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### Your Partner in Early Childhood Staff Development

## Message from the Director: Equity in Early Childhood

Just as children are shaped by their social experiences, reflective early childhood practitioners are shaped by events and shifts that occur in the context of the broader society.

Over the past year, calls for equity have resonated throughout industries, with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests in particular prompting organizations to evaluate their practices and commitments to equity and fairness.

In April of this year, NAEYC released a [position statement](#) on equity, and the Division for Exceptional Children (DEC) has created an Inclusion, Equity, and Social Justice Committee. These mechanisms help to ensure that the decision-making structure is able to identify, evaluate, and respond equity issues.

These issues are particularly salient to early childhood. For example, children from low-income communities generally have less access to high-quality learning programs, and the early childhood workforce (40% of which is comprised of women of color) continues to earn vastly lower wages than its elementary teaching counterparts despite similar certification requirements in many states.

As early childhood is a field that is particularly sensitive to the injustices of inequity, we encourage that those vested in early childhood consider how they can actively reduce experiences of bias or inequity in their programs or classrooms. As the NAEYC Statement on Equity posits: "Early childhood educators...have a unique opportunity and obligation to advance equity."

Teachers might consider:

- **Ways in which you help your students to feel culturally validated:** *What have you attempted to learn about your students' cultures and backgrounds? How do you celebrate this knowledge in your class?*
- **Vocabulary that you use to identify and address unfairness:** *How do you use instances of bias or unfairness as teachable moments? How do you support perspective taking? Do you*

*model vocabulary such as 'same' 'equal' 'different' and 'fair'?*

- **Books and literature in your classroom:** *Do you frequently read books that feature diverse and non-stereotypical characters, customs, and cultures? Do you positively respond to these features while reading the books?*
- **The unique characteristics of your students, including barriers to participation:** *How might it be harder for some children to get to school every day than others? What obstacles do they or their families face and what services are available to support them?*

We love the children we serve and may assume that we, ourselves, do not contribute to bias or inequities: that we treat children equally and are colorblind in our teaching. However, an equity orientation requires more active approaches to our work.

Equity starts when we evaluate the different burdens or advantages that families or children might have. This evaluation should not proceed from biases or stereotypes (e.g. that a white family is more financially well off than a black one, for instance), but should emerge, instead, from an informed understanding based on direct relationships and communications with families.

Teachers who aspire to promote equity should reflect on identified disadvantages and then develop conscious strategies so that students generally experience **equal outcomes** across gender, culture, race, income, language.



- Maureen Hogan, Ph.D.  
Director, Atlas Training



## Play and Why it Matters

While educators are trained to understand the role of play in child development, it can sometimes be challenging to articulate this to parents who may question play-based learning. We encourage you to highlight the following functions of play in your classroom when parents question you:

- **Art:** Playing with art materials in open-ended ways supports essential fine motor skills, as well as symbolic thinking – the ability to represent objects and ideas in different ways. A child who attempts to draw an animal must reflect on what they know about the animal (colors, patterns, number of legs, etc.) and then depict those elements using their materials. This capacity to represent ideas is what sets the foundation for symbolic writing and mathematic representation.

- **Science:** The scientific method - the process of planning, implementing, observing, and reflecting - is intuitive to the human mind and is supported through play. Children playing with blocks may repeat the same actions countless times, but through repeated experience, they learn to anticipate outcomes and begin to modify their actions to control those outcomes. This process supports the development of logic and reasoning skills.

- **Dramatic Play:** Students in dramatic play use materials to reconstruct their experiences – a process which requires both reflection and creativity. Dramatic play also provides students with opportunities to explore the roles and perspectives of people who are different, as well as to practice social interactions and navigate conflict in a more controlled setting.

*"Diversity is being invited to the party.  
Inclusion is being asked to dance." – Verna Myers*

## Takeaways from the COVID era

2020 has been a year of trial, error, and discovery, with many of our activities over the past year closely linked to the threat of the pandemic.

The early childhood field has been forced to adapt in incredible ways, with many programs having to juggle the challenges of remote learning, classroom occupancy, revised schedules and drop off-procedures, and updated health/safety procedures all at once.

In spite of the challenges that the field has experienced, the experiments have enabled some programs to improve in many regards. In this section, we would like to point to some common program changes that may be worthwhile to implement in the post-COVID world.

- **Enhanced health screening procedures:** While all licensed programs have had basic health and screening systems in place, it is fair to suggest that these policies may have been loosely implemented in some environments. With the advent of COVID, programs by and large have developed robust screening systems that prevent the introduction of infectious conditions to the program. Processes like contactless temperature checks, contact tracing documentation, and restricted access to certain environments will undoubtedly prevent the spread of COVID and future diseases, if they remain implemented.
- **Elimination or minimization of class merges.** While the practice of redistributing children based on numbers at the beginning and end of the day is well-established, particularly in private child care settings, it is hardly an

advantageous arrangement for children for reasons that have nothing to do with COVID. These class shifts are often stressful and can disrupt learning as children must set aside their play to enter a new environment with less familiar caregivers and peers. With COVID, programs have greatly limited the extent to which class's merge, which is another positive system change, though it may be difficult to maintain as enrollment and capacities increase.

- **Streamlining more effective communications with families:** During COVID, programs needed to keep parents abreast of changes to hours, policies, procedures, and technology. Improved communication channels will enable programs to better communicate with parents in the long run, though programs should also consider their mechanisms for supporting two-way communication.
- **Lower class sizes:** While this is likely to be only a temporary measure in many places, states with higher teacher-child ratios may consider revising statutes concerning ratio requirements for infant, toddler, and preschool settings.

## Spotlight on Jean Piaget

During your training to become an early childhood teacher, you likely learned about the major theorists who set the philosophical foundations that practitioners apply to their work today. As it can be easy to forget their contributions, we are shining a spotlight this month on one of the earliest developmental theorists: Jean Piaget.

Piaget's Cognitive Theory: Piaget was one of the first researchers to study how thinking processes changed as children developed. Through his studies, he came to classify the stages of cognitive development into sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages:

- **Sensorimotor (0-2 years):** Children explore the world through movement and their senses. Children develop a sense of object permanence and begin to understand that they are different and distinct from others in their environment. Through their interactions with the environment, children understand that they can change their environment.
- **Pre-Operational (2-7 years):** Children begin to understand that objects can be represented through pictures and symbols. Children remain egotistical and may not be able to see things from other peoples' perspectives.
- **Concrete Operational (7-11 years):**

Children begin to develop a sense of logic and reasoning. They develop an understanding of the idea of conservation - that items can be redistributed and retain their total value.

- **Formal Operational (12+):** Children at this stage are able to think both abstractly and logically.

In addition to his cognitive theory, Piaget described processes through which he believed children were able to develop.

- **Schema:** The way that children organize information and experiences. Schema reflect relationships between units of knowledge
- **Assimilation:** Piaget posited that children interpreted experiences by connecting them with their existing experiences/schema.
- **Accommodation:** Piaget also suggested that children would adjust their schema to reflect new experiences that countered or were separate from previous understandings.

Do you agree with Piaget's theories? If so, how do these stages impact your work with children? What additional cognitive features do you think characterize each of his developmental stages?

## Are you ready to begin your CDA journey?

Atlas Training specializes in teacher training.

During our 9-month 100% online CDA training program, students learn content connected to each of the CDA Functional Areas and practice their skills with field assignments. Unlike the click-and-complete trainings of familiar training providers, the Atlas Model is focused on application so that students can know, understand, and apply content areas to their work with children. At the completion of this program, all students will be eligible to take the CDA test.

Begin your journey with us today by visiting [www.atlastrainingcenter.com](http://www.atlastrainingcenter.com)



## Resources for COVID-19

Programs throughout the country continue to grapple with new guidelines for in-person operations, as well as for distance learning. To support you to address the educational, safety, and technological barriers you may be experiencing, we have compiled a list of resources. You can access these hyperlinks on the digital newsletter on our website (Atlastrainingcenter.com):

- **CDC Guidance:** In addition to your state's requirements, we encourage all EC staff to become familiar with the CDC's [Guidance for Child Care Programs that Remain Open](#)
- **Internet Programs for Low-Income Families:** This website provides [a list](#) of discounts that are available through various internet providers. In most cases, families must qualify for SNAP to access these rates.
- **Guidelines for Appropriate Technology:** If there was ever a time to read and understand the [Position Statement](#) on interactive media issued by the NAEYC and Fred Rogers Center for Early Learning and Children's Media, it is now! This document provides guidance on making decisions for technology, summarizing both the benefits and challenges it can pose.
- **Examples of Effective Classroom Practices for Technology:** This simple [tip sheet](#) developed by the NAEYC provides summaries of age-appropriate technology uses, breaking them down by age.