



What We Can Continue to Learn from Fred Rogers



Paper Chains -- Link to Lots of Learning



A while ago, I was observing a group of preschoolers, and I was amazed at how long they stayed at a task. What was so engaging? They were making something rather ordinary and kind of “old-fashioned” -- paper chains.

As they worked on this project, I could see why they were so involved. They wanted to make a chain that would go all the way across the floor. Anything so big has real power to it...and real fascination for young children. There’s even more power to it when you think about how much the children might be learning -- about math, language arts, motor skills, and social-emotional skills.

Fred knew the power of everyday crafts. All through the *Neighborhood* series he

used simple materials like construction paper, scissors and tape to encourage children to create things that were fun and meaningful.

Watch how many skills are involved in this *Neighborhood* episode when Fred worked on a paper chain. When you think about it, it takes fine motor skills, focus and controlled work to cut with scissors, place each strip inside the loop of the previous one, cut tape, and put the tape on just right so it holds. Listen, too, for Fred's suggestion for "differentiating" the activity for children who can't yet cut with scissors.



Here are some other ideas I've learned from teachers who use paper chain projects to link to different kinds of learning:

Patterning

Paper chains can give children a fun way to work with patterns, which is a basic math concept. (Our number system is based on a pattern of 10's.) You can give children the idea of patterning by offering strips of two colors, for example red and blue. Start them with a simple pattern like red, blue, red, blue, etc. It helps to show children three repetitions of a pattern so they can follow it more easily. Then let them continue the pattern. When you feel they're ready, you can encourage more sophisticated patterns (ex., two red, three blue) or have the children make up their own patterns.

Measurement

Measuring is another math concept that naturally comes into play with paper chains. After children add loops, I've often heard them say, "Look how *long* it is now!" or ask, "Is it *taller* than me yet?" And they learn how to hold the chain to measure it. Or they ask, "Can we make it *long* enough to go *across* the *whole* room?" They're getting a very real, hands-on sense of these spatial-relations words that are essential for understanding math.

Language Arts

As you're teaching children the names of the colors, you could select those colors for the paper chains -- and write the name of the color on its strip. Even if children can't read, they sense there's something important in the words we write -- and that's a great motivator for learning to read.

A Spanish teacher used the chains in a similar way. She wrote the Spanish names for the color on each strip. When the children took the chains home, their families were able to reinforce the learning by reading the names of the colors for their children.

Social-emotional Skills

You can sense a feeling of *power* and *pride* when children have made something much longer than themselves. And I've watched children keep working on the chain until it was long enough to reach across the room. They were *focused* and *persistent*. They were learning to *deal with frustration* when they made mistakes in the pattern because the problems could be easily fixed.

You might also see children *sharing* the tape dispenser or *working together cooperatively* by connecting their chains together to make them longer. With all of those social-emotional benefits, you might even see less challenging behaviors when children are working on an activity like this.

I know that teachers are always looking for “special” projects. But it seems that what makes a project “special” doesn’t need new, fancy or expensive materials. In fact, haven’t you found that even the simplest projects are the most engaging? That should be a clue to us that there’s a lot of important learning going on -- on all levels. Engagement, meaningful play, and a rich learning experience -- what a powerful combination!

Thank you for being our neighbor,



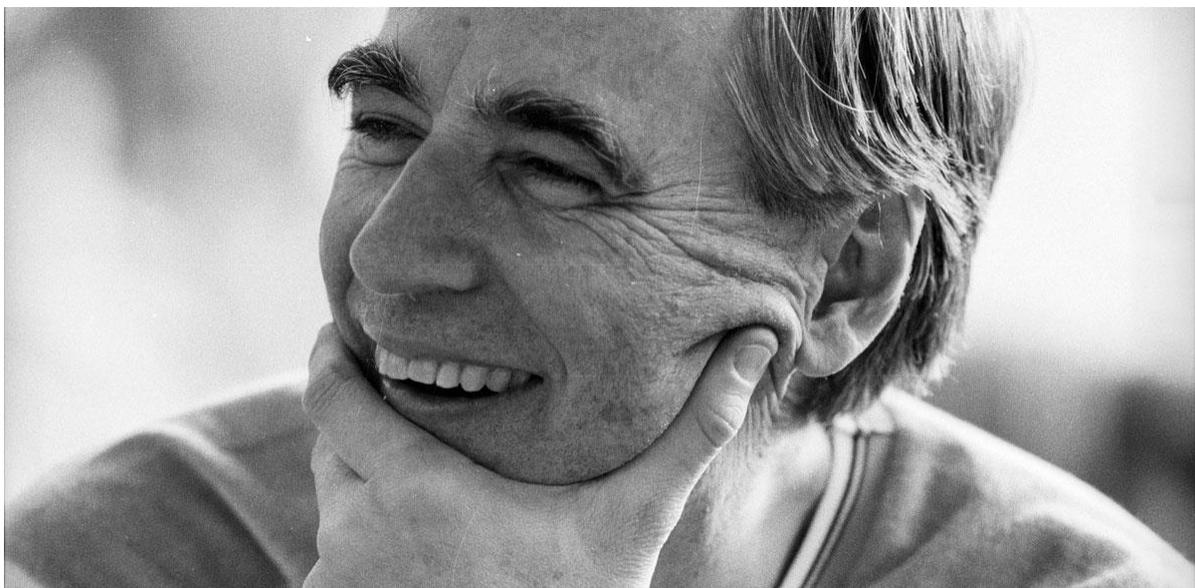
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Timeless Wisdom from Fred Rogers



"While children may look like they're "just playing," they are also working on some of the basic things they'll need in order to be able to read, write, and do math later on."

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