

TRANSFORMING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION LEAD TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM LEARNING COMMUNITY

YEAR 3, SESSION 2 NEWSLETTER



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GENERAL OVERVIEW

During Session 2 of the Year 3 Learning Community, we focused on the intersection of sustainability and racial impact through storytelling. This session included a live Q&A from our featured guest expert and scaffolded conversation about narrative building, storytelling strategies, and practical tips for identifying target audiences as grantees consider the current challenges and opportunities of supporting students while professionalizing the early childhood field.

LEARNING GOALS

Using storytelling to promote sustainability through a racial impact lens



SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

Q&A

For Session 2, we welcomed **Sharise Johnson** from SMJ Communications to provide some context and answer questions about sustaining work through storytelling.

Sharise Johnson was born and raised in Atlanta, Georgia, and attended college at Hampton University in Hampton, Virginia, where she majored in broadcast journalism and Spanish. She has nearly 15 years of experience in communications, particularly in internal and external communications management, public relations, and print, broadcast, and social media, serving Fortune 100 corporations and educational institutions.

Prior to founding SMJ, Sharise served as the senior director of communications for a school district based in Texas. In this role, Sharise stewarded the district's brand locally and nationally by spearheading an effective and innovative internal and external communications strategy. Additionally, Sharise served as



SHARISE JOHNSON

SMJ Communications

the managing director of national communications for Teach For America, was a communications manager at Atlanta Public Schools, and managed corporate communication strategy and implementation for major campaigns and announcements at AT&T.

Sharise currently resides in Charlotte, North Carolina, with her husband and daughters, Faith, Grace, and Joy. In her free time, she enjoys traveling, kickboxing, yoga, spending time with family and friends, and participating in community service projects as a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority.

[In her recorded video](#), Sharise provided an overview of how messaging and storytelling can promote sustainability and inclusivity of participants' work in early childhood education (ECE). She dove into strategies for developing compelling narratives that resonate with diverse audiences, as well as practice tips for effective video interviews. During the live question-and-answer session, participants asked questions about the practical application of storytelling tips given the unique challenges and opportunities of each grantee.



Because the ECE field is so expansive, we often struggle with terminology. Often what we are talking about needs to change depending on the audience. Can you speak to the terminology?

“Terminology depends on the audience. It is important to determine what your core message is and what is applicable across all of the audiences. Then you can pivot and add nuance to each audience about what matters most to those specific audiences. I recommend being really specific on the naming conventions based on the audience. Implementing a style guide with partners and teams is another way to ensure groups have a shared way to talk about this particular thing with this particular audience, a way to draw a line in the sand about the work you do and how you talk about it. The more consistent you are, the more the audience and those that you work with will become familiar.”

The triangle model was helpful to visualize. My understanding is that we should know the content of each triangle, and this helps us get back to the place to get back to our points in the narrative in the scope and sequence we need to.

“There are two uses for the triangle. One is if you have a meeting or specific purpose so you have a clear messaging plan, especially if someone is trying to or does derail you. And the triangle model is also helpful as the central checkpoint to make sure messaging is clear and consistent. Do our deliverables hit our core messages? This is a good foundation to cross-check communications across efforts.”

I see the field moving away from deficit-based models to asset-based ones, and being more thoughtful about who tells what story. How do you advise us to think about this?

“A lot of times, it feels like other people are telling the stories of others; this can mean we don't get authentic stories. One way around this is to amplify the existing voices. Resharing content, helping folks write letters to the editors and op-eds to highlight voices and amplify voices. Moving away from telling the story on behalf of communities and finding channels to work through the messaging of community and amplify. This is powerful for storytelling and asset-based framing.”

Do you have any advice for assembling teams for telling their stories?

“First, you want to make a short list of audiences where we would want their voices heard. Then, consider including as many diverse and inclusive voices as possible so audiences can see themselves represented. Having student voices and teacher/staff is very powerful and these voices in this context can be helpful, too. By including multiple perspectives, you can tell a more full story. Finally, check to make sure diversity and inclusion are at the forefront of who you choose to be in your videos (race, gender, age, etc.)”



We have a big system with a lot of strategies, so often early childhood leaders will have to do awareness and education and strategize or talk about impact in one conversation. This is very hard to do when you find yourself in spaces where you do have to elevate the awareness in the room first before you can get to your purpose. How can leaders think about doing this effectively?

“There is a [simple framework](#) to help us in how we get an audience to understand a problem. Being able to share a vision helps people understand the why and is key. Saying, ‘if we do this is what is possible.’ Then if we put numerical value and timeline to the vision, we show urgency and actionability. One way to help people craft that vision is to ask yourself, ‘If nothing else happens, what is the one result you want to see in your work?’ This usually leads people to their vision.”

Knowing that different messages and different interest holders move people to action in different ways, what is the best way to talk about the work that we do?

“It comes back to one central thing, which is a focus on students, educators, admin, etc. If these things are not working well together, what will the education space look like in the future? This is usually the common through line that drives a sense of urgency and importance to audiences. For example, if a client is focused on offering high-quality in-school tutoring, all our messaging is geared towards the importance of their work and the impact this early tutoring will have. The throughline is what will happen if we DO NOT give the support students need. The messaging is geared towards the gaps, and then we work to amplify the consequences if action is taken now.”

“The ideas of using and creating core messages in the prework is/was helpful to think about continuing to move the work forward and feeds into the sustainability and action piece of our work.”

- GRANTEE



GRANTEE BRIGHT SPOTS

Grantees also spent time sharing updates and bright spots related to their ongoing grant efforts. While the presentations offered a glimpse into their progress, it's important to note that these highlights represent only a fraction of the extensive and impactful work undertaken by the grantees and their teams since the previous year. The shared achievements underscore the collective commitment to advancing systems change at the intersection of early childhood and higher education.

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-LINCOLN

The project is focused on developing assessments that are aligned with teacher training and curriculum.

- A crosswalk of eight different competencies was conducted, with a specific emphasis on increasing the focus on “play.”
- The integration of relationship-based and culturally sustaining practices is a cross-cutting theme.
- The project is currently awaiting external review for the integration of these elements into the curriculum.
- There are plans to admit students in 2024 to test two educational pathways: transitioning from an AA (associate of arts) degree to a BA (bachelor of arts) and from a CDA (Child Development Associate) credential to an AA.

SALISH KOOTENAI COLLEGE

The project has three primary objectives: developing educational and professional pathways; advocating for the early childhood education workforce; and ensuring workforce sustainability through master's programs and undergraduate language programs.



- For the pathways objective, there is a focus on creating stackable credentials aligned with the CDA to meet Head Start requirements. In terms of accessibility to education, the project has partnered with other tribal programs that offer two-year programs, which were launched this fall.
- The advocacy aspect involves working with children ages 0–5 to engage families and practitioners in early education.
- For sustainability, there is an initiative to launch a master of science (MS) degree program, with 25% of staff funding provided by a grant and a curriculum focusing on literacy and equity, achieving 100% retention of 18 students.
- Additionally, there is an undergraduate apprenticeship program that includes a component for learning the Salish language.

NORTH SEATTLE COLLEGE

The project initially focused on identifying degree completion barriers, specifically in math and English, to address these key challenges.

- A collaboration with Childcare Aware led to the development of a transferable ECE math course, set for a pilot launch in spring 2024.
- Institutional policies have been revised to allow technical writing courses in various home languages, broadening English standards.

- Introducing English classes in students' native languages has achieved notable success, alongside specially designed math classes for ECE.
- The project has established a language cohort, offering full BA degrees in Spanish and courses in Arabic, Hindi, and Somali, catering to a diverse student base.
- Leading a cohort of 14 higher education leaders, the project aims to expand courses and degrees in home languages across the state and has created a fellowship to increase higher education accessibility.

UNIVERSITY OF HAWAI'I AT MĀNOA

The project collaborates with colleges to start a registered ECE apprenticeship program, focusing on building a stronger ECE mentoring network and prioritizing enhancements to licensed ECE and home programs.

- Advocacy efforts are ongoing for a wage supplement bill in Maui, amidst economic challenges.
- The Classroom Contracts Bill is a key focus, aiming to reform and respectfully rebuild the childcare market.
- A statewide ECE bachelor's degree program is being launched, supported by a grant from The Collaborative.
- The team is utilizing Hawai'i's media attention to further the project's objectives.



COLLEGE OF MENOMINEE NATION

The project prioritizes cultural responsiveness, creating multiple educational pathways for students.

- The college offers licensing options for teachers without formal licenses and focuses on culturally responsive student support over traditional professional development.
- Menominee has a culturally responsive support model, including monthly talking circles that address individual student needs, and emphasizes program sustainability.
- Organizing culturally responsive and inclusive events enhances the learning environment for students.