Getting Started on Your Constructivist Journey

I’m often asked, “How do I get started on a constructivist journey?” Good question!

First, it is important to examine your own thoughts and feelings about how children learn.

Do you think children are competent and capable of thinking for themselves, or using language to communicate their needs, feelings and thoughts? Can they use their cognitive abilities to problem-solve and think critically? If your answer is yes, start thinking about ways you can make it visible in your classroom community. If you answered no, start reflecting on ways your children have grown from infancy to now. How were they assisted in their development?

My mantra comes from Rheta DeVries. “The first principle of constructivism is to think about what children are thinking and feeling.”(DeVries, Rheta & Zan, Betty) Staying focused on what children are thinking and what they are feeling, naturally guides us to be more authentic in our conversations with them. It is NOT about giving in to their every whim or controlling their every thought, but about examining what they can and cannot do. It is about teachers reflecting on the skills a child currently exhibits. Research indicates getting to know a child through observation and individual conversations helps us be more effective in selecting teaching strategies to support their growth and build their trust. (Hattie p.18) It is about looking at what I can do as the teacher to help them succeed to the next level in their development. I ask myself, “Have I created an environment that is open-ended and offers materials and activities which cover the wide developmental ranges of the children? Have I established an environment that fosters opportunities for open dialogue between children and teachers and children with each other?

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Project Construct Summer Trainings

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Check our website for more trainings this summer
www.projectconstruct.org
Lamie’s Library—Great Books for Young Children

A Seed is Sleepy
By Dianna Hutt and Sylvia Long
ISBN: 978-1-4521-3147-4
Love this book! The vocabulary paints rich pictures and exposes children to a multitude of vocabulary words that naturally lends itself to opportunities for conversations about the natural world. The book is beautifully illustrated with realistic water-colored representations. Great addition to the Science area and your library.

Egg
By Kevin Henkes
Love repetition? You’ll enjoy this book. Especially when helping children understand what it is to “wait”! Waiting, waiting, waiting, waiting… with a great surprise ending. Lots of directions you could go in with this book. What kinds of creatures come from eggs? Understanding differences, learning patience, and what it means to be a family.

7 Ate 9
By Tara Lazar and Ross MacDonald
ISBN: 978-148471779-0
Love a good mystery? Put your little Private I’s on the case. Opportunities for critical thinking and problem solving galore! Development of numerical thinking and letter recognition skills are only aside in this humorous tale of trickery.

Say Zoop!
By Henve’ Tullet
ISBN: 978-1-4521-6473-1
Lots of opportunities for interactive fun using spatial relationships and action words. This book lends itself to reading some or all of the book depending on the attention span of your participants. Offers tons of encouragement for staying engaged.

What are we reading now? The Great Disconnect In Early Childhood Education
By Michael Gramling

Quote for today:
When governed continually by the values, beliefs, and ideas of others, the child practices a submission that can lead to mindless conformity in both moral and intellectual spheres. —Jean Piaget

Most children have not grown up in a large group setting and find themselves in unknown territory. They may lack experience using appropriate language and behaviors to get their needs met. They may also have difficulty understanding the perspective of others different from their own. The skills they have developed at home may or may not be working for them in the classroom. Reflecting on the skills the child brings to the table will help determine which strategies will work best. Remember we are all unique! Helping children become successful members of a learning community takes work and patience. Modeling strategies and language to help them learn about each other, resolve conflicts, self-regulate and communicate their needs and wonderings is a full-time job in the beginning. Establishing routines, teaching a variety of conflict resolution strategies, posting a consistent schedule and providing consistent and engaged responses from you as the teacher will help children develop a sense of belonging and community. (DeVries, Rheta & Zan, Betty). The time it initially takes to build a strong learning community will be well worth it as the year progresses.


Bibliography