

EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHING: Easing Stress, Increasing Engagement
Your guide to professional, personal, classroom, & child management strategies.



MAKING CONNECTIONS:
Professional Journeys That
Will Empower You!

Session I

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Carole Whitener
CLASS® Observer & Child Advocate

Like many early childhood educators of my generation, my preparation for working in this field was not a traditional one. I came to early education by way of Romper Room with a music degree and no particular training in children's development beyond some cursory knowledge of a curriculum developed by Hood College and John's Hopkins for the television program. Each day, as a Romper Room teacher, I looked in the magic mirror and asked, "Are all my children having fun at play?" Intuitively, I understood that this was an important question. However, I could not have known that 50 years later – after a lifetime of observing, studying, listening to children, mentors and other early childhood educators, the question of whether children are playing and why play is critical to their lives would still be a hot topic. Advocating for play and shielding children and their teachers from the pressures of inappropriate activities and harmful environments, including testing has, throughout my entire career, been a passion and sometimes, even a subversive activity.

Romper Room came on the air during President Johnson's Great Society - as did Mr. Roger's Neighborhood, Captain Kangaroo and Buffalo Bob. In those days, the talent, as we were called, were as tuned in to the children as the children were to the shows. We believed that we were helping to improve children's lives and were grateful to be involved and making a difference. Head Start arrived and so did the Plowden Report which challenged educators to take a new look at the early child and to apply what was learned from the work of Piaget and other influential researchers in the field. These were exciting times for fledgling teachers! When my stint on Romper Room ended, I entered grad school and began to study child development in earnest. Later, I taught a course in the Dynamics of Play at the university. When my beloved mentor, Dr. Katharine Kersey, involved me in one of her wonderful presentations at my first national conference, the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), I was hooked – caught up in the excitement of a real movement to advance tolerance, developmentally appropriate practices, and children's rights! Access to this dedicated community of early educators and to the work of researchers such as Dr. Alice Honig, David Elkind, and others, turned the key to my continued growth as a professional. I found kindred spirits and inspiration - friends, who have continued to influence my practice and insights throughout my career.

What a diverse and gratifying field this early childhood education is! I began as a music major, mother, teacher in children's television, grew into a real kindergarten teacher, college professor, CLASS trainer and Observer, and child advocate. Each role was informed by my children, students, colleagues and an army of researchers and authors who continue to share their knowledge and insights and to keep alive my passion for exploring the mysteries of human development and the art and science of teaching.



Fahemeh Pirzadeh
Director, Reston Children's Center

I was a teacher in Iran and continued my education in the United States at the Indiana State University. I earned a Master's degree in Education and a second Master's degree in Library Science, due to my love for books! When my son was 6 weeks old I had to enroll him in the university child care. I started volunteering and eventually got a summer job.

When we moved to Virginia, I started to look for a job at libraries but the hours did not match my need of taking care of two young children at that time. I came across an ad posted by Reston Children's Center. I applied, was hired, and I have been here since then - for the past 32 years!

English is my second language so it has been a challenge to overcome this obstacle. My "Aha" moment was that I can make a difference not only in children's lives at a child development center by offering a safe and developmentally appropriate environment but also to make their families feel comfortable leaving their children in our care. Advocacy of ECE teachers and children has kept me in this field. The new research on brain development has made me more involved in the field and I offer my assistance whenever it is needed.



Betsy Carlin
ECE Consultant

In June of 1992 I took a position at St. John's Hospital in Jackson, Wyoming, as the Director of their yet unopened "day care" center, a position for which I was unprepared other than I had taught kindergarten and had been the assistant manager of the Jackson Hole ski area seasonal child care center. I did have a K-8 teaching certificate, a BA in psychology and an enthusiasm for the work. During the next 20 years I developed and managed a highly regarded early childhood center through the school of hard knocks, gut instinct, and a whole lot of professional development. I also had a knack for hiring good people and had high expectations for their performance. My ability to develop strong relationships with each member of the staff created a safe environment where they could learn and grow. I treated everyone as a professional no matter where they were in their educational and professional journey, and in return they aspired to be professionals.