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IMPACT: Educate, Engage, Empower **- for Equity**

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" Stand aside for a while and leave room for learning, observe carefully what children do, and then, if you have understood well, perhaps teaching will be different from before."

~ **Loris Malaguzzi**
(quoted in Edwards et al., 2012)

Educate

Circle Time: A Typical Scenario







Circle times are a common gathering place for young

Meet the Authors

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Equity Spotlight

children in school. During a circle time students and teachers may read a book, engage in dialogue, or share the daily schedule. Early childhood educators often use circle time as a space to teach social-emotional concepts with one goal being that students develop self-regulation and communication skills necessary for learning in a formal schooling environment. During the first five minutes of a circle time, preschoolers can be expected to sit "crisscross applesauce," stay still, listen, cooperate, follow rules, wait for a turn, and respond to teacher-posed questions. However, when socializing young children to the behavioral expectations of school, educators must keep in mind that school norms around communication, interactions, and behavior work best for white and middle class children (O'Brien, 2000). Young children from non-dominant families and communities may not initially find familiar the expectations and communications patterns of circle time. Preschoolers are often required to perform outside their cultural frame of reference, leading to negative consequences for students and stressful situations for educators. In these cases, preschoolers who engage in behaviors outside dominant norms maybe perceived by educators as disruptive (Ostrosky & Zaghlawan, 2011). In some extreme cases, such scenarios have intensified to the suspension of preschoolers, including a three-year-old (Office of Civil Rights [OCR], 2014).

Examining the Function of Early Learning Opportunities

The earlier scenario illustrates tensions early childhood educators and preschoolers may experience during teacher-led activities. Moreover, with the increasing academic demands of kindergarten stemming from federal education policies, early education professionals are pushed to prioritize academic skills and the behaviors students must have to obtain those skills (Nicolopoulou, 2010; The White House, Office of Press Secretary & U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The purpose of early learning turns from an opportunity to critically engage and foster a child's creativity and curiosity--tenets of Early Childhood Education (ECE) put forth by play-based learning models (Hewett, 2001; Montessori, 2013)--to a focus on preparing a child to function within a standardized K-12 curriculum. As a result, young children are striving to meet expectations set by policymakers that may not be developmentally or culturally appropriate.

From one perspective, ECE should improve the United States' social and economic productivity and global education rankings by equipping students for early success in schools (Committee of Economic Development [CED], 2002; U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2014). Programs like Early Head Start, and all-day kindergarten



Verline Dotson is the Head Start/Early Head Start Director for the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency's Head Start Program. As Head Start Director she annually provides leadership for over 4500 pre-school children in the Greater Cincinnati area by administering, designing, implementing, and evaluating multiple programs affecting children and families. She participated in the fundraising efforts and provided the oversight for two major state-of-the-art Head Start/Early Head Start facilities, and is recognized as a visionary, progressive and a skillful leader.

Ms. Dotson is a former president of the Ohio Head Start Association, Inc. She has worked with the National Head Start Bureau and the Childcare Bureau to address issues that impact low-income children and families in Washington, D.C. She was

strive to provide high quality early learning opportunities for all students (CED, 2002; USDOE, 2014). However, pressures to harness ECE for economic goals and to standardize and audit these programs have led to concerns that experiences in these programs promote inequity and stifle children's creativity. They do so by reducing ECE to preparation to behave within an educational system that is defined by dominant cultural norms and neglects underrepresented racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds. The outcomes of this range from the disproportionate special education eligibility and restrictive placements for students of color as Emotional Disturbed (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2013) in addition to the disproportionate suspension and expulsion of these same students (OCR, 2014), to the creation of what many are calling a school-to-prison pipeline (Behizadeh & Winn, 2011).

These troubling outcomes prompt the question, is the goal of ECE to teach children to navigate schooling or to develop critical ways of engaging in the world through learning? Because of the pressure to measure student success and to prepare students for kindergarten, some early education professionals unknowingly default to schooling--the reproduction of state-led social structures and regulations (Hamilton, 1989)--by cultivating and enforcing culturally laden expectations and standardized communication patterns.

Emancipatory Early Childhood Education and Practices

If the goal of Early Childhood Education is to teach children how to develop critical ways of engaging in world, educators must recognize the individuality and diversity of their students, engage in emancipatory education, and critically examine notions of developmentally appropriate practices. Children enter preschool classrooms with varying abilities, heritages, experiences, and points of development (Buchenauer, Crissman, Halko, & Rafoth, 2004). Each child brings into the classroom not only different understandings of the world, but also different expectations and ways to maneuver in the world. Instead of placing the burden on the child to fit into predetermined set of behavioral and academic expectations (Buchenauer et al., 2004), ECE can facilitate development of critical thinking skills in children and foster curiosity in an environment that supports the diverse needs of the classroom.

In order to support preschoolers' holistic needs, ECE must be emancipatory. Emancipatory education is differentiated from the act of schooling in that schooling focuses on the transmission of concepts, values and skills prized by a dominant community (Brandwein, 1981). It can be argued that acts of schooling maintain society's existing power

instrumental in bringing about policies that allowed blending local dollars with federal dollars to provide full day/ full year quality services. In addition to her national and local commitments to early education, she also engages in advocacy work, including the local movement for adoption in Cincinnati.

In an interview with Mrs. Dotson she displayed enthusiasm and passion for the Cincinnati community and the families she works with. Ms. Dotson believes cultivating the potential of children growing up in poverty-stricken areas is crucial. Referring to the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency, she stated "We go to places where many other organizations do not consider investing in."

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relations and the institutional structures that support those arrangements (Shujaa, 1993). Emancipatory education focuses on the role of students as agents of social change in their environments, and valuing and intentionally using those students' cultural resources (Potts, 2003). Emancipatory education cannot be systematized and calls for an active engagement of teachers and young children working side by side (Galloway, 2012; Hamilton, 1989; O'Brien, 2000). Knowledge is formed by the relationships between the educator, student, and the child's world (Galloway, 2012), and through these relationships, emancipatory education uncovers the hidden curricula of young children from non-dominant families and communities. Emancipation allows educators and students to be co-creators of classroom communication patterns, expectations, behaviors, and curricula. As a result, young children from non-dominant families and communities are able to create spaces within the classroom that do not require them to perform outside their cultural frame of reference. More importantly, young children can co-create spaces that feel safe and welcoming.

Emancipatory education also challenges educators to critically examine typical notions of developmentally appropriate practices (Bredekamp et al., 2009). Developmentally appropriate practices are play-based and must be interactive, hands-on, manipulative, engaging, vibrant, and even messy, and dancing and singing are a must (Bredekamp et al., 2009; Jay, Knaus, & Hesterman, 2014). A one-size-fits-all approach to developmentally appropriate practices is not supported by research on biological and neurological understandings of childhood development (Nicolopoulou, 2010). Therefore, a one-size-fits-all will not work for students, especially students in a racially, ethnically, linguistically, economically, and ability diverse early childhood classroom. Young children are extremely fluid in their development and experience rapid growth followed by inconsistent performance (Buchenauer et al., 2004). Emancipatory ECE takes this fluidity, as well as the variation of families and communities, into account. So rather than set up a classroom on the basis of ECE research informed solely by what is "developmentally appropriate," educators must build a classroom environment that recognizes the diversity of young children's home and community contexts while consulting and examining research on what is considered appropriate for those particular young children at that particular time.

"It Takes A Village To Raise A Child": Recommendations and Implications

To create an emancipatory early childhood classroom that teaches young children how to develop critical ways of engaging in the world, educators must *recognize* and

Upcoming Events

Illinois

January 21-24, 2015
Opening Minds Conference
Chicago, IL

January 28-30, 2015
24th Annual Comprehensive
Literacy and Reading
Recovery Conference
Chicago, IL

Indiana

January 10, 2015
STEM in Early Education
Indianapolis, IN

May 28-30, 2015
International Conference on
Education and Gender
Bloomington, IN

Michigan

January 21-23, 2015
Michigan Collaborative Early
Childhood Education
Conference
Dearborn, MI

Minnesota

January 27, 2015.
Education for Everyone
Minneapolis, MN

January 30-31, 2015
Minnesota Association for the
Education of Young Children
Conference
Saint Paul, MN

engage with each child's family and community. Although its exact origin is debated, the generally credited African Proverb (Ussher, 2010) "it takes a village to raise a child" is a sentiment found in many countries and cultures throughout the world. The proverb instills hope and trust in the community and calls for parents, extended family, and the community to hold equal responsibility of raising a child. When applied to education, the proverb reminds educators that they do not have sole responsibility for young children's academic and social development. Rather, families, spiritual communities, community institutions and community members must join the responsibility of providing young children with the best possible opportunities to grow socially and academically (Payne, 2009).

Engaging with the diverse families and communities in the classroom starts by recognizing each child's "village." Recognizing a student's village requires educators to communicate with families and step into the communities in which children are already learning through observations and interactions with adults and through peer-play with others (Angelillo, Correa-Chavez, Mejia-Arauz, Paradise, & Rogoff, 2003; Bulotsky-Shearer, Fantuzzo, Manz, Mendez, McWayne, & Sekino, 2012; Paradise & Rogoff., 2009). Emancipatory educators recognize that when children come to the classroom, each of those "villages" is represented (Bulotsky-Shearer et al., 2012), and they incorporate practices and artifacts from students' informal learning spaces and empower students to use their experiences in the classroom.

While recognizing the role of informal learning outside of school is crucial, educators must also engage with families and the community to fully embrace the village. This engagement takes the form of tapping into community assets, developing partnerships and including family and community members in decision making. Engaging the community by reaching out to local immigrant and refugee community organizations for curricula and supports for culturally and linguistically diverse students and their families is just one example. To successfully develop partnerships and engage with the community, educators must step outside of the school to seek guidance and support from families and the community.

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Engage

Ohio

January 3-6, 2015.

International Congress for
School Effectiveness and
Improvement
Cincinnati, OH

January 13, 2015

4C for Children Training:
More than Dress Up - All
About Dramatic Play
Cincinnati, OH

Wisconsin

January 21-23, 2015.

Joint State Convention on
Education
Milwaukee, WI

January 26, 2015

Integrating Child Outcomes
Into the IFSP/IEP Process
Turtle Lake, WI.



Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency

COMMEMORATING FIFTY YEARS

Under the leadership of Gwen L. Robinson, the Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency (CAA) is committed to fighting the war on poverty in Cincinnati, particularly through its administration of Head Start, Early Head Start, and Home-Based Head Start programs. The CAA approaches early childhood education from the view that these programs can prepare both parents and children for lifelong learning through prenatal education, health and nutrition education and health care, play-based learning activities, and parental involvement. Regarding parental involvement, the agency believes that "Head Start empowers parents to become leaders and supporters of their children's educational experience," and it provides opportunities for parents to help make decisions about the agency's work and about their children's educations. Furthermore, CAA provides education and support for both mothers and fathers. The Head Start programs are designed as spaces for parents and children to be supported and to learn.

The CAA has forged community partnerships to make resources available for families. These partnerships, such as the partnership with Cincinnati Public Schools, help to form a continuous path from early childhood education to long term social and economic growth for low-income Hamilton County families. It supports families holistically by supporting the well-being of children, but also by providing financial assistance for emergency utility or rent payments, job training and placement for parents, etc. These programs are made possible by the community partnerships maintained by the CAA.

Additionally, the CAA continuously works to develop its own staff so that the agency's work is relevant, impactful, and improves the lives of children and families. Recently the CAA was recognized with a Best Practice award from the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies for the agency's Professional Learning Communities, which are collaborative peer support groups that promote and support staff and educators' professional knowledge, skills, and practices.

The Cincinnati-Hamilton County Community Action Agency

celebrated its 50th anniversary in 2014.

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Empower



Something to Read!

[Building Play-Friendly Communities](#)

[KaBOOM!](#) is a non-profit organization that helps to resist the problem of reduced play in each American generation by promoting balanced play for children, particularly children in low-income communities. The organization develops local communities' capacities to advocate for play and to build play-friendly neighborhoods and cities. [In this 2010 report, KaBOOM! examines twelve cases](#) where communities successfully organized to advocate for play. The report contains recommendations for how other communities can replicate these successes. KaBOOM! also has a [series of videos](#) and [other reports](#) that may be useful or of interest.

Something to Watch!

[The Importance of Play](#)



The [Alliance for Childhood](#) has several [excellent videos](#) explaining the importance of play. Play has important [benefits for children's health](#) and for learning how to navigate the world. [Allowing children to take risks and learn from mistakes](#) is an important part of learning to navigate the world. Additionally, a focus on play has [benefits for families](#).



Something to Use!

[Creative Play and Learning](#)

There are several excellent blogs with activities that combine creative play and learning. [The Imagination Tree](#)

is one example. In her blog, Anna Ranson [argues for the central importance of play](#) and provides detailed directions on playful learning activities. The activities are organized by age (baby, toddler, pre-school, school) and learning discipline (literacy; numeracy; creativity; physical; personal, social, and health education; science). The blog also includes tips on creating a play-friendly space within the home and recommendations for books and toys.

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