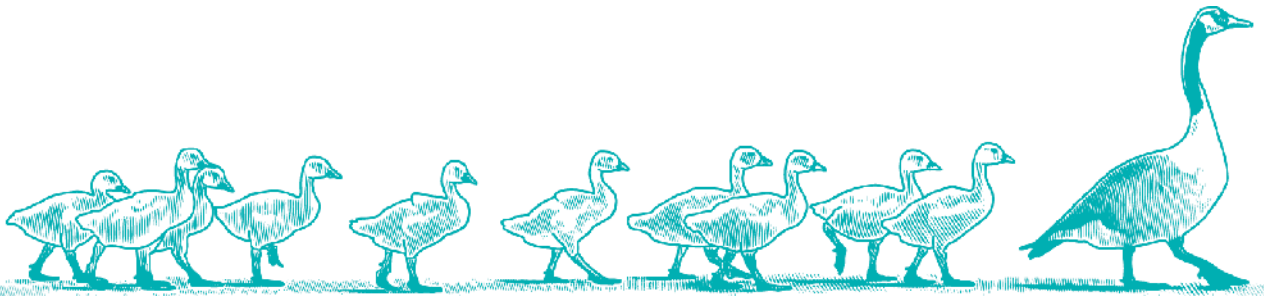


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INTENTIONAL TEACHING in Early Childhood



**Ignite Your Passion for Learning and
Improve Outcomes for Young Children**

**Sandra Heidemann, M.S.
Beth Menninga, M.A.Ed.
Claire Chang, M.A.**

Foreword by Carol Brunson Day

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Praise for
**INTENTIONAL
TEACHING** *in*
Early Childhood

“Offers a valuable guide to new and experienced teachers. As they read and do the exercises, early educators will be able to reflect on their practice, their goals, and their career. This book can be used individually or with a study group of colleagues meeting to share their passion for a profession that is as challenging as it is rewarding. In the end, the children will benefit from their intentional teachers.”

—Angèle Sancho Passe, early childhood education consultant and author of *Evaluating and Supporting Early Childhood Teachers*

“A must read and excellent educator guide about reflection and relationships. *Intentional Teaching in Early Childhood* gives teachers multiple, concrete resources and support for how to reflect on the complexities of a teaching life. As the authors state: “The changes are not just coming at you; they are happening inside you.”

—Tamar Jacobson, Ph.D., author of *Don't Get So Upset! Help Young Children Manage Their Feelings by Understanding Your Own*

“A careful, complete approach to continuous development of teachers, by teachers. The book speaks directly to teachers, helping them develop and articulate goals, worries, questions, and areas of change. While it is supportive of teachers at any level, it also challenges them to continue to explore and respond, to recognize areas of conflict or complacency, and to stay in touch with other opinions. A wonderful tone, full of examples, while at the same time demanding, clear, and based on research and experience!”

—Cindy Ballenger, teacher-researcher and author of *Puzzling Moments*,
Teachable Moments

“Inquiry and reflection are the key to lifelong professional growth as a teacher. They are especially powerful when integrated with organized structures for ongoing dialogue with other adults. This book offers many reasons, stories, and tools to help early childhood educators seeking to promote intentional teaching for themselves and their colleagues.”

—Carolyn Pope Edwards, Cather Professor Emeritus, University of
Nebraska-Lincoln

“This book aims to support teachers in driving their own professional development. Useful concepts include knowing your beliefs and values, understanding stages of teacher development and the change process, integrating new knowledge into practice, and advocating for organizational support. *Intentional Teaching in Early Childhood* is a valuable resource for developing teacher intentionality, professionalism, and leadership.”

—Margie Carter, coauthor of *Training Teachers: A Harvest of Theory and Practice*; *The Visionary Director*; and *Learning Together with Young Children*

INTENTIONAL TEACHINGⁱⁿ Early Childhood

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Dedication

We want to dedicate this book to two groups of people who were instrumental in our success: the trustees of the F. R. Bigelow Foundation, who courageously championed our efforts for our community, and the teachers, coaches, children, and families who participated in our professional development initiatives. The teachers, especially, taught us way more than we were able to share with them. They inspired us, and this book is really the story of their journeys.

Acknowledgments

It is difficult to list everyone who contributed to the two projects we initiated: Words Work! and Numbers Work! First of all, we are grateful for the support of our funders: F. R. Bigelow Foundation, The Saint Paul Foundation, and Mardag Foundation. Their generosity made everything possible. We especially thank Bob Bullard and John Couchman, who were our champions and steadfast supporters. We could not have done it without you.

Our partner programs were willing and ready to engage in the process of learning together about early literacy and math. They helped us problem-solve schedules and logistics and supported their teachers as the teachers attended trainings and analyzed data. Our partner programs include the following Head Start programs: Community Action Partnership of Ramsey and Washington Counties, Heartland Community Action Agency, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, Northwest Community Action, Three Rivers Community Action, West Central Minnesota Communities Action, and Community Action Partnership of Scott, Carver, and Dakota Counties; preK programs at Community of Peace Academy and Independent School District 622; and the following child care programs: Community Child Care Center (Saint Paul) and Wilder Child Development Center.

A big thanks to our evaluation team: Mary Ellen Murphy, Vanessa Stephens of Face Valu Evaluation Consulting and Associates, and Stella Zimmerman from ACET Inc. They guided us as we formed a framework for our theory of change. Debbie Hewitt helped us articulate our model. This model was invaluable as we adapted to different sites and content matter.

We couldn't have done this without the support and encouragement of our editors, Meg Bratsch and Margie Lisovskis at Free Spirit Publishing and Kara Lomen at Redleaf Press. They patiently answered our questions, offered suggestions, and gave welcome feedback. A special thanks to Christine Zuchora-Walske, who carefully went through our manuscript chapter by chapter to ensure we were saying what we wanted to say. Thank you, Free Spirit and Redleaf.

We are grateful to the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC), who exposed us to national experts in the field of early childhood education, and to Gayle Kelly of the Minnesota Head Start Association, who was a great ally as we expanded our model to Greater Minnesota. Dr. Sally Moomaw and her husband, Charlie, provided hours of technical assistance in the thoughtful application of Sally's early math assessment tool. Their charts and graphs helped us share our results with teachers and funders alike.

We thank our spouses and children for supporting, feeding, and encouraging us as we worked. We are sure they sometimes wondered how we were going to get the book done. But we did, thanks to their confidence that we could.

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FOREWORD

by Carol Brunson Day, Ph.D., past president of the NAEYC Board and CEO of Brunson, Phillips & Day Consultants

It is an extraordinarily timely event for a newly published book in 2019 to call itself *Intentional Teaching in Early Childhood: Ignite Your Passion for Learning and Improve Outcomes for Young Children*. As evidenced just last year by the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) newly minted mission statement—which, for the first time since its founding in 1926, identifies advancing the profession as a core component of its work—we are at the dawn of an intentional movement in the field of early education focused on teachers.

Although a timely and exciting topic, the idea of intentionality in teaching is not new. This notion of a teacher being in full awareness of what she or he is doing, and thoughtful and mindful about teaching and learning with children and families, is a well-established ideal for what we want all teachers to be. However, how to achieve this in today's world, where the distractions of changing curriculum models and assessments abound, continues to beg for answers.

Sandra Heidemann, Beth Menninga, and Claire Chang bring their vast firsthand experience working with hundreds of teachers over fourteen years as they explore and analyze intentionality and contribute a unique perspective for today's early education scene. In their own words, they seek to “demystify how to support the full development of teachers.” Sounds simple, yes? But their approach to professional development is deeply analytic and subtly unique. And it arrives at an important moment, one in which there is a seeming explosion of effort to provide early learning initiatives, mainly focused on increased content knowledge and improved interactional teaching strategies with and for children. These authors take a different approach, zeroing in on the teacher's professional

development as a teacher. Though the distinction is subtle, it is clearly a shift away from the *how-tos* and the *to-dos* in the classroom with materials to the *who-am-I*s and *why-am-I*s in the teacher's role with children and others. As you read, you will come to understand and feel the shift.

As we try to learn new things, we often want specifics. But sometimes specifics become recipes that teachers feel compelled to copy or mimic. This volume manages to avoid that formula. That is, while it is full of specifics—stories from teachers and about other teachers, stories about children in classrooms, recommendations about interactions with parents—the specifics are used in ways that open up new possibilities for thinking about *how to think about* who one is as an early childhood education professional. The authors achieve this by always keeping the teacher in the active role of constructing his or her own practice. As they coach their readers through thinking, reflecting, analyzing, and struggling to understand in new ways, they always convey a sense of confidence in teachers' efficacy to achieve the desired result.

This, too, is a remarkable achievement: the way the authors exude such confidence in the power of teachers not only to participate in the transformation of their own practice but also to have an impact on the institutions in which they work. In reading this book, I was convinced that as teachers we can tackle the common and perhaps inevitable roadblocks to change (no money, too busy, too much resistance, don't think we should do that right now) without letting them overwhelm us, turning them instead into "opportunities to become more innovative thinkers and doers." In many ways, the authors place teachers in a position of power over their own professional development. They offer specific tactics, like "Think about ways you can influence those who plan your staff training," and complex strategies, like uncovering the dynamics of one's own professional growth.

Moreover, as a result of their rich professional lives, Sandra Heidemann, Beth Menninga, and Claire Chang are able to share many illustrative stories that bring their points to life. Writing simultaneously *about* teachers and *for* teachers, they have used a captivating style and format that are full of emotion and life.

So what are my favorite parts? Since I have always thought that struggling with contradicting ideas helps people think better, I love the way the

text treats wrestling with dilemmas as rich opportunities to become more conscious of your values and priorities about teaching. Defining a dilemma as arising when you have to choose between two competing or contradictory ideas, the authors encourage working through challenges like feeling stuck as part of the *process* of resolution and as a *means* to it. They encourage us to accept the discomfort that comes from making mistakes and being in disequilibrium—really important for teachers to hear!

As I read, I felt a certain joy and pride as an early childhood education professional in today's world. The way in which the authors write tells so much about who they are as persons. Sensitive. Observant. Creative. Caring and committed enough toward everyone in this world to discuss culture and family engagement in meaningful ways, and to write about disenfranchised communities as models of strength. These are the kind of people we as a profession should want to tell our story. And although I know only one of the authors (Claire Chang) personally, I feel confident saying that all three represent the best that we possess as an early childhood education profession.

These authors have done a splendid and exciting job of identifying how to face the challenges that change presents. As you read their work, you will feel you're being walked through the ideas with your hand held every step of the way by someone who has been on this journey before.

Carol Brunson Day

INTRODUCTION

Your development as a teacher is important not only to you, but also to your students, their families, and your whole community. When you *want* to be the very best teacher you possibly can be, everyone benefits.

Sometimes you might feel lost, marginalized, or forgotten in the midst of quality and accountability trends. Regulations, assessments, student-teacher ratios, and environment do contribute to quality and accountability. But it's the better teachers who create better outcomes. Your ability to reach for your best grows when you're able to define for yourself how you came to teaching, what you learn from teaching, and how you can grow as a teacher while vigilantly keeping children's success as your focus.

This book provides a framework for teacher-directed professional development—regardless of your length of time in the field, your stage of teacher development, or the age of your students. It is a tool not only for you and your fellow teachers, but also for the supervisors, directors, managers, coaches, and principals who guide and inspire your work. You can use this tool to help you take control of your path as a professional committed to facilitating learning for every child.

Why Intentionality?

The word *intentional* means “made, given, or done with full awareness of what one is doing.” We propose that when teachers teach with a full awareness of what they are doing, better learning is the result. Children not only have better academic outcomes, they also have better social and emotional outcomes.

We learned about the power of fostering intentionality in teaching through two distinct projects. The first project focused on how to increase literacy and kindergarten readiness in a Midwestern state among children of color, children whose families had low income, and children whose

home language was not English. In the second project, we worked with children who had these characteristics to achieve early math outcomes needed for success in school and life.

In both cases, we collaborated with preschool programs in our local community, including Head Start, nonprofit preschools, nonprofit child care centers, and preK programs operated by a school district and a charter school. In both projects, children achieved statistically significant growth in reading or math. In some cases, children's gains doubled, tripled, or even quadrupled their initial scores. This occurred despite program variations in curriculum, teacher credentials, student demographics, program structure, and composition of teaching staff. People often ask us about the secret to our success.

This book unveils our secret. We found that when we invest in teachers' intentionality, teachers change. They stand taller, speak more clearly, assert their knowledge and experience, and advocate for their students.

Intentional teachers use resources wisely. They share their perspective and knowledge with others. Often intentional teachers become champions for continuous improvement and advocates for educational equity. As teachers grow more intentional, they shift from asking "Why?" to asking "Why not?" They have the capacity to wrestle questions and debates with a mix of what they've learned from their own

When teachers teach with a full awareness of what they are doing, better learning is the result.

experience and from books, journals, and other publications. Intentional teachers may benefit from guidance and supervision, but they require less monitoring, because they monitor themselves.

Our focus on intentionality emerged as we reviewed the abundance of curricula, classes, books, and environmental props flooding the educational marketplace. It seemed to us sometimes that the ever-increasing number of educational materials aims to take the wisdom of teachers out of the teaching process. One teacher commented that some materials limit the teacher's role to delivering a "boxed" lesson. Another teacher referred to this trend as making teaching "idiot-proof."

We believe that teaching is so much more than that. It is an art and a science. We believe that a great teacher can compensate for limited

materials and curriculum and imperfect environments. Conversely, even the best curriculum, materials, or environment may have only limited success if the teacher's skills and abilities are limited.

This book is informed by the sense that many of the resources aimed at teachers cater to materials and the environment—the tip of the teaching iceberg. The saying *the tip of the iceberg* refers to the obvious aspects of an object or situation, the part we can easily see. The saying implies that there is much more to an iceberg than its tip. What lies beneath the surface is wide, deep, and often undetected.

This book demystifies how to support the full development of teachers. It will help you see and address the whole teaching iceberg. If you are a teacher, the chapters can guide your journey of self-discovery and self-determination. If you are supporting the development of teachers, this book can help you guide teachers toward creating and maintaining time for reflection, coaching, mentoring, and leveraging appropriate resources for the greatest good.



Adapted from Sylvia Guinan, "Why Do Teachers Teach?" August 15, 2013, www.wiziq.com/teachblog/why-do-teachers-teach.

The Importance of Intentional Teaching in Early Childhood

Intentional teaching as a framework for teacher-directed professional development is fairly new to the early childhood field. We acknowledge

4 Intentional Teaching in Early Childhood

that professional development can be challenging for early childhood educators. The field of early childhood education is broad and sometimes undefined, which makes development and implementation of effective professional development seem like an overwhelming task.

In early childhood, educating and caregiving are intertwined. When you toilet train children, you are educating them. When you count up to ten with children, you are caring for them.

Early childhood teachers may enter the field through education or through caring for children in their homes. They work in a wide array of settings: child care centers, family child care homes, workplaces, churches, and schools. In each of these settings, teachers have varying time schedules, work patterns, resources, and leadership structures. Each setting has its own set of requirements, from Head Start performance standards to state licensing standards to teacher certifications and licenses.

A teacher in early childhood may work with infants, toddlers, preschoolers, early elementary students, or all of these. Each age group requires specialized understanding of child development and age-specific instructional strategies.

In the past, early childhood education as a field has often seemed to have an artificial division between care and education. You can hear this in job titles of employees in the field. An early childhood educator could be called a child care worker, a teacher, a caregiver, or a provider. Meanwhile, all early childhood educators in all settings are involved in caring for and educating children. With young children, it is essential that teachers provide a nurturing relationship *and* an intellectually stimulating environment.

Some may believe a teacher's purposeful planning is more associated with children's intellectual development. With this view, some may feel that a discussion of purposeful instruction doesn't belong in early childhood professional development. However, teachers working with the whole child must use intentionality in all the areas of child development in order to be effective teachers. In addition, they do well to remember that in early childhood, educating and caregiving are intertwined. When you toilet train children, you are educating them. When you count up to ten with children, you are caring for them.

Given the diversity of settings, the broad array of job definitions, and the complexity of the job itself, it is imperative to address how early childhood teachers grow and develop in their profession. How do they learn to be more effective in their work with young children? Many current efforts in the field promote new content knowledge and teaching strategies. However, such efforts do not often address the development of each person's professional identity as a teacher. We see this as a missing element in the ongoing professional development experience for early childhood educators.

With evidence supporting the importance of the early years mounting, and with funding and attention increasing, discussion about early childhood professional development can't wait until the field is more standardized, more defined, or less conflicted. Young children need thoughtful, reflective, and purposeful teachers in all settings *now*, not at some indefinite point in the future. We hope this book serves you as an ally in your effort to become more thoughtful in your teaching—whatever your setting and job title may be.

Scope and Organization of This Book

This book is organized as a journey, starting with your first steps as a teacher.

Part 1: Starting the Journey

In Chapter 1 we explore the stages of teacher development, core beliefs on teaching, and how teachers change over time. Chapter 2 discusses intentionality and how it can help you navigate mandates, changes in expectations, and increased accountability.

Part 2: Change Brings Intentionality

Chapter 3 introduces the concept of a growth cycle that includes the following phases: Teachers Learn, Teachers Practice, and Teachers Share and Model. It lays the groundwork for Chapter 4, where we explore the first phase of the growth cycle, Teachers Learn. Chapter 4 also introduces the dimensions of teacher learning. Chapters 5 and 6 outline the next two phases of growth, Teachers Practice and Teachers Share and Model. How you balance observation and feedback with the realm of research, data,