



Inside Gateways Newsletter—Summer 2010

Greetings! Welcome to the summer 2010 edition of *Inside Gateways*, the Gateways to Opportunity quarterly e-newsletter.

Have you ever watched children with their natural inquisitiveness spend a few hours outside? *Everything* is interesting to a young child—watching ants trailing in a long line, looking at clouds that form shapes, picking dandelions to form a lovely, though wilting, bouquet; even blowing dandelion “fluff” in the air is exciting! Children have an innate curiosity, an ability to ask endless questions that helps them to learn and grow. In Lilian Katz’s article “Dispositions as Goals in the Early Years,” she talks about the importance of young children *wanting to know*, their *dispositions to find things out*, and how teachers can positively impact a child’s natural interests.

As teachers and educators, we recognize the importance of wanting *to know*, and we recognize that strengthening a child or youth’s curiosity and desire to accumulate information is a critical ability that teachers can foster. Gaining new knowledge and skill sets and learning and applying new information at every age are key to a successful and rich life. Questioning may begin in early childhood but should last throughout our entire lives. Setting the stage in early childhood by helping children to pursue answers to questions is an integral part of building this important lifelong skill.

In this issue of *Inside Gateways*, Winnie Howell, a family child care provider in southern Illinois, chose early care and education as her second career. In wanting to know and learn more about her new career, Winnie asked questions that led her to the first step to acquisition of new knowledge and skills—obtaining her Level 1 ECE Credential. Achieving the Level 1 ECE Credential helped propel Winnie toward college coursework for an early childhood degree, expanding her knowledge and skill set. Winnie has all the characteristics of a dedicated lifetime learner. Vicky Foster, a teacher in Paris, Illinois, teaches the Level 1 ECE Credential curriculum in her high school family and consumer science class. Introducing the Level 1 ECE into high schools provides an opportunity for students to learn about early childhood, knowledge that may translate into a lifelong career or into applied skills and knowledge within their own families. The Level 1 answers questions that students may not be aware they need answers to!

Demanding to know “why” or “how come” is a fundamental part of childhood. Any practitioner who works with children of all ages will say there are days when they run out of answers long before the kids run out of questions! Asking questions, wanting to learn something new, should be a disposition that we encourage and use throughout our lives. Acquiring new knowledge can lead to a second career pathway, enhance what we already know, or satisfy innate curiosity.

The complexity of today’s world can only be understood by continuing to learn and seek answers each and every day. As teachers, as educators, as parents, and as citizens, we owe it to ourselves as well as the children and families we serve to ask *why*. We need to demonstrate a desire for new knowledge, express our natural curiosity and, yes, be a little “nosey” in our day-to-day experiences. Asking, learning, growing—the hallmarks of a happy childhood—can also lead to a more satisfied adult life. Look around; view the world with a child’s fresh eyes. Ask “why” at every opportunity. You might be surprised at what you learn! Thank you for all that you do to support curiosity and learning for children and families, every day.

Credential Corner

In this issue's Credential Corner, we highlight the **Level 1 ECE Credential**, which provides basic knowledge and skills for those working with or seeking to work with young children.

Winnie Howell is a family child care provider in Makanda in southern Illinois. Winnie received her Level 1 ECE Credential in fall 2009 and shares her experience below.

Winnie Howell



The tremendous support from the CCR&R staff and my PDA motivated me to explore new opportunities. In addition to the Level 1 ECE Credential, I discovered new training opportunities to help me with my child care business, scholarships to pay for classes, and free materials to use in my program. I felt like Alice in Wonderland opening new doors of opportunity.

After working for years as a caregiver for developmentally delayed adults, Winnie sustained a back injury that forced her to make a career change in midlife. Winnie had previously taken early childhood education classes at John A. Logan Community College and had raised her own four children and had enjoyed those experiences. She considered working with young children and contacted the **Child Care Resource and Referral (CCR&R)** in Carterville to explore her options. CCR&R staff told Winnie about the Level 1 ECE Credential classes and helped Winnie get in touch with a **Professional Development Advisor (PDA)** to develop a professional development plan for starting her family child care program.

Winnie signed up for the Level 1 ECE Credential classes at the suggestion of her PDA, but she confessed to some apprehension about doing so. "I had been around children all of my life. I grew up as one of 11 children and raised my own 4 children. I thought I knew all I needed to know about caring for children but discovered I had a lot to learn about child development." Winnie found the hands-on method of instruction in the Level 1 ECE Credential classes and the interactions with the other participants meaningful and engaging. "The instructor opened my mind to the field of child care—where it was going in the future, how to deal with caring for young children in all situations, and how to work with families."

One of the classroom practices that Winnie especially valued was the opening conversations during which participants were encouraged to share current challenges and suggest possible solutions to challenges. "There were 14 participants in our class. Some of us were from family child care settings, some from Head Start, and some worked in small, private child care center programs. Despite our different settings, we learned so much from one another." Another teaching tool used in the Level 1 ECE Credential class that Winnie found effective was role-play. "Our instructor encouraged us to role-play different parents and administrators in our programs so we could better understand their perspectives. Role-playing also helped us become more comfortable communicating with parents and administrators in our programs, particularly about sensitive issues."

Next to the knowledge gained in the Level 1 ECE Credential classes, Winnie said the greatest benefit to the credentialing experience was the boost in her confidence and the faith in her ability to proceed with her own professional development. "The tremendous support from the CCR&R staff and my PDA motivated me to explore new opportunities. In addition to the Level 1 ECE Credential, I discovered new trainings to help me with my child care business, scholarships to pay for classes, and free materials to use in my program. I felt like Alice in Wonderland opening new doors of opportunity."

Since completing the Level 1 ECE Credential, Winnie received her Associate of Arts degree from John A. Logan College and is working on her Early Childhood Development and Family Services degree from Southern Illinois University (SIU). "I never would have imagined that at 48 years of age I would be starting college at SIU and looking forward to it."

Winnie encourages others to **contact their local CCR&R** to find out about professional development opportunities available through Gateways to Opportunity. "Take that first step. Contact your local CCR&R. They will open doors that you didn't even imagine."

Vicky Foster is a Level 1 ECE Credential trainer who is working to incorporate the Level 1 ECE Credential training in high school family and consumer science curricula around Illinois.

Vicky Foster



“Those who want to pursue early care and education after high school get an automatic bump up on the career lattice when they graduate with a Level 1 ECE Credential in hand. The recently approved provision that allows high school graduates to apply for a Gateways Scholarship is an added bonus.”

In spring 2007, Vicky was invited to offer the Level 1 ECE Credential training to the junior and senior high school class at **Charleston High School** in Charleston, Illinois. The Level 1 ECE Credential training was recommended by another **Illinois Trainers Network (ITN)** trainer who had piloted the Level 1 ECE Credential training curriculum the previous year in the high school in **Paris**, Illinois.

As a member of the Illinois Trainers Network, Vicky was familiar with offering the Level 1 training to community-based child care providers but not to groups of high school students. “The Level 1 ECE Credential training is well suited to high school classes. The curriculum is engaging, includes lots of hands-on activities to reinforce skills, and builds in many opportunities for discussion.” Vicky found the Level 1 training flexible enough to adapt to the format of the high school family and consumer science class in Charleston, where the students work in an on-site preschool setting three mornings a week and attend their high school classes two mornings a week. “It was fascinating to me to hear the fresh perspectives high school students brought to the discussions about child behavior and development.” Of the 14 students in her high school class, Vicky said 10 expressed an interest in pursuing early care and education after high school. They were delighted to find out at the end of the school year that high school graduates who intend to go into the field of early care and education can apply for a **Gateways to Opportunity Scholarship** to help pay for their education.

Since its introduction into high school curricula in 2005, the Level 1 ECE Credential training has been offered in 10 high schools around Illinois. Vicky will offer the Level 1 ECE Credential training to other high school teachers in June 2010 and expects the interest to grow as word spreads about the Level 1 ECE Credential training. “This training benefits high school graduates in so many ways. If students wish to pursue a position in the field after high school, they get an automatic bump up on the career lattice. If they aren’t interested in pursuing a position in the field, the skills they develop through the Level 1 ECE curriculum can help them understand children better if they offer evening care for families or decide to become parents later on.”

Lilian Katz: Reflections

Dispositions as Goals in the Early Years



Lilian Katz reflects on how teachers can foster young children’s dispositions to seek knowledge and understanding.

I have noticed over the past several years that when national and state agencies issue performance standards for our children, they invariably state them in terms of what all children “should know and be able to do.” Thus far, I have seen few references to goals concerning children’s dispositions to use that knowledge or to become willing and eager to use their newly acquired abilities. In other words, performance standards do not focus on the importance of young children wanting to know or to strengthening and supporting their *dispositions to find things out* and to *seek understanding*.

If we want our children to grow up to become responsible participants in a democracy, the disposition to seek understanding of the complex issues and decisions for which we all share responsibility should be a major goal of education at every level,

including at the preschool level. I am not implying that we should teach children about how to vote on health care reform! My point here is that the disposition to seek knowledge and understanding is most likely inborn in all of our little ones, though it may be stronger in some than in others. One of our most important tasks as educators is to encourage this “natural nosiness” in all children.

When we watch young children conduct investigations in the course of project work, it becomes very clear that the disposition to seek greater knowledge and deeper understanding of things around them is easily provoked and supported. To nurture that disposition, our curricula and our teaching methods must ensure that young children have frequent opportunities

- to explore their environment,
- to observe objects and events around them and to investigate these things in depth,
- to look for evidence with which to answer their own questions about these phenomena,
- to challenge and to appreciate each other’s questions and explanations of daily events,
- to ask the adults and older children around them to help them deepen their understanding of what they observe and experience,
- and so forth!

These points are among the basic processes involved in the Project Approach. As I have often said, the Project Approach is not the whole curriculum, but it is the part of a curriculum that strengthens young children’s motivation to know about important things in their experience and supports their dispositions to apply their growing knowledge, understandings, and abilities.

Dispositions are not likely to be learned through instruction, but they can be fostered during interactions with people who exhibit them.

As parents and teachers of young children, we can be observable models of curiosity, of striving to unravel a puzzling event, of wondering (for example) why a particular plant in the school garden does not seem to be doing well. A teacher models the disposition to seek understanding when she gathers the young gardeners and says something like, “Remember yesterday we noticed that one of the potato plants didn’t seem to be growing right? Well, I looked it up (or I called the nursery or an expert or a neighbor who is a gardener) to find out what might have happened. The problem is called X, and what we can do is....”

In the normal course of classroom life, many real events and predicaments could lead the teacher to follow up in this way. I recall observing a kindergarten teacher in northern California who greeted a child on her arrival saying, “Hi there! Remember yesterday you asked how many different kinds of bridges there are? I found this book in the library that has pictures of lots of them.” The teacher’s behavior was connected in a genuine way with the child’s curiosity and was easily a model of the disposition to follow up queries.

It could also happen that when children are working on a particular project—investigating something around them in depth, such as the local supermarket—a child might ask the teacher a question that she can be reasonably sure another child in the class might be able to answer. In such a case, the teacher could say in a genuine and serious way, “I think Greg knows more about this than I do. His mom works at the supermarket. Ask him what he thinks might be the answer to your question.” In such situations, the teacher models the disposition to seek help from others who know more about the topic.

Standards focus on what sorts of skills and information children are expected to learn in school. It is up to us—the teachers and parents—to offer children ongoing opportunities to investigate things that are worthy of their attention and to provide them with “working models” of curiosity and willingness to pursue the answers to questions that come up during their investigations. When we do so, we do much to foster in the children the lasting dispositions to seek knowledge and understanding.

Practices, Programs, and Publications

Kathy Sheridan discusses the goals of the revitalized Illinois Association for Early Childhood Teacher Educators (ILAECTE).

Illinois Association for Early Childhood Teacher Educators (ILAECTE)



ILAECTE was revitalized to provide a unified voice for early childhood teacher educators in Illinois.”

In spring 2008, the state chapter of the **National Association of Early Childhood Teacher Educators (NAECTE)** was revitalized. “There had been a period of inactivity after a transition in ILAECTE leadership, and many expressed concern that early childhood teacher educators did not have a unified voice to speak out on state issues in Springfield or a voice to bring to the national organization, NAECTE,” explains Kathy Sheridan, current ILAECTE president.

The goals of ILAECTE are to promote the professional growth of its members, to advocate for improvements in early childhood teacher education in Illinois, to provide a forum for consideration of issues and concerns of interest to early childhood teacher educators, to provide a communication network for early childhood teacher educators, and to facilitate the exchange of information and ideas about research and practice.

ILAECTE holds half-day meetings twice a year, typically once in November and again in April. Currently, meetings are held on the National-Louis University campus in Chicago. ILAECTE membership includes educators from various higher education settings around the state as well as others who provide early childhood teacher education from organizations such as the CCR&Rs and advocacy groups.

Kathy described the process for formulating the ILAECTE meeting agendas. “We ask members what topics are most pressing for them and develop the agenda topics and guest speakers around members’ input.” Recent ILAECTE meetings have addressed National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) accreditation for higher education programs, how to best address ethics in higher education courses, responding to the need for bilingual certified teachers, employment opportunities for our college graduates, school district responses to issues related to kindergarten and PreK readiness and programming changes in Illinois, and appropriate student teaching sites.

The home page of **ILAECTE** includes information for joining the association. Questions can be directed to its president, Kathy Sheridan, at Kathleen.Sheridan@nl.edu.

Training Delivery Strategies and Techniques from the 2010 Summit

On April 30–May 1, 2010, 130 trainers representing the **Illinois Trainers Network (ITN)**, the **Gateways to Opportunity Registry**, and Registry-related training agencies attended the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (INCCRRA) Annual Summit of Trainers in Bloomington, Illinois. The two days included 17 different workshops and two keynote sessions on topics related to training adult learners. We asked participants to share a few of the strategies and techniques they learned at the 2010 Summit. Their ideas appear below. Additional **session resources and handouts** from the 2010 Summit are available on the Registry Web site.

- Use tent cards—large index cards folded in half that participants can write their names on—so that the presenter can address participants by name.
- Remember that humor and laughter are effective techniques to train, motivate, and inspire.
- Employ icebreakers to help engage and warm up workshop participants.
Remember that props, such as icebreaker **Thumballs**, are effective tools to help participants share personal experiences and ideas at the start of a workshop. Beginning a workshop session in this way helps participants make the transition from their day at work or home to the workshop session environment.

- Establish “ground rules” at the start of a workshop. Ground rules vary from presenter to presenter but can include the following: timing of breaks, restroom locations, policies about using cell phones or texting during the workshop, opportunities to ask questions, and requests not to carry on side-bar conversations during the workshop.
- Play soft music as participants enter the room to establish a relaxed environment for the trainer and the participants.
- State the session objectives at the start of the workshop and summarize them at the conclusion of the workshop.
- Plan ahead for any interruptions that could happen during the session such as loud background noises.
- Connect with participants as soon as they walk in the room; remember their names, if possible, and make them feel welcome.
- Post a large sheet of paper on the wall to keep track of questions asked during the workshop so that you remember to address each question before the end of the training event.
- Distribute small props or trinkets as participants enter the workshop to facilitate volunteer participation (e.g., “All those with the blue beads, please come up to the front.”)
- Plan for active participation that incorporates a variety of learning styles. This participation might include moving around the room, regrouping for small group work, participating in discussions or projects—something besides asking participants to be passive note takers.
- Use drawings and other visuals to enhance presentations.
- Be conversational in the way you present material; use PowerPoint slides as an outline only, not as your only talking points.
- Finish your presentation by restating the most important points. After a two-hour training session, you want your audience to remember the last thing you said.
- Consider using Survey Monkey—a free online survey software and questionnaire tool—for conducting workshop evaluations.

New Gateways Resources

The following resource links have been added to the Web site since the last issue of Inside Gateways.

Advocacy Links

[The After-School Corporation \(TASC\)](#)

Career Opportunity & Job Links

[Early Childhood Workforce Hourly Wage Data](#)

[Illinois Salary & Staffing Survey of Licensed Child Care Facilities: FY2009](#)

[Early Childhood and School-Age & Youth Development Initiative National Professional Development Center on Inclusion \(NPDCI\)](#)

Research Centers

[National Institute for Early Education Research \(NIEER\)](#)

[National Professional Development Center on Inclusion \(NPDCI\)](#)

Research Reports

[A Guide to Understanding State Child Care Subsidy Programs through Analysis of Public and Non-Public Use Datasets](#)

[A Window on Early Childhood Administrative Practices](#)

[Building an Early Childhood Professional Development System](#)

Charting Progress for Babies in Child Care: Promote Health and Safety

Do Effects of Early Child Care Extend to Age 15 Years? Results from the NICHD Study of Early Child Care and Youth Development

Engaging Older Youth: Program and City-Level Strategies to Support Sustained Participation in Out-of-School Time

Head Start Administrative Practices, Director Qualifications, and Links to Classroom Quality

Head Start Impact Study Final Report: Executive Summary—January 2010

Improving the Odds for Young Children: Illinois Early Childhood Profile

Infant/Toddler Specialist Network Fact Sheet (2010)

Learning How Much Quality Is Necessary to Get to Good Results for Children

Out-of-School-Time: Leveraging Higher Education for Quality

Promoting Children's School Readiness: Rethinking the Levers for Change

Room to Grow: Tapping the After-School Workforce Potential

The Big Picture: A Planning Guide for Cross-Sector Early Childhood Professional Development Systems

The Case for Home Visiting: Strong Families Start with a Solid Foundation

Training Organizations

National Professional Development Center on Inclusion (NPDCI)



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