

Educator in the Neighborhood:

Cindy Patterson, First Grade teacher, Pittsburgh Dilworth preK-5

Cindy has been teaching for 25 years in urban public schools, the last two decades in Pittsburgh Public Schools. She is National Board Certified as an Early Childhood Generalist. She lives in the East End of Pittsburgh with her “wonderful, heaven-on-earth family,” her husband, daughter, and two dogs.

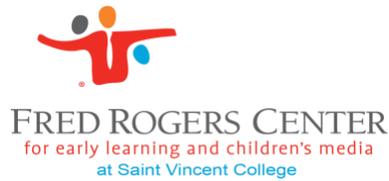


What's your earliest personal memory of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood?

When I was a kid MRN was something that was on when I was in upper elementary school. It would come on. I remember knowing the beginning song. I don't remember if I loved Mister Rogers yet. But I remember the song and that when the episode came on, I remember it being a calm time.

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

I think my favorite was the time you came in and it was the Up and Down episode about dominoes (episode 1657). The boys and girls were just so mesmerized. We had been playing math games and other things with dominoes, but that episode let them try other ways. I went back and played it again and they didn't say, "Oh we already saw this." They loved it. I loved that they tried with the dominoes without giving up. They built and worked together so nicely. I didn't say for them to do what Mister Rogers did. They asked me if they could do that. They



wanted to create it. And it was great being together and watching you and I struggle to make the technology work. We made the best of it, and you held up that little screen for everyone to watch, and no one complained at all.

Is there anything that has surprised you about your students' responses to watching MRN?

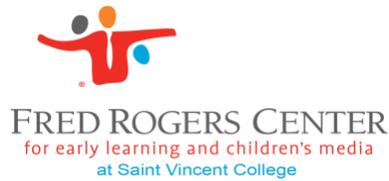
I would say for me, [because of my troubles with technology], what we watched was almost a little surprise. I'm an "enjoying the journey, even if there is a detour, Mister Rogers Educator." We say, "Let's just see which episode will work for us today" and no matter what episode we watched, we would stop, breathe, and really try to be present in that moment... my students and I would hear the song, and gather on the floor. We sometimes didn't know exactly what we were going to see in the Mister Rogers episode, but we all came together. Kind of like... we don't know what we're going to have for dinner, but we'll all be together. For Mister Rogers, it's like we will have a "hug meal." We will gather together to share together. Sometimes my students and I would just watch part of the episode because we'd have to zip and go someplace. Although it may seem little, it's actually a big thing. It's not a predetermined project. It's... let's put our thinking and our hearts right here and see what will evolve. When the episode would begin—the opening notes and song—we would all just come back to that moment. If it had been a week since we'd watched an episode together, the boys and girls would ask, "When are we going to watch Mister Rogers?" I have a diverse group and they are first graders, so they are a little older than students some of the other teachers who are a part of Educators' Neighborhood. There is still a space for them to wonder, to create... to embrace themselves as little learners.

As a Grade 1 teacher, you know the pressures of academic requirements for students and teachers. What would you say to teachers who say they don't have time to show MRN in their classroom?

I would say that in my experience you don't NOT have time to show Mister Rogers. It's like a meditation for your heart. As a teacher, you can always get back to the rubric or the performance-based assessment. Showing MRN is a way to bring community together. For students to be kind to themselves. Give themselves compassion. Not a space to be right or wrong. Not a push to have an academic thing done. Sometimes that's not the most important thing. It's like me not telling my daughter "I love you" at night, I would never NOT have time to do that. It's like that. Mister Rogers is something I use to get into that heart space. Another teacher might use something else. Not to sound so heavy headed, but... just do it. You don't need it to be driven by a schedule. It doesn't have to be a gigantic thing. If you don't get to it, don't torture yourself. Just get to it when you have the opportunity.

What do you like about being part of Educators' Neighborhood?

I love being part of Educators Neighborhood because it's an outreach. It's not just for my school district. I like to see what other people are doing. It is early childhood focused. I like to talk with



other educators and others working with early childhood, the broader community not just in my district. I like the topics we talk about that help us be whole and be part of humanity in the world. What we are doing in Educators' Neighborhood is really trying to embrace the whole child, their learning, they'll still be thinking of this when they're 80-90 years old. I like being part of something more than myself.

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

Oh, that's a really good question. I don't know if I have one definite one. Every one of them has a little characteristic that I can relate to it. Every one of them as a little space of me. They each help me be a better person and help me think about things from a different perspective. When they're having problems, having a disagreement, every character has a feeling to share. MRN shows the perspectives to help you see the world beyond yourself.

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

I've heard them talk about Daniel Tiger because they know of the modern Daniel Tiger. They are most aware of him. I think they really engage with the beginning and the end of the show, seeing Mister Rogers. They like the routine. And they like the guests that come in and they like the visits to the shops and factories. They like the real people. They aren't the regular characters, but that's what they like... the milk episode where they milked the cows, the little boy playing the piano. They like going to see how things are done and made and how things happen... going to the restaurant and going up/down the escalator.

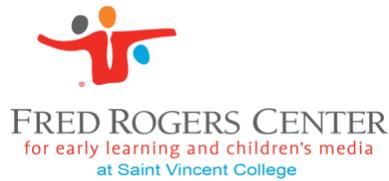
What is something you've learned in your readings from the FRC archives? What do you want to study more next school year?

I remember looking at all the meticulous notes and Fred Roger's handwriting. And how he is cognizant about how you speak to children and the words you use. How he worked so hard with every word he used. And learning about the *Plan and Play Book* was good. I now have my own copy and I've been loving it. I would like to dig in deeper next year and find other ways to explore those topics in the book.

Why do you show MRN to your students?

I became part of this project and this is one of the reasons I started to play the episodes. It was a way to try creating a space for self-compassion and kindness in the community of my classroom. It's like action research in my classroom. How would this [MRN] impact my diverse boys and girls? Does it improve our community?

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



There's a lot of them. A lot of little messages that Fred has. We're in this together. I'm thinking of these poems that I'm getting ready to share with them tomorrow. Getting in touch with your feelings. Your feelings are okay. You're fine the way you are. Be the best that you can be at this moment. You are still important. And it's okay to be afraid.

Is there anything else you'd like to say?

Thank you. I love being part of the Educators' Neighborhood. I've learned a lot. It's a crazy year, but sometimes when I'm thinking of what to put together [to share virtually because schools are closed], I think about the community that we started this year with Mister Rogers, and this seems really positive right now.

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