**"Appreciating the Deep and Simple in Early Childhood Education"**

NAFCC Conference Opening Keynote Session 6/29/18

Speaker: Junlei Li, Co-Director of the Fred Rodgers Center

Notes: by Nancy Wyatt

**The Moments That Matter**

Dr. Li started by showing photos of "The Most Beautiful Day at a Daycare Center." It looks like a beautiful day is all about the architecture but that's not what makes it beautiful to a child. They visited child care sites and looked for the moments that matter, the tiny moments. They observed what "helpers" do. They went to Miss Devore's family child care home in a low income area and saw a child that was new and had only attended for three days. Mrs. Devore had been a provider for 20 years. At naptime, she lovingly read her mail (advertisements, bills, etc.) to the child who was sitting on her lap. Her tone was calming as she let the child open the mail and she rocked the child. The child started falling asleep and then, the provider put the child down on a bed and patted her back. We could see that this was a moment that mattered. At *The Center on the Developing Child* at Harvard, they have done research on resilience. The single most common finding was that children do well when they have had at least one stable and committed relationship with a parent, caregiver, or other adult. We could see that Miss Devore was going to offer that kind of relationship for this child but Miss Devore was only rated at level 1 in the Quality Rating System (QIS). The QIS system had not captured what was deep and simple in Miss Devore's program. How do we advocate for providers like Miss Devore?

**Measurement Tools Are Imperfect**

He showed a slide with charts and binders. The tools measure physical and non-physical resources. The tools have a hard time measuring "resourcefull-ness." Miss Devore lived in an impoverished, high-crime neighborhood and she had used whatever she had (her mail).

There are no absolutes - no golden standards. The measures need to grow. He showed a 1980 cover of an environmental rating scale and compared it to the current, 3rd edition. The 3rd edition had more pictures of human interaction. The tools are imperfect. Staff-child interaction is number 32 in the list of 43 items. What counts cannot always be counted. What can be counted does not always count.

Budhist Story: A young monk was having trouble understanding some written works, so he went to the Zen master and asked for help. The young monk was surprised to learn that the master could not read. The master explained that the truth has nothing to do with words. He pointed at a mountain and said that you must look beyond the finger. QIS binders are like fingers that can point to the moon but you must look beyond the binders to see the moon.

**Relationships Are the Active Ingredients**

They had visited a Chinese village that ran an orphanage like a family child care home. The children were assigned to farmers who became their foster parents. Children had been abandoned first because of gender and now they were being abandoned because of disabilities. He showed a scene where a caregiver was playing a tissue game with three children. The children were different ages and abilities. One severely impaired child sat in her lap as the other two children and caregiver said "choo" and the tissue floated in the air for a few second. They were having fun, being nurtured and learning about cause and effect. The environment was sparse, but they were doing what matters. At all times of the day they saw this kind of interaction.

The first policy paper from Harvard simply stated that relationships are the "active ingredients" in the environment that influence. It's like toothpaste labeled with active and inactive ingredients. The inactive ingredients only matter if the active ingredients are present. So, when inactive ingredients are with active ingredients, the inactive ingredients can be important. Everything else is secondary! And that is why human relationships cannot be number 32 out of 43 items. Fred Rodgers: "It is through relationships that we grow best and learn best."

Let's not shortchange the complexity of relationships.

Diagram: Adult Child

Activity

Good interactions have these four main elements. These are the most important things:

1. A sense of connection

2. Reciprocity

3. Inclusion (At Chinese village, the 3 kids were at different levels, but all participated.)

4. Opportunity to grow

See simpleinteractions.com

The simple, ordinary, and mundane interactions are the most important "active ingredients."

Deep and simple is far more essential than shallow and complex.

**How do we proclaim the power of family childcare?**

**1. Family child care must be clearly understood.** We must articulate a simple relationship focused on a "theory of change." Their theory asked, "What does a child need to learn and grow?" A child needs to be surrounded by the human interactions to strengthen partnerships between the provider (the teacher) and the family. When the parent and provider like each other there is no expulsion of the child.

To make ECE work, we must strengthen the triangle. We cannot skip the adults in the middle.

**2. We must help the helpers** (advocacy point).

St. Francis of Assisi said that we are laborers if we use our hands, we are craftsmen is we use our hands and heads, and we are artists if we use our hands, head and hearts. Family child care are artists, but we are being paid like laborers. Investment is not just money, it is investing time and more. To help the helpers, we need a community of support. The support should not just be a conferences, it should also be in states, etc. If we fail to offer a community of support, we fail children. The *Center on the Developing Child* looked at Head Start and found that stress leads to too little comprehension. For the staff to function well in their work with children, they must be well compensated. Fred Rodgers said, Think of the children first." This is what family child care does. Think of the helpers next. Yes, invest money, but don't just invest money. Invest in the helpers in all ways.

**3. We must ask the essential question: Does this (practice, program, policy) encourage, enrich and empower human relationships around the child?**

Example - The inclusive childcare reimbursement rates.

Model showing effect of stress:

provider $ family

child

If $ causes stress for the provider and family it interferes. (Providers and families need more money.)

The (practice, program, policy) works for children if and only if it works for the provider and family.

Fred Rodgers: "The greatest thing we can do is be a "helpful appreciator." At the core of everyone is something wonderful. We can advocate for a system that is a helpful appreciator.

They investigated family child care in impoverished neighborhoods to learn from the family child care.

In ending: Showed a clip from the Harvard research in an impoverished neighborhood as we heard Mr. Rodgers singing "I wish you well."

To see Dr Li's keynote at the Early Learning Summit 2017 (some similarities)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKpt6Wf\_rOA