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What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers

Reflecting on Fred's First NAEYC Keynote



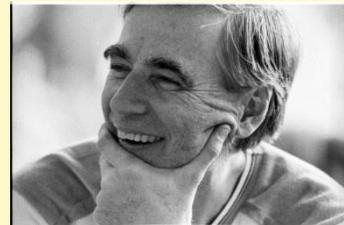
As I'm getting ready to attend the Annual Conference of NAEYC (the National Association for the Education of Young Children), I've been thinking about the first time I was there. It was 1983, and not only was I presenting my first workshop at a national

conference, but I also had the privilege of watching Fred inspire an audience of thousands of early childhood professionals at *his* first NAEYC keynote.

We've often talked about Fred's messages as "timeless." They mean as much today as they did more than thirty years ago. I think you'll see that, too, as you watch this excerpt from his 1983 keynote. Thanks to our friends at NAEYC, we were able to get their permission to share some of it with you in this newsletter.

As you watch and listen, think about what his messages mean to you and what they can mean for your work, whether you work with children or on behalf of children. Reflection is such an important part of learning.

Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"I remember that to be a positive contributor to children's development does not mean to be a perfect person... the children in their own imperfection will keep on loving and trusting us adults who do our best to be supportive in their growing."



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Here are some of Fred's messages from this keynote, along with my reflections:

"I sometimes wonder if what I'm offering that day is as appropriate as it might be." One of the things that made Fred's messages so meaningful is that he was willing to share his own feelings with us, even his doubts. I think he wanted us to know that it's natural to feel that way. Just think about how much happens in your day with the children. Your attention is needed in a hundred places -- sometimes all at once. At the end of the day, it's easy to wonder if you've accomplished anything significant. But I heard another important message in what he said -- there's a positive side of that kind of doubting and wondering -- it keeps you reflecting and striving to do your best the next day.

"But I have to trust the fact that I've worked as well and as honestly as I know how." That's part of what professionalism means - working as well and as honestly as we can. But I think Fred was also helping us keep in mind that some days are better than others-- because we're human...and so are the children, their parents, and the other staff. It takes a lot of courage to be your honest self with others, young and old. But that's what helps to strengthen your relationships.

"And being supportive often means waiting and listening...and more waiting... until you're better able to understand the drama that a certain child is living through at the moment." I think Fred was reminding us that we humans are very complicated, even when we're young. Sometimes it takes a lot of patience and a lot of listening and a lot of hard work to understand what a child may be dealing with. I can't help but think that curiosity is one of your greatest

assets because it helps you keep on searching for "why is that child behaving that way?" All of the things that you do -- as you observe...listen...and work on learning about the inner drama of a child -- all of those things strengthen your relationship with the child and the child's family. And that's what's most supportive of all.

What I've learned over the years is that it's not enough to just listen to a keynote or workshop or webinar or read a newsletter or a blog. It's the reflection afterwards that can help us grow professionally. That's one of the reasons I'm looking forward to once again attending this year's NAEYC Annual Conference. I hear ideas that excite me, and then I think about how I can translate them for my work. When I ask, "What do they mean to me?" they have more of a chance to be meaningful for me.

We all need a boost from professional development, whatever form it's in. And I hope that you, too, have those kinds of opportunities -- and that you can take the time to actively reflect on what they mean to you.

Thank you for being our neighbor,



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P.S. If you'll be at the NAEYC conference, come by my workshop to say hello. It's Friday morning from 8:00 - 9:30 on "From STEM to STEAM: What We Can Learn from Fred Rogers and How We Can Apply His Approach to Our Work with Children."

Contact Us

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