

Values We Share

How do we define our direction and continue to act with integrity on into the future?

These pages address us, the community of people who care for children, childhood, and spaces for children. We are educators, program supervisors, advocates, families, staff, and community members who are endeavoring to build the best growing places we can for young children — here for us and beyond to others. I have yet to meet anyone in early education that does not cradle a commitment to that effort nor recognize people don't do this alone; it takes a cooperative effort to create spaces for young children that are optimized for their full realization as human beings.

The effort to build optimal places for children takes years and even generations to build, all the while the people involved change. The children grow. The families move on. Educators retire. To sustain the long journey of creating a culture that continues the work over the long term we must establish something enduring, which requires creating and maintaining the traditions of being self-reflective and continuously evolving our culture. Things always will be changing.

Nothing is permanent. Evolving cultures, different participants with different heritages will take different paths, but the heart of enduring spaces for children are cherished, constant, fundamental values. Daily confrontations, differences in meaning-making, hindering forces, and unforeseen events can allow a well-intentioned community to fall into tradition rather than continue to repair what breaks with an unshakable resolve. Building and maintaining continually self-improving spaces for children and families will likely falter without clear values, made explicit, and held with solemn persistence.

Here are seven compelling values a community can refer to as they reflect upon the events and decisions continually faced in the effort to evolve spaces for young children that optimize their full realization as human beings.

BELONGING

- *We ensure the perception of being included in diverse and multiple communities.*
- *Children belong at school, in care settings, at home, in the family, and in the community; whatever situation people find themselves in, they belong.*
- *Families belong.*
- *Teachers belong.*
- *The community belongs.*
- *When belonging is a value, anytime we find someone who does not feel included, we fix it.*

WELL-BEING

- *We offer an ethic of care for health, in all dimensions, for children and families.*
- *An ethic of care maintains and repairs our world, so we can live in the best way possible.*
- *We enable groups and individuals to think critically and question our commonplace assumptions, within our relationships with each other.*
- *When well-being is a value, anytime we find something unhealthy, we fix it, even if it is difficult to do.*

RECIPROCITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

- *We are, ourselves, becoming and changing, in a passionate, compassionate, and aesthetic relationship with those whose lives we wish to enhance.*
- *In the exchange with each other, as allies-in-action, we disarm power and privilege.*
- *Reciprocity and mutuality enable us to co-construct what it means to be a human being, living and working with others to create a more ideal society through reflective practice.*
- *We thrive in the beauty of our being together.*
- *When reciprocity of relationships is a value, we stay open to being profoundly changed in every encounter.*

PARTICIPATION

- *We invite the participation of all into creating our possibility and defining our opportunity through our interaction.*
- *We offer spaces (physical and social), languages, time, and organizational systems that are open and somewhat indefinite.*
- *School is a form of community life.*
- *When participation is a value, we make sure every outlier is included and has a voice.*

JOY

- *We are playful — cherishing spontaneity, laughter, wonder, and vibrancy.*
- *When joy is a value, we take care to enter each moment with good humor and loving kindness.*

WHOLENESS

- *We appreciate others, young and old, as whole, competent, capable human beings connected to other children and adults.*
- *Humans are an indefinite, integrated complexity — with bodies, minds, emotions, creativity, history, cultures, and identity.*
- *Children are not bearing needs nor are they immature or incomplete.*
- *Children, parents, and members of the community are competent.*
- *When wholeness is a value, we remain aware of the fundamental goodness of being human.*

TRUST

- *We listen carefully to discover the ways of being of others as we stay truthful ourselves.*
- *What others choose to do is how they are being in this here and now; it says nothing of the future.*
- *We maintain our faith and love, unconditionally.*
- *We listen.*
- *We understand that responsibility emerges through trust.*
- *When trust is a value, we open space for situations to be as they are, seeking honesty while accepting uncertainty.*

GUIDING VALUES

In the midst of confusing daily life with its constant uncertainty, the Values We Share ought to help us in the choices to make, alterations to discover, and benefits everyone can see. Otherwise, a claim of a more esoteric value, absent dimensions of application, can make little difference in people's lives.

A quick search for phrasings of values we may aspire to—such as authenticity, generosity, justice, respect—are difficult to grasp and, therefore, can't serve as guides for daily actions or course corrections. If someone is not authentic or generous, what can be done to fix that inadequacy? These seven Values We Share are actionable. Each points out choices in planning and care along our chosen course.

Guiding values in a democracy.