

Early Childhood Learning podcast - Episode I: Exploring Early Learning transcript

00:00:06:03 - 00:00:33:17

JUDI ROSSABI

Thank you for tuning in and welcome. This podcast is brought to you by SERVE at UNC Greensboro. We have over three decades of experience providing high quality research, evaluation, and customer support that drives positive educational outcomes for all learners. Permeating everything we do is our commitment to engaging collaboratively with our clients to do high quality, important and useful work.

00:00:33:20 - 00:01:06:01

ROSSABI

I'm Judi Rossabi, a communications specialist for SERVE, and I will be your host today. All podcasts are archived and can be found on SERVE's website at www.serve.org. That's www.s-e-r-v-e.org. I'm here with Carla Garrett, Early Childhood Specialist for the Region 6 Comprehensive Center, which you will hear referred to as RC6 during our podcast.

00:01:06:04 - 00:01:13:21

ROSSABI

Carla, thank you for being here with us. Can you share a little bit about yourself and your background in early learning?

00:01:13:21 - 00:01:29:25

CARLA GARRETT

Hi, Judi. It's an honor to be here with you today. I'm looking forward to the conversation. I'll start out by sharing my why. The children who would benefit the most from high quality early learning experiences are those least likely to get it.

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GARRETT

Young children, particularly those who are overburdened and under-resourced, need to have environments where they are engaged in meaningful learning experiences. Relationships are key to making this happen—relationships with children, with families, with educators, and with the community. My focus on relationships and my passion for appropriate practice contribute to the mission of providing the best possible experiences for young children and their families.

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GARRETT

My work at RC6 allows me to center around my why, and for that I am grateful. What an opportunity! My background includes amazing opportunities over my career, such as my role at the local level as a preschool director, which included a Head Start program, and as a school administrator. I enjoyed the challenge of providing leadership over state and federally funded preschool programs, and serving children in high quality, comprehensive classrooms.

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GARRETT

Prior to joining the SERVE team with RC6, I worked at the state level with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction as the Title I Preschool Consultant, where I was able to support a collaborative effort supporting local coordination of services among early learning partners using ESSA as a lever.

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ROSSABI

Let's move on to something I've heard you talk about—brain research and why it is critical.

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GARRETT

Judi, there's so much we could talk about in terms of brain research. I'm going to highlight a couple of important points from the Center for the Developing Child at Harvard. The Center shares how experiences determine whether a child's brain provides a strong or weak foundation for all future learning. In terms of development, first we hear and see—then language develops, then cognitive abilities. Development peaks around ages two to three but does not really drop off until about age ten. In addition, the brain is able to change and grow and be influenced by experiences. The brains of the children we work with require little effort to grow and change in response to experiences. Okay, the bad news—as we get older, the harder it is to learn new things.

00:03:45:11 - 00:03:56:17

GARRETT

It requires much greater effort. Again, the development of a child's brain provides the foundation for all future learning to prepare children for school and for life.

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ROSSABI

My next question has two parts. What does this mean for early learning educators and what does it look like in the classroom?

00:04:06:24 - 00:04:32:24

GARRETT

Judi, as I mentioned earlier, development generally peaks around ages two to three and remains high until around age ten. This unique developmental window offers educators vital opportunities to ensure the experiences of young children are of high quality. So, first of all, we need to make sure children have equitable access to services. And second, that those services are of high quality.

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GARRETT

As far as the classroom, what this means is the most effective way to support a child's development is through play-based experiences. Years, in fact, decades of research tell us that play is an essential part of children's healthy growth and development. We know that children who have high quality, play-based learning environments excel in all domains of development.

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GARRETT

Play is not just important in preschool classrooms, but in kindergarten through third grade classrooms as well. As Dr. Sharon Ritchie says, what would happen if we actually utilized the research? We have to use what we know about young children to create high quality environments. As far as what it looks like in the classroom, children need opportunities to have access to high quality environments both indoors and outdoors.

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GARRETT

Children should experience positive, nurturing relationships. Remember, relationships are key. We've heard that a few times throughout this podcast. Connections with adults, with peers, with families, forming classroom communities. We should also see opportunities for choice throughout the day. Don't we all like to choose where we sit, for example? Don't we like to sit by our friends? We should see play indoors and outdoors, allowing for active engagement.

00:05:54:04 - 00:06:13:18

GARRETT

We should seek collaboration, opportunities to learn and grow together, as well as active engagement where children can think about their thinking. We should have intentional time for talk, and we should especially notice joy in the classroom and hear lots of laughter, just to name a few.

00:06:13:18 - 00:06:31:16

ROSSABI

Carla, what do administrators need to consider?

GARRETT

Administrators need to consider that equity begins with resources. All children deserve experiences that meet the full range of their developmental needs. Most states and districts don't offer universal preschool.

00:06:31:18 - 00:06:58:10

GARRETT

How do we build relationships with community partners so that we utilize multiple funding sources to work towards the goal of ensuring equitable access to high quality early learning environments? In addition, administrators need an understanding of child development— and that means whole child development and learning, so that they can effectively support teachers and focus on alignment from preschool through the early grades.

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GARRETT

And finally, administrators have to be intentional about prioritizing relationships. I know we've heard about relationships several times during this podcast among students, teachers, staff, and families. This is vital to the development of the full school community, and results in the opportunity for children to experience continuity across the preschool to third grade continuum.

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ROSSABI

Can you tell us a little bit about how the Institute got started?

GARRETT

Absolutely. The Distinguished Leadership Institute is one of my favorite topics. When I began at RC6, leadership provided me with an opportunity to really think about the why around early learning preschool through third grade. We assembled a group of early learning leaders representing preschool through the early grades, who determined a need for a statewide collaborative.

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GARRETT

Hours were spent thinking about early learning and listening to the voices of the practitioners, which resulted in the development of a white paper titled “Children Come First: Ensuring School Policies, Practices, and Strategies Lead to Positive 3rd Grade Outcomes.” The white paper is the foundation for the syllabus for the Preschool–3rd Grade Distinguished Leadership Institute. This Institute is focused on the high leverage problem of improving equitable access to high quality early learning environments.

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GARRETT

Professional development is provided for elementary and early learning leaders, including teachers, as well as mentoring using evidence-based practices. The Institute is a ten month, approximately 100 hours, of blended learning opportunities developed by myself and team members Dr. Sharon Ritchie and Dr. Eva Phillips. Participants receive a Preschool–3rd Grade Distinguished Leadership Institute Certificate upon completion. The Institute is focused on building a community of practitioners to improve experiences for preschool to third grade children, and all those supporting their education and development.

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GARRETT

I'm excited about this continued opportunity to learn and grow together.

00:09:08:12 - 00:09:17:22

ROSSABI

That sounds intriguing. Thank you, Carla, for joining us today. We appreciate your insight and hope our listeners have enjoyed this conversation.

00:09:17:24 - 00:09:47:25

ROSSABI

Next up on our SERVE podcast, we will feature a follow up conversation with Carla and her colleagues, Dr. Sharon Ritchie, and Dr. Eva Phillips. We will hear more about the Preschool–3rd Grade Distinguished Leadership Institute, and we will explore how it came about and how this model of learning supports the work of early learning educators. Stay tuned for more information from all of us at SERVE to all of you. Thank you for spending this time with us.