieces of rotini, and the plastic flimsy spatulas were certainly not capable of flipping any grilled cheese sandwich. I decided to forego these options. I did two things instead. First, I went to the Dollar Tree and bought real dishes, pots and utensils. If my little friends were going to grow up and cook in a real kitchen, why not use these real items now. It was a success, and my students loved the real kitchen feel. I also decided not to put fake food in the kitchen. Instead, I placed baskets of loose parts and such in the kitchen, and purposely placed the math manipulatives near the kitchen. Imaginations soared as they used Unifix cubes in soup and floral stones as macaroni and cheese.

3

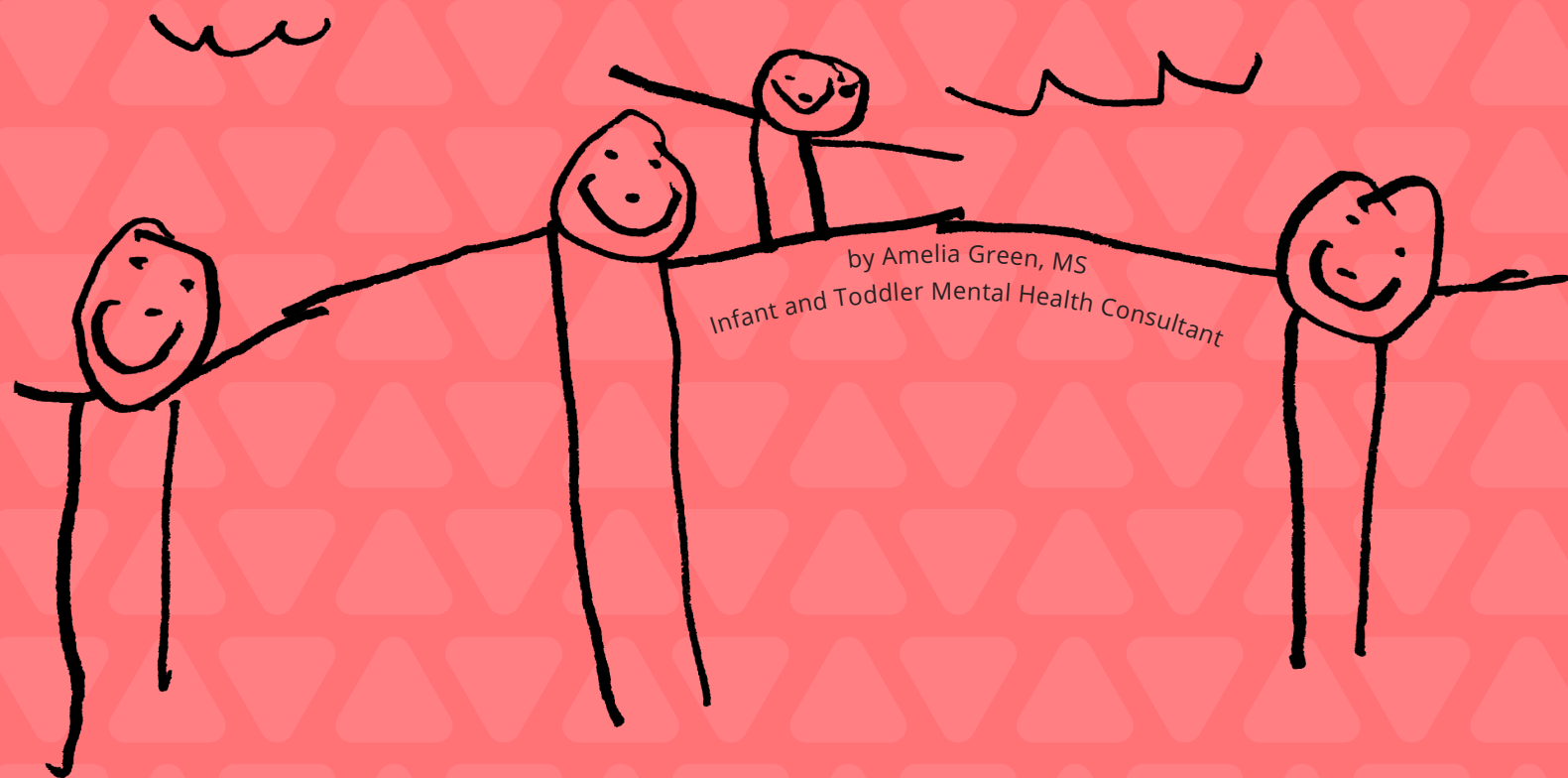
PLACE IMAGES NEAR YOUR BLOCK PLAY CENTER

At one point I noticed that many of my preschooler’s buildings looked the same... four sided roofless structures. There was a building being constructed nearby and when I drove by it on the way to school, I snapped a photo. I simply thought it would make a great conversation with my class. But they ended up studying the photo and trying to copy what it looked like in the block center. I posted the photo on the wall next to the block center and creativity happened!

What a great lesson in engineering as well! This is a chance to share buildings and structures from other cities, communities and countries. Your children might try to build a pyramid like the ones in Egypt or maybe the Golden Gate Bridge. These three little changes are simple and easy to make and don’t be surprised when they have a BIG impact on your children’s imaginations. ▲



TEAMING *up for a* BRIGHTER FUTURE



by Amelia Green, MS
Infant and Toddler Mental Health Consultant

For many families and school districts, a New Year can mean many things; a new school year in September with new opportunities for learning and growth, or it might be the New Year in January or February when re-evaluations are conducted and meetings are set up to discuss progress and goal-setting. So how do you, as a team member, step up and show up to make sure the needs of your little person are met to ensure the bright future they deserve?

If you have a child in your program or home with special needs, you might be part of that child's multidisciplinary team. This team, which includes the child's family, works together to advocate

for and attain a common goal; what is best for the individual child. The term "multi-disciplinary" means combining the knowledge of a group of individuals in varying fields of study or experience. When we look to serve a child with a disability, no matter the diagnosis, there is almost always a need for expertise in different areas of health and development in order to meet the child's specific need.

For most children, there is a team to support their growing and development, a network of nuclear family, friends, extended family, neighbors, teachers, and even acquaintances. For children with disabilities or special needs, additional team members, many with specialties, are necessary to help the child reach their potential. Some of the specialists who may be part of a multi-disciplinary team may include a physical therapist, occupational therapist, a speech therapist, and a special educator.

When you support children with disabilities it is very easy to become so focused on their needs that you may lose sight of your own body's signals. For personal and team health and effectiveness it is important that both self-care and community care are regular practice.

A physical therapist helps improve a child's range of motion, strength, flexibility and movement patterns in order to help them to move their body to the best of their ability. An occupational therapist helps children acquire or strengthen the skills needed to perform the activities (occupations) of daily life which include fine-motor skills, visual-perceptual skills, cognitive or thinking skills and sensory-processing problems.

Speech therapists help children with communication challenges, both in how they understand communication and how they speak, and can even assist with oral motor concerns such as chewing and swallowing difficulties, articulation, and auditory processing. A special educator creates appropriate curriculum and activities, as well as monitors a child's academic, social, and behavioral development.

Another important team member is the Chair Person of the Committee for Preschool Special Education for children 3-5 years old or Special Education for children aged 5-21. The role of this person is to help the team come to a consensus on decisions, including setting goals and the level of involvement of other team members such as therapists. The chairperson is also expected to be knowledgeable about programs and services available to be sure that the needs of the child are met. The last team member to be highlighted is the one who usually holds the team together and knows the child best – the family. While the family may not hold a degree in a specialty subject, they have spent the most time with the child and have watched them progress and develop.

When working within a multi-disciplinary team, it is of the utmost importance that every voice is heard and every opinion respected. This team has the power to work together to support vast growth and change for a child, regardless of their diagnosis. Keeping steady, open

and positive communication is a great way of keeping the team united. If one does not yet exist, consider starting an email chain of all the team members. This is a great way to share important information such as illness or updates as well as pictures, stories and anecdotes to help everyone get to know the child and their abilities more.

It is important to always consider our perspective and come from a strength-based approach when looking at the future for children with disabilities. A strength-based approach in early education is a collaborative and solutions-focused way of working that encourages team members to consistently draw on their knowledge of a child's skills, capabilities, and dispositions to learning. When setting goals for an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) it is important to consider the strengths and abilities of the child and set goals that build off of these.

For children with disabilities there are often needs in numerous areas and it can be easy to just discuss problems and lose sight of the skills and strengths a child may have in other areas. By using a strength-based approach, we are mindful that learning is dynamic, complex, and holistic, and that children demonstrate their learning in different ways. It is important to start with what is present, not what is missing, and highlight what works for the child. A golden rule to remember when assisting a child with

disabilities is that the problem is the problem – the child is not the problem.

In order for a team to be successful in advocating, meeting, and advancing children's needs the entire team needs to be as healthy as possible, as individuals and as a unit. When you support children with disabilities it is very easy to become so focused on their needs that you may lose sight of your own body's signals. For personal and team health and effectiveness it is important that both self-care and community care are regular practice.

Self-care is a term that we hear used in reference to any number of activities. To fully engage in self-care, there are many layers to consider: making healthy lifestyle choices that feel good to you, self-recognition of symptoms and recognizing if you need support outside of yourself, self-monitoring for signs of deterioration as well as growth and improvement, and self-management which involves treating symptoms and

finding tools to help with self-advocacy and regulation. The term community care refers to members of a community or group caring for each other. When we have team members who are committed to leveraging their privilege, power, resources and expertise to provide care to benefit and better other team members we have a healthier community comprised of healthier individuals. Sometimes community care is as simple of asking "What do you need and how can I help?"

By being conscious of our contributions to caring for our team we can cultivate togetherness and teamwork and better support the needs of the child. Think of each team member as a cup – if one cup is empty it cannot possibly pour into another. Self-care and community care together can leave cups overflowing and ready to give to others and then we can fill the built up, reinforced cups of children with disabilities and guarantee the brightest future possible. ▲

INFANT & TODDLER MENTAL HEALTH CONSULTATION

Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation (IECMHC) is here to help you promote and support adult-child relationships, social and emotional health, and overall positive mental well-being by providing resources, coaching, and training. Mental health consultants partner with regional infant and toddler specialists, and early childhood education specialists to support children's overall development in child care settings, at home, and in the community.

Visit brightsideup.org to book an appointment or call 518-426-7181.



CONNECT

CACFP

Child and Adult Care Food Program

CACFP provides reimbursement for nutritious foods that contribute to the wellness, healthy growth, and development of young children. Family, group family, and legally exempt child care providers are eligible to participate. (Child care centers can participate through the Dept. of Health).

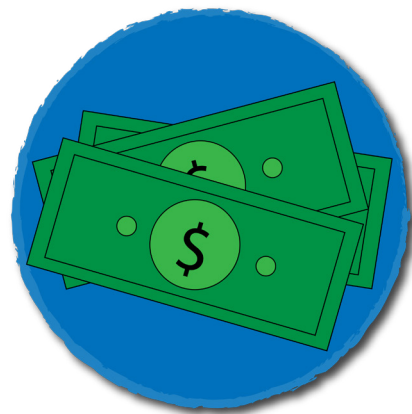
Joining is easy and the benefits are invaluable. In addition to reimbursement, you will receive free training and ongoing education on food safety, nutrition, menu planning, shopping and budgeting.

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SERVE



COLLECT

mindful moment

with Kim Polstein, LMSW

GREET YOURSELF WITH COMPASSION

A simple act of self-compassion can help us to regulate the big emotions, feelings, sensations that come from living and working in stress. When life feels overwhelming you may notice an impulse to try to fix, control, or change things beyond our reach. You might notice more negative self-talk when you are under a great deal of stress, so treat yourself to a moment of self-compassion. Today we practice believing that we are whole and worthy just as we are, with no need to fix or control. We will start as we often do, by finding a comfortable seat.

Sit down in a place that is quiet and free of as many distractions as possible. Place your feet flat on the floor and notice how it feels to have your body supported by the ground and the seat you are in. *Inhale. Exhale.*

Acknowledge the thoughts that come into your head and let them go, there is so much to think about in this world, but right now, all of those thoughts can wait. Focus your awareness to your internal state. Close your eyes if that helps, or take a soft gaze not focusing on anything in particular. Place one hand on your heart and the other on your belly. *Inhale. Exhale.*

Notice how it feels to have your hand on your heart. Now, shift your focus to the hand on your belly. How does it feel to be held by your own two hands? *Inhale. Exhale.*

Repeat a mantra in your head if you find it helpful. "I am enough," "I have everything I need inside of me," "I love myself unconditionally."

You might acknowledge the hardships these past two years have brought. You may validate the feelings of exhaustion, fear, and stress. Do so, and then come back to your breath. Feel yourself being supported by the ground and by your hands. Acknowledge that hardship is part of life, but so is love and joy.

Acknowledge the compassion and kindness you can offer to yourself by wrapping your arms tightly around yourself, give yourself a tight hug. *Inhale. Exhale.*

End your moment of self-compassion with a few more rounds of breath and by saying to yourself, or out loud, "I love and accept myself just as I am." ⚡

creativity is the hope for the future

By Dr. Phyl Brazee

I'm an eternal optimist and I have been sorely challenged about our future during these troubled times. But, when I get beyond the negativity of many news sources and discouraged people, I find immense evidence of and so many reasons to hope for a bright future, for ourselves and especially for the young ones in our care. I am a grandmother of 3, ages 1, 4 and 6, and when I look into their eyes, I see such possibilities. I know that early childhood caregivers have always felt the same way. Our job is to create environments where each child's unique gifts can flourish.

So why am I hopeful for the future? For one thing, there is much evidence of the incredible ingenuity and inventiveness of human beings alive today that is buried in more the obscure media outlets. I have spent many hours looking for these sources and the stories they have to tell. I would like to share a few of them with you to demonstrate that creativity is alive and well in our current world. The source I will quote from is The Optimist Daily, their Optimist Solutions News, an online website that publishes encouraging stories once a day.

Story #1 / August 27, 2021

Problem: "A motorway forms a huge barrier for many insects as the vortexes and currents in the air caused by traffic are deadly to them."

Solution: "...a web that stretches over a Dutch highway called the Butterfly Effect." It blocks the fast moving air from the cars, is filled with solar technology, and funnels nitrogen to trees and wild plants on the sides of the roads."

Innovators: Dutch design studio VenhoevenCS, landscape architecture agency DS Landschapsarchitecten, and solar energy firm Studio Solarix

Story #2 / August 26, 2021

Problem: Regular coolers contain polyurethane foam that is difficult to recycle, has harmful chemicals and noxious gases released during decomposition.

Solution: a wool-insulated cooler made of 100 percent natural sheep's wool

Innovators: Wool Street

Story #3 / August 25, 2021

Problem: Can you turn the energy generated on stationary bikes into green electricity?

Solution: "mySun, a microgrid in a box that acts like a personal green energy-producing machine. Combined with a few solar panels and the power of human movement, mySun can generate enough energy to power LED lighting, mobile devices, heating systems, air conditioning units, and more"

Innovators: WZMH Architects

These stories demonstrate the ingenuity of the human spirit when faced with seemingly intractable problems and highlight what creative people have envisioned and produced in response. So how do we help children see what might be possible in their lives? One way is through quality nonfiction children's books that document the lives of people who have seen problems and used their creativity to solve them. Here are a number of such picture books I pulled recently from my local public library:

Nothing Stopped Sophie: The Story of Unshakable Mathematician Sophie Germain by Cheryl Bardoe (2018)

This book tells the story of a young Parisian girl during the French Revolution who wanted to be a mathematician, something no woman had ever been before. She enters a contest to try to figure out a seemingly unsolvable problem. After many tries, she succeeds and is finally recognized for her mathematical achievement.

The Watcher: Jane Goodall's Life with the Chimps by Jeanette Winter (2011)

This book tells the story of Jane Goodall's life as a watcher of many things in nature, especially the chimps of Gombe. It tells of her patience and persistence in learning with and from the chimps. The author writes: "I wish that when I was a little girl, I could have read about someone like Jane Goodall - a brave woman who wasn't afraid to do something

that had never been done before. So now I've made this book for that little girl, who still speaks to me."

Mario and the Hole in the Sky: How a Chemist Saved Our Planet by Elizabeth Rusch (2019)

This book tells the story of Mario Molina who was born in Mexico City and who on his eighth birthday received a microscope from his parents, using it for the rest of his life to explore the issue of whether or not all the new chemicals put into the world were safe. He is now taking on the issue of global warming. He has said: "You never know which young, bright mind holds the solution to a serious problem we face in the world. We need every one."

Seeds of Change: Planting a Path to Peace by Jen Cullerton Johnson (2010)

This book tells the story of Wangari Maathai from Kenya who defied tradition by going to school and then becoming a scientist. In 2004 she won the Nobel Peace Prize, the first ever awarded to an African woman or an environmentalist. Wangari started the Green Belt Movement that advocates for planting trees all over the world. "Young people, you are our hope and our future," she said.

One antidote to the doom and gloom in the world is to acknowledge the power of the human spirit, its curiosity, creativity, persistence, inventiveness, and joy. We see it in the discoveries of very young children as they manipulate their environment. It is our sacred task to provide environments that bring out the unique human spirit in each child, and in ourselves. We need to encourage and appropriately respond to the many "Why" questions posed by young children, and model for them the search for new information from many sources. We, too, as educators and parents, are innately creative. We, too, need space in our lives to create, to be curious, to invent. When we do this, we are ensuring a bright future for us all.

Dr. Brazee is a retired associate professor of Literacy Education. She taught at the University of Northern Colorado and the University of Maine.



Spotlight CHILD CARE STABILIZATION GRANT

When the COVID-19 pandemic began in March 2020, child care providers stepped up for children and families by opening their doors to provide care for essential workers. They kept New York's youngest residents safe, though it was no easy feat. Maintaining safety became a priority as providers installed plexiglass table dividers to help physically distance children. Providers innovated the way they cared for young children from using hula hoops at circle to teach about social distance. Across the country, child care workers were applauded as essential.

The financial cost associated with remaining open was recognized on a federal level. In August 2021, the Child Care Stabilization Grant went live to provide financial relief to child care providers for unexpected business costs associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, and to help stabilize their operations so they may continue to provide care. The Child Care Stabilization Grant is a historic investment of 1.1 billion dollars to stabilize New York's child care industry.

As of November 2021, over 500 programs in the Capital Region were approved for funding. Over six million dollars of funding had been disbursed to programs. Child Care Finance Support Specialist, Kiersten Kennedy, reports the positive impact the grant has had on providers in the region. "This grant has been 'life changing' for some of our providers who were affected by the pandemic. Some people exhausted their savings or retirement accounts just to keep their business afloat."

Ciny Cayemitte, (pictured above) center-based director at Eco Kids Child Care in Troy, spoke about the impact the pandemic had on her program. She shared, "The pandemic definitely brought our center through trials and tribulations that we would have never expected to experience. We were closed for three months last year (March-June) and many staff members were out of work, and many families with no child care options. However, we still had to maintain the center and all the costs that came with it. Even once we opened back up, many families and staff were hesitant about returning to normal activities due to all of the worry that was



floating around. Many new policies had to be put in place, many changes were made with the dynamic of teacher-parent interaction, and a lot more stress was put on everyone involved in our Eco Kids community. The turnover rate was rising and the uncertainty of security was terrifying! Budgets had to be cut to maintain the livelihood of many. It was definitely a difficult time."

Enter in the stabilization grant. Ms. Cayemitte described the grant as "Godsent" and explained how "the stabilization grant helped us tremendously. Not only did it help with maintaining the center and allowing us to get new toys and new supplies, but it also gave us the ability to increase the rate of pay for our staff! It allowed us to be able to hire more staff so teachers would be able to take a day or two off without stress. It has given us an opportunity to feel secure in our careers."

The grant helped family-based child care programs as well. Jan Rechnitzer owns and operates a child care program in her home in Scotia. Jan recalled the anxiety of being open at the start of the pandemic and described cleaning toys with a toothbrush to ensure she reached every nook and cranny of every toy in order to keep the children safe from the virus. "Back then we didn't know how it spread, we were scrubbing toys and then running them in the dishwasher. What if I miss a spot and someone gets sick? I went into a panic mode and I threw away [the toys we couldn't clean easily.] I can't be comfortable enough knowing I didn't miss a spot." She described how the grant helped her invest in much needed infrastructure changes, including her driveway and sidewalk.

"Where the entrance was, there was an odd step that I was terrified they'd break an ankle on and it was in terrible disarray. It was so unsafe and in the winter with snow there's nowhere to put the snow. I was so worried someone would lose a door or get hit, so the first thing I did with the grant was replace the sidewalk and make it ramped so I no longer have that awkward step. Normally you have a 4ft wide opening...when it was redone in concrete, it was made to a car length so they can pull right up."

Ms. Rechnitzer described the benefit of relief thanks to the stabilization grant. "The grant relieved a lot of pressure." She recalls working for 30 years and only being able to replace one slab of concrete throughout that time. She shared, "I'm a single parent, my kids are almost grown up but it's just been me, so I was never able to do anything major, so this grant...I think I had a panic attack I couldn't believe it was real, that it was for us, that we can better our home for other children to be in our care."

As for center-based programs, the future is looking bright. Ms. Cayemitte welcomed families back into the program to celebrate Halloween this last fall, noting it was "the first time some parents re-entered the program since March 2020." Ms. Cayemitte looks forward to welcoming more families and programming into Eco Kids: A Natural Child Care Center, including a music and movement program.

Although applications for funding have closed as of November 30, 2021, programs are able to use funds through September 2023. Funds will continue to be disbursed to programs that were approved throughout the year. For additional support tracking expenses and understanding what qualifies as an allowable expense, get in touch with Brightside Up's very own Kiersten Kennedy. She can be reached by phone at (518) 426-7181 or by email at kkennedy@brightsideup.org.

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