

Sophie's Summer at Lesley!

This summer, I began an exciting new chapter in my teaching career as I started my Master's degree in Early Education at Lesley University!

Thanks to the generosity of the Apple Orchard community, the Apple Orchard Teacher Fund supported one of my courses, *Culturally Responsive Pedagogies*. This course focused on creating meaningful, inclusive, and responsive learning environments that honor the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of students and their families.

Throughout the course, we explored the work of educators Dr. Bettina Love and Liz Kleinrock, both of whom have influenced conversations and professional development at Apple Orchard. We examined ways to build welcoming classroom communities, strengthen home-school connections, and recognize the unique experiences, perspectives, and cultural knowledge that each child and family brings to school.

One of the highlights of the experience was participating in three in-person institute days, where I had the opportunity to exchange ideas and learn alongside fellow educators. These rich discussions offered fresh perspectives, practical strategies, and inspiration that I'm excited to bring back to my classroom.

Perhaps most meaningful was seeing how closely the course aligned with the anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) work we are already doing at Apple Orchard. It was incredibly affirming to recognize so many of our existing practices reflected in the research and approaches we were studying. I was proud to share examples from our school while also discovering new ways to deepen and strengthen our work.

I am so grateful to the Apple Orchard community for making this opportunity possible. Your generosity has allowed me to expand my knowledge, strengthen my teaching philosophy, and continue growing as an educator. I look forward to bringing what I've learned back to the children, families, and colleagues who make Apple Orchard such a special place.

Thank you for investing in our teachers and, in turn, the children and families we serve!