

Early Childhood Ally

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5 Things I Am Loving

Conference as a Podcast: Recently I attended a free virtual conference and there was an option for a small fee to have the content/workshops delivered in a podcast format. Most of the sessions were 45 minutes and there were over 30 of them. Brilliant! What an easy way to revisit them, not all crammed into 24 hours.

Summer Goals: The focus for my summer goals was MORE. More time to play, rest, reflect, connect and explore. And for those who have been around awhile I am still working on my goal of feeling confident on my Stand Up Board. What do you want more of this summer?

Teachers As Leaders: During the height of the pandemic I connected on Instagram with Crystal the owner of Teachers As Leaders. We instantly found so many things we had in common. We continued to stay in touch and I cheered her along as she launched her business, Teachers As Leaders. I have committed to being a part time Coach engaging with teachers on their journey. I loved my first session with them on "Summer Resilience".

Celebration: In June my colleague Becky retired after 38 years working at Grand Rapids Community College. We celebrated to highlight a career filled with impact in Grand Rapids and nationally. She is currently on the NAEYC Commision on the Accreditation of Early Childhood Higher Education Programs as a Commissioner. She was the first Chair of the Commision when it started! This picture is from a dinner together celebrating with colleagues that have become lifelong friends

Tea Party: Last weekend I had the pleasure to go to tea with all my sweet ladies. It was an extension of Mother's Day which I personally love. It gave me something to look forward too, supported a small business and we had a chance to connect.



What's Happening on the GRAM

RESILIENCE IN ECE

WHAT DO HEALTHY ENVIRONMENTS LOOK LIKE FOR TEACHERS?

MORE STORIES AND LESS POSTS



Sing, Sing a Song

I believe music is always one of the essentials of a high functioning program. I am especially eager to see it with Infants. Perhaps because I have been fortunate to work with teachers who always have music embedded throughout the day I hadn't considered barriers to why it might not be included. After visiting a few programs and not observing any music opportunities throughout their day I was eager to have a conversation with the caregivers. The rooms did have a radio going on and off throughout the day.

I appreciate their transparency and willingness to let me share some of our conversation. The most important part of the conversation in my opinion was that they never knew that it was an expectation for infants. No one had ever told them that it was important for infants and they had never observed any other infant rooms to know that they could/should do it. In the classrooms I visited they were newer teachers to the profession and were currently enrolled in CDA programs. Their Directors were also fairly new to their role and had not done any formal observation. Their programs had a curriculum for older age groups.

One of the teachers shared that she would be embarrassed to sing in the room unless everyone sang. They also shared that they didn't really know any children's songs. We brainstormed why it would be important. All of the caregivers were able to share that they thought it would be good for language development and calming. For older infants they thought it would be fun to play with some child friendly instruments and sing songs.

We started with a commitment of wanting to include one music experience a day. Singing was the idea that seemed to have the most interest. We explored some possible songs that could be used and that they could remember. We especially talked about how when we hold babies how our talking with them can take on a sing-song nature if we don't know a song. I taught them the trick of using the same tune and just changing the words. I modeled it for them and they seemed relieved that it wasn't hard or as awkward as they imagined. We included it at diaper changing and during transitions. We played lap games like patty cake. I am eager to see how they continue to develop in adding more music to their classrooms/program.

What is a favorite song or music experience you do with young children?

Don't Stop, Never Stop

This is the best time of year to begin planning what your Appreciation and Motivation plan is for your program. Also, remember this time of year is often when year around staff need a boost. I have found that sometimes staff returning from vacation can be hard. Having a few things to help anchor them back is important.

Here are a few ideas of things that can be done during the work day:

- Make a bouquet
- Ice Cream Truck
- Food Truck
- Ice Cream Social
- Salad Bar Day
- World Emoji Day (July 17th)
- Tie Dye
- Walking Challenge
- Corn Hole, Frisbee or any summer game
- CookOut
- Picnic lunch to go
- Yoga
- Make a summer playlist
- Book Exchange
- Sandcastle building
- Community shares a list of favorite things to do, places to eat, etc.
- Make pizzas
- Any kind of quick fun learning experience. Make hot sauce, bbq rub, tea blend, etc.
- Putt putt golf set up
- Painting canvas - there are many tutorials online
- Gardening tips/tricks
- Garden sharing
- Recipes from the garden - make jam, pickles, etc.
- Smoothies
- Mandala and Mindfulness
- Popcorn Bar
- Mocktails

If you aren't in charge of this, ask your Director if you might spearhead something. Start with three times a year. Remember it doesn't need to cost a lot for it to have an impact.



Kickoff To Summer

As a play advocate I continue to work in partnership with our Play and Learn team to engage families in play experiences. In June we hosted a Kick Off to Summer Event for children 0-5 years of age with several activities for families to actively explore.

I share the details to encourage you to think about how you can promote PLAY with families in your program. Don't hesitate to reach out and ask for my assistance on what it could look like. The event was from 5:00-7:30 and included a Taco Dinner. We also had a focused Resource Fair for families from 5:00-6:30. The Resource Fair had 7 local agencies that work directly with families such as YMCA Aquatics, Early On, Healthy Homes, Family Futures, Kent Resource Center, etc.

We had several stations for playing, learning and exploring setup for families to engage in for children 0-5 years of age. We had signage that linked the play with learning goals.

Outdoor Experiences:

- Ice cube exploration - Did I mention it was 90+ degrees?
- Baby doll washing
- Spray bottle exploration plus cellophane for sticking
- Buckets/brushes/water painting
- Sponges with water on cookie sheets
- Baking Soda and vinegar
- Stick Painting
- Water and chalk exploration

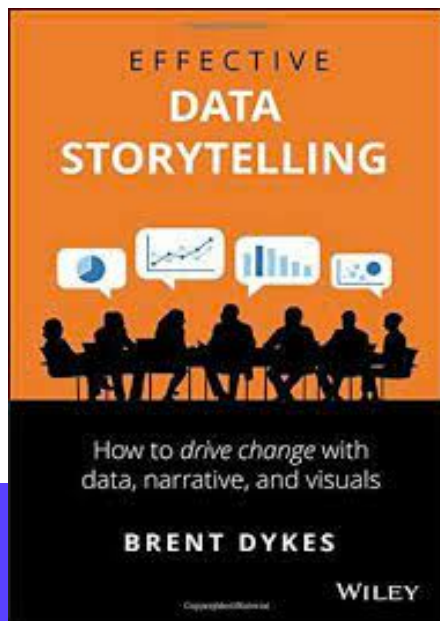
Indoor Experiences:

- Language and Literacy focused activities for all ages such as using environmental print, puppets, books using a picture walk and rhyming experiences.
- Say Yes to Nature station with many pelts and science exploration.
- Fine Motor focused activities with golf tees/marbles, pom poms with tongs/tweezers, beads for stringing,

Take Home:

- Resources on a ring; 20+ ideas to use over summer
- Book from Storytime GR
- Puppet
- Shoe lace/beads
- Nature Journal/pen
- Cookie sheet/sponges or bucket/brush





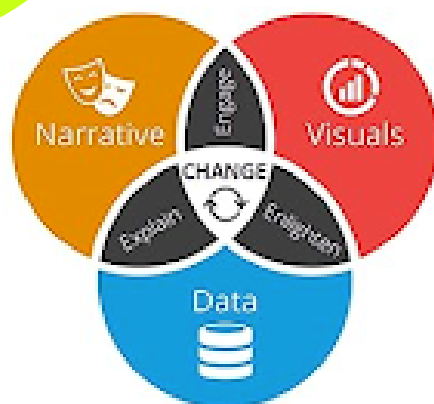
Effective Data Storytelling

I happened upon this book by Brent Dykes and it was more than I hoped for. I have always been a firm believer that the most effective delivery of data includes stories. Over the years I clearly understood that for some funders, administration and stakeholders the statistics of numbers were the foundation.

What I also discovered is that the stories were magic. I found that when I could attach the right story with the data I was able to be successful getting what was needed. This book has some educational examples which is great. The business examples are excellent and do translate to education.

If you work with data and are looking for tangible ideas to enhance traditional data with storytelling I strongly encourage you to dig into this book.

Effective data storytelling can help your insights drive change.



Explain.
Help your audience interpret and understand your insights.



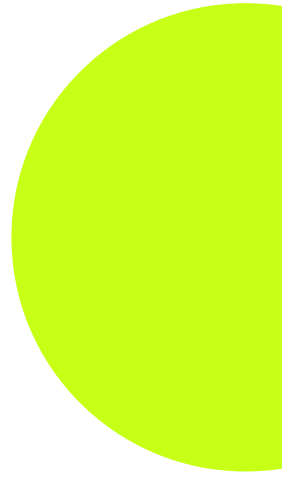
Enlighten.
Use data visualizations to reveal insights hidden in the data.



Engage.
Combine narrative with visuals to connect with your audience.



Applicants



With hiring more competitive than ever I am encouraging you to think about all the details. I believe that hiring the right fit for jobs is critical to the long term health of an organization.

Time is of the essence after someone has applied for a position. Reach out with a phone call ideally and make a connection. Applicants consistently say that they feel more engaged when they hear from the program quickly.

Communication is clear as to what is needed. This includes specifics of the schedule and responsibilities.

Space to meet where you won't be interrupted. Think about how you can sell your program to the applicant. What do you do that is different from other programs? Also, small details matter. Did you offer them water, have a few moments to chat before you started with questions.

Second interview with a working component whenever possible. Having time to see the applicant in the classroom is always a great idea.

What about if it is an internal applicant?

I am going to encourage you to always grow your own. Also, think about asking them questions that get them reflecting on what the next step will look like. We often see only one side to jobs. Some questions I would consider would include: How do you communicate with your co-workers when you don't agree with a decision by a supervisor? What is something you would change/adjust if you were to get this job? How will you feel if you aren't hired for this new role?

Interview Question Ideas

In such a competitive market making sure we have the right questions when we interview is more important than ever. Although we always ask child development focused questions, having other types of questions is critical. I always support working interviews whenever possible. I find the answers help to frame possible professional development and goals I might want to explore with the teacher if they are hired.

Send me any ideas you have and I will add them to the list!

- If you could be one storybook character who would you be? And why?
- Why do you want to leave your current job?
Or - why did you leave your last job?
- If you could buy one skill what would it be?
- What is your communication style?
- How do you build relationships with co-workers?
- What are your workplace non-negotiables?
- What do you value in a workplace?
- What is the last professional development experience you were involved with that you implemented?
- What does diversity, equity, justice and inclusion mean to you?
- What do you know about our organization?
- Tell me about the environment, the materials, the children, the teachers you are working with. And anything else you can think of.
- Describe your ideal teaching situation.
- I've read your resume - tell me who you are aside from teaching.



Welcome to Early Childhood Ally!

Are you new here? We are so glad you have joined us!

A little bit about me, I am the founder of Early Childhood Ally (ECA) and have been in the field for 40 years as a teacher, coach, mentor and director. I started the Early Childhood Ally Instagram page just over two years ago with the support of my family and friends, especially my daughter Jazzy.

My partner Herm and I live primarily in our cottage in the Manistee National Forest after 30 years of living in Midtown Grand Rapids. I have two daughters Britany who works and lives in East Lansing with her partner Nick. Jazzy lives and works in Grand Rapids. I do travel into Grand Rapids often for work and to see my grandchildren Rosalie and Alex with my bonus daughter Ashleigh.

I spent over 20 years at Grand Rapids Community College leading and directing the Early Childhood Learning Laboratory, an accredited, star rated program in the heart of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Over the past year I transitioned to semi-retirement and am loving working as the Lead Coach for our Play and Learn grant. If you are interested in following along with that work you can check it out on Instagram through Play and Learn GRCC. I coach and mentor a handful of Directors which is incredibly rewarding.

As a long time advocate of all issues impacting the field of early childhood I have more time to devote to my passion. If you are interested in specific content don't be shy and reach out and let me know. I am always eager to hear what you all need.