

Educator in the Neighborhood:

**Katy Thompson, preK teacher, Pittsburgh West Liberty**

Katy has been teaching for sixteen years, all in Early Childhood in Pittsburgh Public Schools. She's taught at Pittsburgh Mifflin and Pittsburgh King. This is her fifth year of teaching at West Liberty. She lives in Bridgeville, PA with her daughter Nora Rose who is two and a half years old.

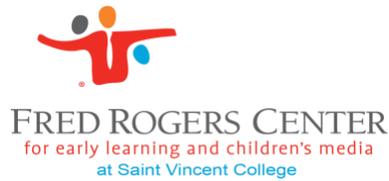


*What's your earliest personal memory of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood?*

I recall watching it as a child. My mom would put it on, make us some cookies and milk and we would watch it. I am the youngest of three children. We would watch together. I remember the puppets and the trolley and Mister Rogers coming in and changing his shoes and putting his sweater on.

*What made you want to join this Educators' Neighborhood group?*

I wanted to show my students who Mister Rogers was and how he is a symbol of Pittsburgh. I wanted to give a personal experience to them and share that this is what I used to watch when I was their age. It was also to let them know that this show was before Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood. I change my theme every year; one year was a learning garden, another year talented turtles. This year it was going to be our Neighborhood. It was going to be around Daniel Tiger and then the opportunity for Educators' Neighborhood came up. I wanted them to see how MRN is real, not just a cartoon. I felt it was more authentic learning for the children to see. I love how he shows things that are relevant years ago and we can see how things have changed. There are connections between Daniel Tiger and Mister Rogers. O the Owl and X the Owl. And Daniel Tiger was on Mister Rogers. I love how the music is similar. With our theme being



neighborhood, we were learning how we can be a neighbor with everyone and with each other. Mister Rogers helps display this.

*What is your favorite episode you played for students this school year? Why?*

My favorite episode would have to be the one where they learn how construction paper is made (episode [#1653](#)). Going to the warehouse and seeing how it is made and how it's packaged and then children were looking at our construction paper in the classroom. And everyone received construction paper strips and was asked to be creative... it didn't matter what they made. I didn't say this is what you need to do. I let them explore. Give children materials and let them explore. Just do it. Let them be expressive and enhance their problem-solving skills. You get to see what they're thinking and the connections they are making. That activity could have gone on longer than it did. It went on 40 minutes, I think... they were so connected and engaged.

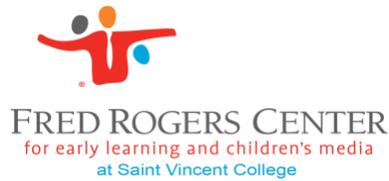
The other episode that is my favorite is the up and down episode ([#1656](#)) on the escalator, going up and going down. You think that's something so easy and simple. The way that Mister Rogers and Mr. McFeely spoke and modeled... there was simplicity and a pause. Lots of children hear commands that are quick, quick, quick. With MRN, you can be patient and listen and it is calming. It's not quick, quick, quick all the time. It's a time to watch and reflect and go slowly. I like the connections children are making. One child came to me after the episode and said, "Look, my zipper on my boot goes up and down." You never know how children are connecting and then... they make a connection! It's an ah-ha moment.

*Has anything surprised you about sharing MRN with your students?*

Their recalling has surprised me. They remembered what we heard and watched last week. I would ask, "Do you remember what he brought for us to see last week?" or "Do you remember who he visited?" They always could remember what they heard and what they saw.

*Most of the educators in our group teach Kindergarten and you teach preK. What have you noticed about how children three and four years old relate to Mister Rogers and MRN?*

Well, I will say they really enjoyed the real-life video parts. The Neighborhood of Make Believe they were kind of unsure of. The imagination part was hard without seeing the episode before it. They still liked it, but they enjoyed the real life. Many students don't leave their neighborhood or even their street. Many students stay in the house all the time for many reasons, so going to real places and learning how things are made, these were their eye-opening moments.... how to make fortune cookies, how instruments are played, all of the factory visits. Also, they really liked the whole idea of how he changed his shoes because he was coming from somewhere else. A child said, "He is putting on his play shoes," making a connection to how we come to school.



*How has MRN impacted your teaching?*

I feel like it helps me slow down a little bit. Give me opportunities for reflection and observing the students. When I play MRN I sit with the students and I observe them, too. When I hear him talking, he speaks with a slow and elegant voice. He is calm. He never raises his voice. It reminds me to be mindful. He's appreciative of everyone. His care for sharing the message: [It's You I Like](#). Oh, that is such an important song. I tell students, "I'm proud of you," but I want them to say that they are proud of themselves, too. MRN helps me to teach mindfulness and for me to be modeling for my colleagues as well as my students. Yes, our work is about educating, teaching, but it is also about the relationships we create. Number one is communication, positive reinforcements, and relationships with each individual. Colleagues always say, "Back then... how things used to be." I say, "How about today?" Today we need relationships with kids. They need to feel safe. Fred Friday is part of building relationships. Let's just take a deep breath. Slow down and enjoy the little parts of the day.

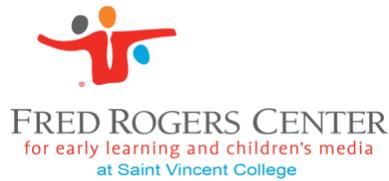
In the beginning of my teaching, 15 years ago, I used to model that an apple is red, but I've changed my teaching and now allow for a more student-led approach... "Let's explore different apple colors," "What color would you like to make your apple?" Mister Rogers helps with this. Children can create and have choice in their creations.

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

As a child I was more the Daniel Tiger puppet. I was shy and timid. I didn't think I had anything to say. I was quiet. I remember in kindergarten the teacher saying, "She finally talked today." I think today in my teaching I'm more like X the Owl. I'm not saying I'm wise or a know-it-all. I'm still learning things, but I feel like he tries to give support to others. He's a team player. He is always there to give his support in some way and give ideas... he gives a different perspective. I try to do that with my co-teachers. I try to model being a team player and sharing ideas.

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

The trolley. They always want to see the trolley. They ask, "Where does the trolley go? Where is the trolley?" They want to know all about the trolley. We also have a toy trolley in our classroom... they pass it around for each person to encourage class participation. They also talk a lot about Mr. McFeely. If there is a knock at the door, "Oh it's Mr. McFeely!" They want to see what he's going to bring today. They like to know what he brings for Picture Picture. I even brought in a VHS cassette to show them... they were amazed!



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

I like to read about being a mom. I was a new mom at age 41. I like learning about patience. And I like to see his handwriting, seeing how he writes things is interesting.

*What are you looking forward to trying or exploring next school year?*

My idea is to link Fred Rogers with my personal practice goal that we do for my school. I want to find a way to tie in MRN with a morning message every day or every week. I would like to tie in a clip of an episode or something from the archive. I want to find little quotes and little things to share. I want to offer a perspective to my school, for my colleagues... whether we are at school or through online forums... I want to offer a beginning of the week motivation. Maybe Motivation Monday. I want to try to share positive messages. I think this could be helpful for the staff and the students. I'm still thinking about how we can make this work and incorporate ways to have students implement positive messages into the learning environment.

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

One of the most vital things Mister Rogers hoped to teach viewers was that having feelings is never something to be ashamed of. Emotions are a natural part of the human experience. It's also important to let those feelings help you grow into a better person. Working from home with a toddler has opened up many feelings in me and I agree with Mister Rogers, I feel I am growing into a better mom, educator, and person because of this Covid-19 lifestyle change and I'm appreciative of all the helpers in this world!

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