

# Enhancing Early Childhood Program Quality

Wisdom From the Field



**AT LEADING FOR CHILDREN**, we know that early childhood educators are always finding new and creative ways to nurture and inspire children — our next generation of critical thinkers and leaders. We introduced the Leading for Children Innovative Ideas Award in 2017 to recognize ideas being implemented in early learning programs across the country. Leading for Children grounds our conversations about quality within a simple framework — the Coherent Path to Quality. Focusing on the Coherent Path encourages a commitment to a shared vision that drives quality and positive outcomes for children. In 2019 the focus of our award program was on the three “lanes” of the Coherent Path:

- Relationships and Interactions
- Emotional and Physical Environment
- Learning Experiences

As you read the ideas included in this resource, we hope that you’ll be inspired to apply or adapt them to your program.



### Congratulations to the Award Winners:

**FIRST PRIZE** was awarded to Valerie Stewart, Principal at the Garfield Public Preschool Annex 3 in Garfield, NJ.

**SECOND PRIZES** were awarded to Sara Podvasnick, Teacher in the Duquesne City School District in Duquesne, Pennsylvania, and Kristin Capezio, Director at the Immigrant Family Services Institute in Roslindale, Massachusetts

### Honorable Mentions Were Awarded to:

- **Karen Aldrich**, Conway Learning Center
- **Dawn Brown**, Christ the King Early Education Center
- **Dory Herman-Sample**, St. Clement Episcopal School
- **Julie Hume**, Kind Hearts Day Care
- **Robin Ranae Lampp**, Community Learning Center
- **Cathy Lancelotta**, Heritage United Methodist Church Preschool
- **Olivia Maldonado**, Immanuel Genius Educational Center
- **Laura Newman**, Quality Care for Children
- **Stephanie Rhodes**, Riverbend Head Start Families and Services

### Special Thanks to Our Judges Who Helped Us with Selection:

- **Kara Ahmed**, Principal, LYFE (Living for the Young Family through Education)
- **Kenecha Brooks-Smith**, Assistant Director for Early Childhood Academy, Mississippi Community College Board
- **Jill Gunderman**, Program Coordinator, Arkansas State University Childhood Services
- **Cindy Stephens**, Co-Chair of Early Childhood Education Department, College of the Canyons

We look forward to hearing from you when we introduce the 2020 campaign. Watch for it on our website [www.leadingforchildren.org](http://www.leadingforchildren.org).

Warm regards,

**JUDY JABLON**

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Judy".

*Executive Director, Leading for Children*

# First Friday — Family Fun Day

*Opening Doors to Families the First Friday of Every Month*



**Garfield Preschool Annex 3** — Garfield, NJ

**Valerie Stewart**, Principal

The staff at Garfield Preschool Annex 3 embrace the knowledge that families are children's first and most influential teachers, and that a positive relationship between home and school is a powerful indicator of student success. According to principal Valerie Stewart, these values inspired staff to create more successful ways to engage families as active partners in their children's learning and development.

They identified that family attendance had been higher at events which highlighted and celebrated their children in classrooms among peers and teachers.

The First Friday program was developed based on this data. A school-wide family engagement program, First Friday invites parents or significant adults to come to school for Family Fun Day, the first Friday of every month, to spend an hour with their child. Families can enjoy their children and learn about growth and development, the curricula, and ways to extend learning experiences at home.

## **The goals include:**

1. Creating a welcoming environment to get to know families and increase their comfort levels.
2. Providing opportunities for families to actively engage in the program.
3. Facilitating families' learning about curricular content areas (literacy and mathematics) and how they can extend their children's learning.
4. Building a sense of community by providing opportunities to meet other families and community stakeholders.

## **Making a Difference**

The First Friday initiative caused family involvement in the program to increase dramatically. Attendance at these events rose from 7% to over 75%. Families noted that they enjoyed meeting each other, built friendships, and made community connections as a result of these events. Also, within the school district, another preschool site began the same initiative and experienced over 70% family participation. Knowing that school connectedness and family engagement are at the forefront of every successful early childhood program, the staff of Garfield Public Preschool Annex 3 are accomplishing their mission!

## **Make it Yours**

Ms. Stewart's advice for replicating a family engagement initiative like First Fridays is to utilize your data to make sure the program fits your

school's needs; survey families to identify the topics they would like to learn about; and involve all stakeholders to ensure buy-in. First Fridays progressed from an idea to reality with the action steps below:

1. A handout about First Fridays and scheduled dates was provided for families early in the school year so they could be aware and plan ahead of time.
2. Families were polled about convenient times for the events; then times were determined.
3. A First Friday planning committee with school community stakeholders was formed, meeting monthly.
4. Special events were held for classrooms related to curriculum content areas.

“Parents love coming to the school, seeing their child thrive in the classroom, and getting time to meet with administrators, social workers and other staff members that they may not get to see every day...All parents want to be in the know, and want what is best for their children. This [First Fridays] provides for a positive home and school connection. It also allows parents to see and make friends with the other parents in their child’s classroom. This helps them become more of a community, and parents have personally told me that they feel that they are part of our family here.”

— **Beatriz Arjona-Mendez**, *Principal, Garfield Preschool Annex*

## Overcoming Obstacles

Obstacles the preschool program had to overcome in making First Fridays a success included:

### 1. Family attendance and sibling child care —

Families had to find child care for siblings in order to be able to attend First Fridays. In response to this challenge, siblings were welcomed to the events.

**2. Purchase of supplies and materials —** The purchase order process did not ensure the timely arrival of materials and supplies for events. In response to this challenge, the Home and School Association ordered materials that were needed more quickly. Subsequently, planning far enough in advance for purchase of needed materials and supplies became routine. ■

## GARFIELD PRESCHOOL ANNEX 3 is on the Coherent Path to Quality

On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is **Relationships and Interactions** among all who support the success of young children. The First Friday initiative, primarily a vehicle for building relationships between the school and families, embodies this element. The Family Fun Day events provide opportunities for relationship-building among families, and between children and adults. School staff have opportunities to model high-quality interactions, extending children’s learning, in order to raise parent awareness about their critical role as their children’s first most important teachers.



## FIRST PRIZE

# Spoken Word Literacy: Story-making and meaning

## *Pre-K Students Develop Lifetime Literacy Skills*



**Immigrant Family Services Institute** — Roslindale, MA

**Kristin Capezio**, Director

Kristin Capezio, director of The Immigrant Family Services Institute, was compelled by the fact that their students' stories are missing from both the canons in this country and the children's books that they are expected to read. Many prekindergarten and kindergarten students served by the Institute have recently arrived in the US from Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Cape Verde. They live in poverty with limited access to early education, texts and children's books, and where English is not spoken at home. Their literacy skills including phonemic and phonetic comprehension are limited when they enter the public school system. What is more, English, reading, writing, and speaking are taught through a Euro-centric lens and series of experiences.

In response to this reality, the Immigrant Family Services Institute designed a project to support student literacy and language development. The project also promotes cultural inclusion of their families who are developing their English language and reading comprehension skills. Knowing that verbal mastery often develops before written mastery or raised reading comprehension, and that immigrant youth are able to contribute their stories to their existing literature if only given an adequate platform, they decided to help children create their own storybooks and digital audio books.

### **Making a Difference**

Upon completion of their digital audiobooks and printed storybooks, students were immediately excited to share their stories. They wanted their stories to be read aloud to them by parents, significant adults, and school staff. Families requested additional copies to be shared with overseas family members. Children experienced raised confidence with speaking, sharing, and other language and literacy skills. These storybooks have the potential to be the start of a library that students and families can continue to create throughout their lifetime.

### **Make it Yours**

The steps to operationalizing this project, which can be replicated, are below.

1. Run a fundraising campaign to cover the cost of software, printing, and publishing.
2. Solicit for volunteers and in-kind donations including iPads, Chromebooks, and laptops.

Reach out to tech companies with philanthropic initiatives for donations of new systems and software.

3. Prepare the computers, download the software, and test functions.
4. Provide training for teaching staff on technology usage and software.
5. Provide student helpers with project orientation and basic technology training.
6. Map out all versions of each child's story and artwork through dictation and paper print - this includes storyline, characters.
7. Draw artwork or search online for images to support their stories.
8. Encourage volunteers to provide editorial notes, and student helpers to write short bios for each of the stories. They might also audio record their "review" of the book to add in the final version parents receive.

9. Scan everything online, creating paper and electronic copies of all, and ensuring that all images are printed in color.
10. Sponsor a capstone event with families to share the work — Invite them to also create or co-create a story with their child as a family keepsake.
11. Allocate time at least a month for the project. Ensure the quality of every story by leaving enough time for review. Offer rewards and incentives for students to maintain motivation.

## Overcoming Obstacles

The institute staff noted some challenges in completion of the project for which they made adjustments:

1. **Technology challenges and financial barriers** — Donated technology had incompatible systems. The program adjusted by limiting system variations and providing up-front training.
2. **Time challenges** — Volunteer support varied from day to day, which challenged the level of quality of the stories. In response, the program committed days in each week to ensure work on the project and adherence to deadlines while upholding quality.

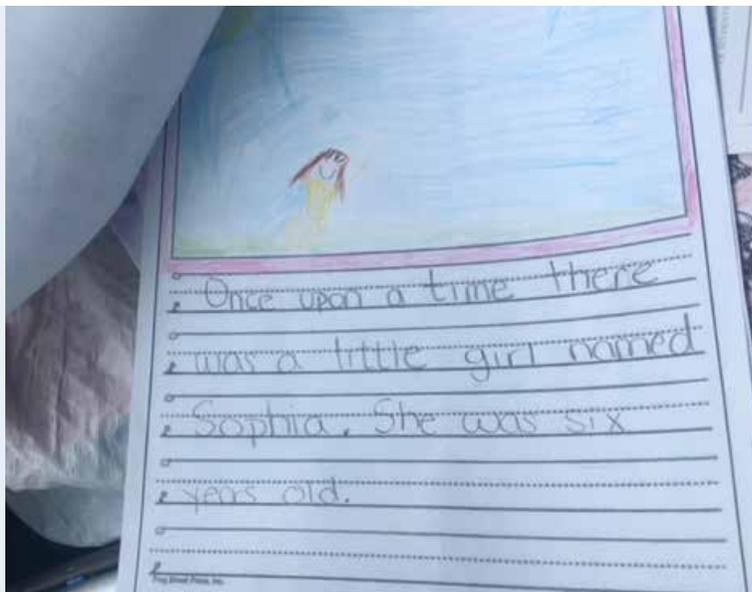
“The storybook and the opportunity to create a digital audio story of one’s life and experiences develops an intrinsic motivation to understand the spoken word as it relates to the printed word...These stories contain parts of the child’s native language which conveys cultural acceptance and a celebration of who each individual is and was prior to their arrival to the United States.”

— **Cyndie Paganos**, *Lead Pre-K Teacher and Coordinator*

3. **Children’s ongoing motivation** — Maintaining children’s interest in their final product (storybooks and audio stories) was challenging due to the overall length of the project. When first products were completed, motivation and pride in their work was restored. Future plans would include providing a few copies in advance and avoiding gaps in the work such as breaks in the calendar. ■

## IMMIGRANT FAMILY SERVICES is on the Coherent Path to Quality:

On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is **Learning Experiences** which foster opportunities for adults and children to develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally. By creating storybooks in their first languages that conveyed individual stories and cultures, children participated in a series of rich learning experiences. These learning experiences had clear purpose and objectives, involved hands-on interaction with materials, social interaction with adults and peers, and opportunities to repeatedly practice language and literacy skills in a meaningful context. The products - storybooks and audio books - were the result of open-ended, yet scaffolded thinking and learning. Students could own their stories, their work, and their learning.



## SECOND PRIZE

# Don't Throw it in the Trash!

*Upcycle to create a masterpiece*



**Duquesne City School District** — Dusquesne, PA

**Sara Podvasnick**, Teacher

For Sara Podvasnick, prekindergarten teacher at Dusquesne Elementary School, making and creating has been important since childhood. She embraces the belief that it allows young children to become innovative and critically thinking adults. She notes that often, children gravitate to play with boxes, wrapping paper and bows as much as the toys they come in. Possibilities are endless, inspiring collaboration with others, imagination, and use of critical thinking skills, to name a few.



Ms. Podvasnick had an idea to bring in some boxes, bottle caps, and straws to see what would happen, and to see if the children would want to play with them. She created a center, called Makerspace, which was the most popular center in the classroom. When she added paint, glue, and other materials for creating to the area, the students were very enthusiastic, and their creations amazed her. Some of the students who were less verbal or talkative got very engaged and motivated about what they were creating. The Makerspace area continues to allow all learners to foster their independence and creativity to make something child-centered that they are proud of!

### Making a Difference

Student engagement in the Makerspace area was strong evidence of its effectiveness. Students did not want to leave the area, and even requested that additional items be added to it. They were excited to work together to create different things using simple everyday items. The staff could ask high level questions to enhance students' critical thinking skills. This idea also encouraged families to recycle materials for their children to make and create at home without cost!

“The space is simple. The concept is simple, but the results are formidable. Children are naturally curious. The space has allowed them to apply that curiosity during play while allowing student choice. They can create and express themselves while collaborating...They are learning to communicate...to work on their verbal skills by explaining what they have created.”

— Deneen Folkmore, *Library Media Specialist*

## Make it Yours

Initially, Ms. Podvasnick was unsure of how to get a Makerspace area started. One day she was inspired by children at play discussing how they might use an old box to pretend it was a tunnel. This sparked her planning and process for setting up the area. Below are the simple steps:

1. Begin by collecting enough materials that one might normally throw away or recycle. Open a small area.
2. Add bins for materials (straws, cardboard pieces, packing materials, egg cartons, etc.).
3. Open the area, first discussing rules with students. Differentiate instruction by asking

questions and scaffolding children's use of language, problem-solving, and other skills and concepts.

## Overcoming Obstacles

Some problem-solving involved in this project included:

1. **Space availability** — To make space for materials involved, thoughtful rotation and storage of some materials that were in the areas was necessary.
2. **Collection of needed materials** — Families and friends were enlisted to save and contribute materials they might normally recycle or throw away. ■



## DUQUESNE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT is on the Coherent Path to Quality

On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is **Learning Experiences** which foster opportunities for adults and children to develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Creating and extending children's learning in a Makerspace area involved the planning of purposeful learning experiences with all of the developmentally appropriate ingredients. Children were able to use language skills to collaborate and communicate in the context of social learning and hands-on activity creating from recyclables. Tying the experiences to literacy through read-aloud and representation from books allowed children to build their literacy skills. Intentional teachers were able to scaffold individual children's learning and participation to maximize independence and success. As children shared ideas, synthesized, and problem-solved together, they were able to see themselves as thinkers and learners.

## HONORABLE MENTIONS

# Learning in the Great Outdoors

## Exploring Curriculum in the Great Outdoors

**Christ the King Early Education Center** — Topeka, KS

**Dawn Brown**, Director

The staff at Christ the King Early Education Center became interested in outdoor (natural) playgrounds, and began taking classes to learn about them. They visited several of these playgrounds to see firsthand how they could use them to extend learning in all areas and enhance play for their students.

Director Dawn Brown and the staff first removed the large plastic structure in the middle of their existing mulched playground. They replaced it with a wood structure which included a slide, rock wall, hammock, swing and web swing. This opened up the area for imagination, learning and interaction. Additional outdoor areas and items now include:

- A sandbox, built by a boy scout for his Eagle project, with seats around the inside,
- A mud kitchen with cooking equipment, utensils, a water source, and dirt for digging, cooking, and experimenting,
- A beach area with sand, a small structure with a roof, beach chairs, and a walkway to the rest of the playground,
- A camping area, with a pretend fireplace to roast marshmallows and have a group meeting,
- A music area on one side of the playground for children to play drums and find different sounds on items hung on a pallet,
- A stage, which has been used for plays, dance parties, hospitals and much more,
- A small city made out of blocks for the children to play in, with building materials, wood, cards, blocks and many other items,
- Two cement tubes — donated by an area concrete company — one covered with artificial grass, and the other painted by the children; they have many uses, including forts, restaurants, hiding places, and a reading area,
- Easels for the children to paint with paint, mud, chalk and other media,
- Plants that vine to allow for shade and color, and
- A robin nests on the playground each year, allowing for the children to watch the eggs hatch.

This new playground allows children to explore freely and bring their imagination and learning from the inside out. All children are learning content and developmental skills, including social and emotional competence, on every part of the playground. Additionally, the contrast between the quiet secluded areas and loud active areas promotes opportunity for emotional balance. For children who benefit from various types of sensory input, the sand, slides, swings, hard and soft items, noisy and quite areas, and other items provide an array of options. ■



**On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is an **Emotional and Physical Environment** that is safe and comfortable for all who support the success of children in your program. The outdoor natural playground at Christ the King Early Education Center has been purposefully and universally designed to support learning and independence for all children. A highly engaging, and safe space, it supports endless possibilities for children and the adults who intentionally support their learning.**

# Books and Cooks: Connecting Literacy and Life Skills

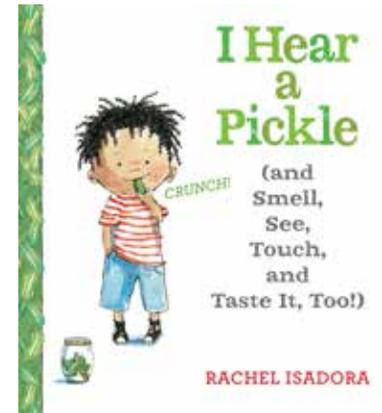
## *Connecting Children's Books with Cooking Experiences Gives Children Life Skills*

Twinkeling Stars Child Care and Preschool — Neenah, WI

**Stephanie Winkel**, Owner and Educator

Stephanie Winkel, Owner and Educator at Twinkeling Stars Child Care and Preschool, was inspired to build intentional cooking into her program as a way to support children's development of daily living skills. This idea was sparked when her son started kindergarten, and she realized that he lacked independence with age-appropriate kitchen skills. She reflected that, as can be the case with many parents and teachers, concerns about mess and consumption had prevented her from allowing children in her program to learn important life skills.

Ms. Winkel began to consider where child-led cooking would fit naturally into the program to extend children's learning, and how to connect it with their interests. Inspired by the book, *If You Give Dog a Donut*, and knowing that her children were avid readers, she created the first Books and Cooks event, extending the book experience by baking homemade donuts with the children. It became immediately apparent that numerous skills were being developed in the context of excitement and rich learning. As the weekly Books and Cooks program evolved, books that connected to food and responded to children's interests were selected. ■



**On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is **Learning Experiences** which foster opportunities for adults and children to develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Books and Cooks provides hands-on interactive experiences targeting a myriad of skills and concepts. Adults can intentionally scaffold the successful learning and participation of all children.**

# Our Yoga Start Makes Us Smart!

*Starting the day with yoga helps kids center, focus, and share*

**St. Clement Episcopal School** — Alexandria, VA

**Dory Herman-Sample**, Director

At St. Clement Episcopal School, as in many early childhood environments, teachers realized that children needed support to regulate their emotions and learn other social and emotional competencies. The presence of attention-seeking and other challenging behaviors caused teachers to be spending a great deal of energy reacting. This prompted Director Dory Herman-Sample to collaborate, problem-solve, and plan with teachers to best meet the social and emotional needs of individuals and the group. Teachers were invested in creating an environment in which children's energy could be spent exploring and creating in a pleasant classroom climate. In their planning process, they identified priority focus areas based on the children's needs in order to achieve their vision. Priorities included a more formalized ritual start to the day, increasing and maintaining children's focus, and opportunities for large muscle activity and leadership and autonomy.

The Yoga Start was designed as an opening routine for each morning, intended to build a sense of community and personal responsibility. Yoga Start is held in a separate room with yoga mats, promoting individual and group engagement. Children have progressed in learning various poses, some of which require them to work in partners and encourage each other. It has become a vital part of the morning classroom routine, which children do not want to miss. Each child can proceed at his/her own pace, and master skills that promote focus, strength, self-regulation, leadership, and creativity! Children's relationships during class time have become based on cooperative play, rather than competition. Overall, the results have been transformative! ■

**On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is Relationships and Interactions. Yoga Start has enhanced relationships and interactions by promoting positive engagement and development of key social-emotional competencies among children and all who support their success.**

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## Taking Intentional Teaching to the Next Level

*Intentional Teaching Makes the Biggest Impact in Child Development*

**Riverbend Head Start Families and Services** — Alton, IL

**Stephanie Rhodes**, Center Operations Supervisor

Intentional teaching is a priority for Stephanie Rhodes at Riverbend Head Start Families and Services. She values an intentionally planned schedule with purposeful routines and learning experiences which support children's learning. She believes that Intentional teaching strategies in the context of established routines help children to effectively engage and participate in learning as part of the classroom community. As Center Operations Supervisor, her vision was for teachers to be clear and prepared about what they were doing as they led children through each day.

After doing research on intentional teaching and its correlation to child outcomes, Ms. Rhodes decided that an Intentional Teaching Systems Plan could provide a frame for teachers and all adults in the classroom to have clarity about their roles — the why, what, and how behind each part of the classroom day. She knew that first it was important to raise teachers' awareness about the idea, articulate the why behind it, collaborate with them to gain their input and buy-in. To ensure teacher ownership, developing the plan together was key. The resulting Intentional Teaching Systems Plan, posted in a visible place in classrooms, addresses room arrangement, transitions, use of visual supports, teaching strategies, and hands-on child participation during routines. Each person, including children and parents, has a role which is described in terms of what they will do when, and where they will be positioned. One outcome has been that as children have had input into the classroom, they have gained empowerment and ownership as learners. ■

**On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is **Learning Experiences** that foster opportunities for adults and children to develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally. The Intentional Teaching Systems Plan is a frame for ensuring that learning experiences are purposeful, interactive, and clear, supporting children's learning of targeted skills and concepts throughout each day.**

## Roll Out and Discover

*The “Roll Out and Discover” project promotes early reading skills*

**Kind Hearts Day Care** — Princeton, MN

**Julie Hume**, Owner

Julie Hume, Family Child Care Provider/Owner at Kind Hearts Day Care, was looking for a more effective whole-group circle time routine, including more efficient access to materials that support group activities. She knew that reducing children's waiting time as materials were being retrieved for whole group activities would promote more meaningful engagement. One day she found a 3-tiered cart on wheels, which she began to use to organize and store needed materials for circle time.



As they began to use the cart on wheels, staff became more intentional about teaching developmental skills, and more engaged in the experiences themselves. Learning topics and activities could be revisited by the children and shared with parents as a way to recap the learning. This incidentally helped to strengthen partnerships with families, and supported further discovery between parent and child. Families have reported noticeable growth in their children in these skills:

- Showing more patience, warmth and sensitivity towards others;
- Following rules;
- Sharing and talking politely to their peers;
- Reciting songs, rhyming words, and making up songs with rhyming words;
- Problem-solving;
- Showing knowledge about books, their emotions, letters, sounds, numbers, and shapes; and
- Showing confidence in what they are learning. ■



**On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is **Learning Experiences** that foster opportunities for adults and children to develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Roll Out and Discover helps teachers to plan and facilitate children's learning with purpose and clarity while keeping their attention. Learning is engaging, interactive, meaningful and relevant.**

## Sensory Solutions

### *Responding to Trauma: Equipping caregivers with knowledge, skills and supportive environments*

**Community Learning Center** — Kalamazoo, MI  
**Robin Ranae Lampp**, Director of Education

Over a two-year period, the Community Learning Center (CLC) realized an increase in children who had experienced trauma and were having challenges with managing their emotions. Their distress was manifested in behavior that was not safe for themselves or others. Robin Ranae Lampp, Director of Education, had a sense of urgency for staff to become trauma-informed educators. She knew that informed staff could form stronger relationships with individual children by creating emotionally and physically safe environments. Her vision was for staff to be empowered with tools necessary to identify triggers and defuse them by responding to children's needs and preventing outbursts.

To begin to actualize her vision, Ms. Lampp consulted with the program early childhood mental health interventionist, other program leaders, and the program director to engage them as partners. Making clear the what, why, and how of developing a trauma-informed staff was the first step for gaining buy-in. Other key

beginning steps were acquiring funding for materials and creating a comforting sensory room for calming down. With students' safety as a priority, this space was designed with soft calming elements and equipment to allow children with charged emotions or who were overstimulated by sensory input to decompress. Finally, educating staff was critical to raising their awareness and collaborating with them to formulate a plan for supporting students. Following the professional development experience, the CLC staff designed and carried out the plan together. The belief that when children experience safety and trust with responsive adults, they develop an openness to learn was realized. ■

**On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is Relationships and Interactions. Trauma-informed staff are now better equipped to respond effectively to children in crisis and help them to learn ways to manage big emotions. Enhanced relationships and interactions among all who support the success of the children has been the result. A second Essential Element on the Coherent Path is an Emotional and Physical Environment that safe and comfortable. The new space conveys a message to children that they can use tools and strategies to help when they feel overwhelmed — and that adult support is available.**

## A Cultural Experience — Learn with Me

### *Impacting the Future Generation through Cultural Experiences*

**Conway Learning Center** — Orlando, FL  
**Karen Aldrich**, Preschool Director

For Karen Aldrich, Preschool Director at Conway Learning Center, an article entitled “Culture Matters — Strategies to Support Young Children’s Social and Cultural Development” (Durden, Escalante, & Blich) ignited a challenge. Realizing that understanding culture has a positive impact on the quality of services that children and families receive, the center staff planned a community outreach event. The staff had a vision of being able to connect with families by recognizing their cultures and conveying interest in them.

A Cultural Experience: Learn with Me is an initiative conveying the message that every family matters and deserves respect. The Conway Learning Center staff have generated meaningful activities for the children, families, and community members. At the community outreach event, promotional materials and a steel drum band comprised of community members were provided. A cultural fair, held at the center, followed the event. Staff performed music and traditional dances from their home countries. Attendees were encouraged to wear traditional dress and bring food, photos, and artwork to share and display from their home countries. Families and staff appreciated the time invested and interest shown in learning about and sharing their cultures. Trust and relationships were built, which fostered an openness to interaction and learning. The Conway Learning Center continues to develop culturally responsive classroom environments, multiple language labeling, and first language experiences for children. ■

**On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is Relationships and Interactions. A Cultural Experience - Learn with Me was a catalyst for enhancing relationships and interactions between the center and the community, and between adults and children. According to a quote from Parenting Hand in Hand, “When all parts of the brain are feeling safe and connected, a child can remember what they learn, develop new skills, and improve their judgement.” This quote summarizes how an openness to learn on the part of all involved was fostered.**

# Director to Director (D2D)

## *Establishing a Network of Support One Workshop at a Time*

**Quality Care for Children — A CCR&R** — Atlanta, GA

**Laura Newman**, Manager and ECE Business Coach for the Provider Resource Hub, a Shared Services Model

Laura Newman, Child Care Resource and Referral Agency Manager and Business Coach, saw a need for child care directors to have a forum for gaining support and resources. Inspired by work she had begun in two previous positions, she developed a unique model called Director to Director, for directors to access resources and collegial support.

Director to Director (D2D), a forum for child care directors which convenes at monthly 2-hour meetings, addresses topics relevant to current issues they face. Topics for the first cohort of participating directors included:

- Addressing Staff Problems to Motivate and Reduce Turnover
- Collaboration Between Staff, Parents and the Community
- Supervising and Developing Staff Competence
- Work-Life Balance
- Self and Staff: Assessing Your Leadership Style
- Questions That Guide Your Work
- Ensuring Emotional Health in Your Early Childhood Program
- Professionalism in the ECE Program: It All Begins with You
- Tools for Evaluation and Review of Your Program

Resources for each topic were also provided at the convenings. Each topic was approved by the state accreditation agency. In addition, a closed Facebook group has been established, and has over 100 active members. Resources, news, reminders, and other posts are shared among this online group. Participants



in this D2D group have expressed appreciation and enthusiasm for all they have gained from it. It has inspired self-reflection and motivation for moving their practices forward. One provider even exclaimed that she would be attending monthly meetings “unless [her] program is in flames.” This successful D2D model was replicated and made accessible to 4 of 5 additional regional CCR&Rs in the state, reaching programs in many counties. ■

**On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is Relationships and Interactions among all who support the success of young children. D2D clearly enhanced relationships and camaraderie among this cohort of directors, inspiring them to own their best practices and encourage and learn from each other.**



## Money Market Play

### *Universal Pre-K Class Holds “Money Market Play” to Enhance Teaching and Learning*

**Immanuel Genius Educational Center** — Bayside, NY  
**Olivia Maldonado**, Educational Director

At Immanuel Genius Educational Center, building strong family engagement and cultivating the home/school connection are valued practices. They believe that when caregivers and families are involved in the learning process, learning experiences become much more meaningful for the children and teaching teams. In addition, the staff seek to provide rich, hands-on learning experiences that are child-centered and promote critical thinking skills. They were inspired to implement Money Market Play as a way to strengthen family partnerships and foster such rich learning experiences for children.

Money Market Play was an event during which children had an opportunity to shop and “buy” items. In the weeks leading up to the event, children learned about money - counting, spending and saving it. They also created and decorated their own wallets and shopping bags, which built anticipation. Families were informed about the event, and were invited to contribute gently used items from home that they were no longer using, such as books, toys and games. Children and families attended the event with play money, chose items to put in their decorated shopping bags, and “bought” them. Teachers at the registers totaled

**On the Coherent Path to Quality, one of the three Essential Elements is Learning Experiences that foster opportunities for adults and children to develop intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Money Market Play embodied this essential element by enhancing relationships and interactions and tapping into trust between the center and families.**

up the cost of each child’s items so children could count their money, pay, and receive a receipt. In this authentic learning experience, children were able to practice math and many other skills in a meaningful context. Following the event, parents sent items to school to add to the dramatic play area, which had been turned into a market, such as empty cereal boxes, snack containers, etc. Families reported that children were showing greater interest in taking visits to the supermarket and other shops. Involving families and articulating the purpose of the Money Market Play event and why it was important for children’s learning was key to its success. ■