

TRANSFORMATION

Transformation Through Story: Preserving Early Childhood 2008

-Arianna Keil, Birth to 3 Professional Development Specialist



Educator, leader and author Stephanie Pace Marshall spoke to a gathering of several hundred early childhood professionals gathered at the Concourse Hotel in early March for the Preserving Early Childhood Conference. Presented by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, this 6th annual event focused on helping communities embrace community approaches to four-year-old kindergarten and preschool inclusion with partnerships in settings such as Head Start and local child care.

Pace Marshall spoke of the power of the story as a map of what communities want to establish. She encouraged participants to not underestimate the power of story, citing examples of how “narrative trumps data every time.” She believes stories ground us and help us define what matters deeply, and thus choreograph our lives. “Think what it is you want to tell your children, your communities, your families.”

Within community, Pace Marshall stressed the importance of individual contributions to the story. “In a community, there is no such thing as a random comment,” she stated. She told a personal story of a time when she headed a prestigious institution for young adults with an emphasis on math and science. Mistakenly, letters of acceptance were sent to students on the school’s wait list. Pace Marshall insisted these students be offered admission, and she proceeded to collect comments from school staff following her decision. Approximately half of the comments fell into a negative category she termed “the fire storm.” These consisted of ideas such as, “This is going to be terrible,” and “These students are going to pull everyone down.”

On the other hand, the remaining comments were much more positive. Pace Marshall called this category “the gift.” “Gift” comments included: “I am proud to be part of this honest organization,” and “This challenge will strengthen us.” She brought this division in perception to the attention of her staff. This intentional focus on stories helped her staff to embrace “the gift” story and to recognize their ability to change their perception of the situation.

Pace Marshall encouraged attendees to tell a new story in their communities. These new stories are to be grounded in engagement and personalization, rather than limited potential. Stories offer a key conduit to transform perception and ultimately help communities rise to what is best for children and families. To aid PEC conference participants in this process, each received a copy of Pace Marshall’s book, *The Power to Transform: Leadership That Brings Learning and Schooling to Life*. 🌐

First Annual Wisconsin Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Conference *Early Relationships Matter: Building Networks*

June 19-20, 2008 (Preconference day - June 18)

Concourse Hotel, Madison

For details: www.wiaimh.org

Registration due May 23

