

Sara and Greta Attend the 2022 Annual NAEYC Conference in Washington DC



Sara's Recap: I was so excited for the opportunity to attend the 2022 Annual NAEYC Conference in Washington, DC this fall. While there, I selected a few seminars focusing on anti-racism and equity within the early education space.

One seminar that piqued my interest was titled "Welcoming All Genders: Implementing Gender Theory to Cultivate Joyful Classrooms." Gender expression and exploration is something so common in PreK, but in some states, seems to be such a divisive topic as of late. This seminar was led by two researchers from a school in California who shared their findings from a three-year study. They taught in a classroom that promoted gender norms exploration with the ultimate goal of cultivating joy. I noticed so many similarities with their school in California and AO. I reflected on certain aspects of our daily classroom routine and thought about ways to enhance our dramatic play time in the classroom.

Another seminar I attended was titled, "White Savior: How it impacts staff, interactions, family engagement, pedagogy and policy." I was interested in this topic as one of the many white women who occupy the early education space. To continue to grow as an anti-racist educator, I try to reflect on my own background and acknowledge the biases I bring into the classroom.

Greta and I had the chance to explore the Smithsonian Museum and other sites around the city. Thank you to all the parents who donated to the Teacher's Fund and helped make this a possibility! ~Sara Cirioni

Greta's Recap: Recently I was lucky enough to travel to DC for the NAEYC annual conference. Having only experienced professional development over Zoom since becoming a teacher, I jumped at the opportunity to go to in-person seminars and meet other teachers from around the country. When deciding which seminars to attend, I chose ones that felt relevant to Apple Orchard and also ones offering a new perspective. Some seminars were more factual, whereas others explored growing themes and opportunities in early education.

Since studying psychology in college, I was excited to attend a few seminars rooted in extensive psychology research. One was about the value of neuroscience studies to understand young children's learning, and the other dove into new developments in understanding sensory processing challenges in children and how this information can be implemented in the classroom. I also got to meet two play therapists who introduced strategies in play therapy that can be used daily in classrooms to explore emotional regulation and social problem solving skills.

Interested to hear about STEM strategies in preschool, I headed to a discussion on incorporating 'number talks' into the classroom. It was interesting to hear different approaches to adding daily mathematical thinking into our schedule. Along with all this new information, I had a lot of opportunities to reflect on how to incorporate this learning into our nature-based school and which themes felt like a good fit with our learners.

Beyond seminars, there were opportunities to meet authors and illustrators of new children's books. In one conversation, an owner of a popular independent book store read many of the best children's books of 2022. It was fantastic to see books focused on themes similar to our ABAR curriculum and nature are well represented in the best books collection. Sara and I went to a presentation from three authors/illustrators. The talk inspired us and we began discussing a potential children's book of our own. When not in a seminar, we got to meet some other educators and administrators, including meeting with our teacher friend Annie and hearing about her move to DC. We visited the Smithsonian and the International Spy Museum for some fun after our busy days. What an amazing opportunity and we are so thankful to AO and the professional development fund for being able to send us. ~Greta Poler