

Educator in the Neighborhood:

Renata Capozzoli, Kindergarten teacher, Pittsburgh Faison K-5

Renata has been teaching for 17 years. She started her career near Boston, MA, before moving to Pittsburgh, PA. She has been both a pre-K teacher and a Kindergarten teacher in Pittsburgh Public Schools. She lives in the Morningside neighborhood of Pittsburgh with her husband, two young children, and her dog, Willie.



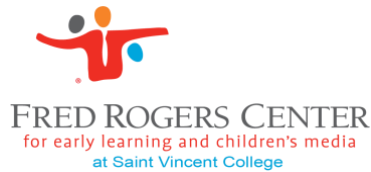
What's your earliest personal memory of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood?

I can't remember any specific episode, but I remember seeing Fred Rogers the way he is in the opening of the show. I remember his voice and knowing who he was. I remember him as this sweet grown-up who was on TV.

What is your favorite episode you've played for students? Why?

Two of the episodes about construction paper ([1652](#) and [1653](#), from the week on Learning). They were the first episodes that sparked the interest of the children to be doing things and asking questions after the episode. The "Picture Picture" video of how construction paper was made...they were interested in how it was sealed in plastic... they kept finding packages in the classroom that were sealed and they were excited; they couldn't believe that we had the same paper as was on the episode. After the episode, I gave them a piece of paper and let them make something. To me it was eye opening because I just gave them one piece of paper. Typically, I'd overthink it and plan for more, and this taught me to slow down and let things happen. One piece of paper to them suddenly has way more meaning now because they have seen how it's made, and are thinking more: What I can turn this paper into?

Do you have a most memorable MRN classroom moment?



Yes, I think it would be the day we followed up an episode on Friends by using popsicle sticks to create something. Two students who were often on the edge of things and didn't typically watch the episodes or participate joined the learning without it being forced; the way that they were able to come in and join the group in their own way to create something that mattered to them. The other children included them without me making that happen. That was really special and made me realize, too, that this was children's time for independent play and creating, and they included each other on their own.

How has MRN impacted your teaching?

In so many ways. Starting with that idea of control and having things set up in a certain way and that's been the whole thing I've had to let go of this year. You always say that you're flexible, but how flexible are you, really? I think that watching the episodes with the children, meeting with the other teachers in this project, and bringing MRN into my own home with my own children, it has all really given me reason to slow down and enjoy the process around learning, to realize that it's so important for everyone to feel good about themselves and have relationships with each other. And how much we grow from being in a safe and happy place, not just from forcing content on students always, but taking time to know their interests and explore things more deeply than I think I've done in the past with kids. Making the time to do all of this is important and necessary. The same way that we make time for the routines during the school day. This really has become a routine that builds community and develops deeper relationships.

Which puppet or person of MRN do you most identify with? Why?

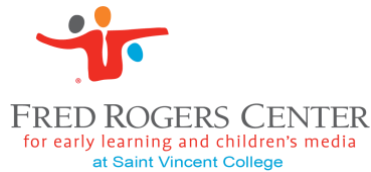
I don't know if she is who I identify the most with, but I would like to be more like Lady Aberlin and just be happy and singing and dancing. Just the joy that comes from her.

Besides Mister Rogers, which puppet or person of MRN do your students talk about the most?

Well recently, it's Mr. McFeely. At first, it was Daniel Tiger because there was so much interest connecting this Daniel Tiger with the Daniel Tiger cartoon. But now they have been talking more about Mr. McFeely and where he's coming from and where he's getting these videos and where he lives and why we never go to his house, only to Mister Roger's house.

What is something you've learned in your readings from the FRC archives?

The idea that this isn't just a project I'm doing at school, but I've gotten so much from reading Fred's writing and thinking about how this applies to my whole life, who I am and how I am as a mother as well as a teacher. And how I view the process of learning and growing and how I want to value all of that in all parts of my life, not just school. The idea of slowing down, noticing and wondering about this. Not just with my kids at school or at home, but also with myself. What I can keep doing to grow and learn in myself, for my own self-worth, trying to do my best in all



situations when it's still really hard. To remember that you're lovable; you need to remember that as a grown-up, too.

What questions/topics do you want to explore more?

In April we wanted to focus on re-making things with common objects, with an emphasis on different kinds of recycled materials. We want to look at more connections with found objects. And really trying to open up to what students are showing an interest in and going from there. We are still picking the episodes mostly from what we think they'll like, but we are wondering more about what they are most interested in watching, too.

Regarding learning from the archive, it's hard because everything I've read is always so good, no matter what it is. Now that we're out of school [because of Covid-19 closures] and some kids are learning online and others are not, I've been thinking about: How do we support kids to be motivated in their own learning? How do we support children's learning without the rewards? What did Fred write about children's motivation for learning? What are his thoughts on children developing their own love for learning?

Why do you show MRN to your students?

One reason, selfishly, is because it brings me happiness. It slows everything down. It's a nice way for us to come together and spend time together and learn together. The opportunity for me to sit back and listen to students' conversations and their reactions to things without it being my agenda. It is a special time of our week where we can be together and enjoy our time together and enjoy the messages of the episode.

What message from Fred Rogers do you think matters right now for families at home with children [due to Covid-19 closures]?

The stress of what's going on right now can be overwhelming, so how can we refocus and find joy? I think Fred would encourage us to use this unexpected time to listen to our children and learn from them. What positive experiences can we create together during this time?

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Educators' Neighborhood interviews are conducted and transcribed by Melissa A. Butler.