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(Rogers in Stacey, *Emergent Curriculum in Early Childhood Settings: From Theory to Practice*, Redleaf Press 2009, pp. 74-75)

### Permission to Talk

Our vision as a staff is to share our teaching journey both on and off the floor. We exchange stories at staff meetings and planning times but also among the children and families of our community every day. Although we have been valuing one another's unique and insightful contributions in meetings outside the classroom for many years, we noticed that as a team of teachers we weren't availing ourselves of one another's viewpoints and expertise while in the classroom.

We wanted to do something about our tendency to teach alone, to rely solely on our own skills and knowledge. So we agreed to make an intentional effort to talk more while we were working. In some ways, this endeavor was easy: asking a coteacher about his weekend, sharing a story about a play scenario, delighting in a child's clay work over a cup of coffee, or offering to jot down notes for a coteacher who's engaged with a group of children. It also meant taking an interest in each others' passions, encouraging one another to share these parts of our life at school.

For example, through our conversations, Siobhan's interest in theater and dance led her to offer dance classes on Saturday mornings. Although technically this class extends beyond our regular work hours and includes children beyond those enrolled in our program, it contributes to our community on several levels. Parents enjoy coffee and conversation while the children dance. New and enrolling children have a chance to connect with and explore the center, claiming a sense of place for themselves so that when they arrive at our program they already have the feeling of belonging and their transition is eased. The dance class is meaningful for both Siobhan and the children who are realizing and sharing her passion.

Lengthy conversations among coteachers about our shared value of developing the feeling of home at school encouraged another of my coteachers, Jason, to share his love of carpentry by bringing our idea of a kitchen table to life. Teachers wanted a comfortable, familiar place to sit with the community, and Jason built the table along with the children. It's been the center of a beloved place in our school for many years now.

We're learning that choosing to talk while we teach is complex, requiring ongoing practice and thoughtful risk taking. Breaking the habit of doing everything on my own in order to feel like a successful and competent teacher calls for hard personal work. Asking for help when I need it, even though it makes me feel vulnerable, is challenging. So is figuring out how not to talk too much, and knowing when not to add my two cents. I need to be in tune with my coteachers so that we balance well together. It takes ongoing thoughtful practice not to feel confronted or not to confront others with help. Rather, we need to support and be present for one another.

It takes effort to develop our abilities to listen to one another, understanding that each teacher's perspective, even when it conflicts with our own, says something about our shared work among the children. Exercising both our listening and our unique voices ensures that we teach in a connected rather than a disconnected way. Entering into and negotiating partnership during curriculum planning and project work fundamentally changes our individual teaching by including others and being affected by the meaning making that grows from shared experiences. Giving ourselves permission to talk, teacher to teacher, throughout the early childhood program day is an important step in teaching and in learning collaboratively as a staff.

By welcoming dialogue, we choose to exercise our ability to actively listen to one another as well as to strengthen cooperative skills in our daily teaching. Allowing ourselves to talk intentionally generates opportunities to partner with the community, where individual ventures (activities and projects) between a teacher and a group of children often open up to more integrated and resourceful learning experiences for all.

Welcoming teacher talk in the classroom frees each of us from feeling guilty about our human need and desire to connect and converse with one another as adults and as educators. Intently valuing each other's company while working with the children makes our relationship, our connectedness, and our joy and support for each other visible to the children and families and, even more important encourages our playfulness.