



SALSA NEWS

Supporting the Advancement of Learning Stories in America

2nd Annual National Learning Stories Conference Update

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Due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is with sincere regret that we must cancel the 2nd National Learning Stories Conference that was scheduled to occur in Ann Arbor, Michigan on May 30, 2020. The SALSA Board of Directors would like to thank Julia Koumbassa and her team at the North Campus Children’s Center at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, for all of their planning efforts for the conference and for offering to host the 2022 national conference.

Meanwhile, we are working on planning a virtual conference that will take place on Saturday October 3, 2020. Please watch for more information to come.

Strengthening Relationships in Challenging Times

by Richard Gonzales

The recent changes in our society due to the restrictions and safety measures enacted in response to COVID-19 present many challenges to all of us in navigating our lives. As an infant teacher and caregiver (or Educarer, as I prefer to say), it drastically affects the ways in which we teach, but it also helps us remember what the foundation is of what we do: relationships. Relationships are the center point in our work, they are what allow us to teach and serve as a partner in a young child’s development. Relationships are just as important now as they were before this pandemic, if not more so.

In response to the pandemic, the center I work for had to close. My colleagues and I have been working remotely since the closure, catching up on paperwork and focusing on teacher development. We have not forgotten our children, and family outreach has continued to be an important part of our daily duties. As teachers of young children, we realize that remote teaching is not going to be the same as it would be in the K-12 world; it is instead going to continue focusing on relationships with children and families, especially with infants and toddlers. We know that they learn holistically through their relationships with caregivers. Our way of remote teaching therefore is focused on preserving the relationships we have built and continuing to build and keep them strong during this temporary closure.

In one of my first messages to families during this closure, I mentioned that learning is all around us, and that it will happen no matter what. After speaking with one family, I realized that this family felt that their child was missing out on so much learning, but really, I feel exactly the opposite! Children are gaining so much in their development of even deeper relationships with their families. The family in question even mentioned how much closer they feel their two young sons have become. I have heard children are helping out with dinner, they are taking more time to focus on building self-help skills, and they are spending more time observing and viewing the natural world from the safety of their homes. This is ideal material for writing Learning Stories for our children. This is a different time, it is unprecedented, so it calls for some unprecedented Learning Stories! After all, learning is going to happen no matter what.

Richard is an Infant & Toddler Teacher with the University of California Santa Barbara Early Childhood Care and Education Services.



Teacher Richard and aspiring gardeners get ready for spring planting in Santa Barbara

Mission

SALSA, Supporting the Advancement of Learning Stories in America, advocates for the Learning Stories approach that enhances intentional teaching, reflective practices, and advances equity and diversity by acknowledging early childhood educators, families, and children as both learners and teachers.

Vision

SALSA represents children’s learning with integrity and respect, recognizing their individual value and competencies. We advance Learning Stories in the United States as an authentic narrative approach to bring joy into teachers’ work of documentation, observation, and assessment.

Board of Directors

Board of Directors- Regan Bynder, Chris Carducci, Isauro M. Escamilla, Jeannette Mulhern, Annette Muse, Lorena Ramos, Lindsey Shafer, Joyce Stone, and Annie White

Teacher Inquiry Groups: A Vehicle for Sharing Your Voice

“The muscles of inquiry focus our attention and mobilize our curiosity and search for meaning; we stretch to find connective tissue between ideas and additional perspectives. We move from reflex to reflection as our first instinct.”

Ann Pelo & Margie Carter, *From Teaching to Thinking: A Pedagogy for Reimagining Our Work*

Teacher inquiry groups support teachers' construction of knowledge with the assistance of peers who help refine and clarify ideas about their learning and teaching experiences in the classroom. Teachers present classroom problems or questions as possibilities for learning and growth. Over time, a problem can lead to new experiences, deeper understanding, and positive changes. Teachers share observations, hypothesize about learning, ponder big questions that underly the seemingly simplistic notes, and stretch themselves to understand not only their teaching but the learning they are witnessing.

This past year a group of nine California educators met virtually once a month to explore their understanding and role as facilitators of Learning Story-focused inquiry groups. The goal was to share practices, discuss dilemmas, determine a framework they could all work from, and grow together. Over the course of the year the group agreed to a shared Inquiry Group structure. This structure supported both this core group in moving their work forward, as well as the individual inquiry groups they were facilitating.

The Inquiry Group discussions focus on actual documents. The conversation is guided by inquiry questions: What was observed? What do the notes, photos, samples of work mean? What questions or curiosities arise when examined? What do they say about the child/ children who are the focus? What understanding is represented? What strategies are they working on? What dispositions are being developed? What are the individual and group reactions? What more do we want to know?

Stay tuned for excerpts from the Inquiry Group meetings designed to highlight practices and reveal new questions for investigation. You can also find more information on our website at <https://salsa-global.org/connect/inquiry-groups/>

SALSA News Briefs

3rd National Learning Stories Conference Set for June 24-26, 2021

Spearheading the movement that empowers learners to confront and challenge the current system of injustice, the 2021 National Learning Stories Conference is a capacity building opportunity to empower and equip adults working with and on behalf of children and families with the tools to transform how we approach our work with young children.

Out of this multi-day intensive hosted by Hilltop Children's Center in Seattle, WA, will emerge a more unified community, grounded in commitment, action, and accountability to build resiliency in our future generations, inspire curiosity and reflection and imbed responsiveness and restorative justice into our practices, programs, and society. With a framework on how responsiveness lives, how it can be used in various contexts, and how it can strengthen documentation, we can then shift the educational paradigm to bring power to the profession and equitably support the next generation of leaders, thinkers, artists, politicians, and social activists through an anti-racist lens.

For more information please go to <https://hilltopcc.com/institute/lsc21/>

SALSA Website Launched!

This website has been developed by the SALSA Board of Directors to provide information on our organization and the history of its development; to provide information on our Board members; to act as a repository for the SALSA newsletter and other resources related to Learning Stories; and to serve as a forum for sharing information on conferences, presentations, Inquiry Groups, and other opportunities to become involved with the practice of Learning Stories. Visit us at <https://salsa-global.org>

Free Webinars with Wendy Lee

Educa, the New Zealand-based company that has developed a Learning Stories app and is also a sponsor for our upcoming conference, is hosting a series of ten free webinars with Wendy Lee. Each in the series highlights part of the latest book by Wendy Lee and Margaret Carr, *Learning Stories in Practice*. To sign up for a future webinar or access a recorded one, go to: <https://www.geteduca.com/webinars/wendy-lee-webinars/>

Want to be more involved with SALSA?

The SALSA Board of Directors is accepting applications to serve either on the Board or on the Advisory Committee. If you are interested, and feel you have a contribution to make to support our Mission and Vision, you may email us at SALSA.USA10@gmail.com or download an application at <https://salsa-global.org/connect/get-involved/>

For More Information...

The Editor would like to thank all of the contributors to this newsletter. If you are interested in receiving more information about SALSA, upcoming events, or any of the items mentioned in this newsletter, please email us: SALSA.USA10@gmail.com