

What Works! **Strengths-Based Approaches to Early Childhood Education**

A Three-Week Virtual Conference

Sponsored by

The Institute for Teaching



The California Teachers Association



iCohere, Inc.



in cooperation with
other California and national agencies and organizations
dedicated to the welfare of our youngest children

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.”

-Margaret Mead

We as teachers, parents, and community members here in California find ourselves in a topsy-turvy world. Those of us who care for the most precious resources in our state—the young children who will inherit and then determine the future of our communities, our country, and our planet—currently find our support systems eroding due to budget cuts, political wrangling over educational priorities, and school district reprioritization.

Eventually, policymakers, advocacy groups, school administrators, and teachers will reach a consensus on how to best resolve the long-term educational issues facing our schools and our children. *But where can those of us who have the most direct, personal connection with our youngest children turn in order to address the immediate challenges we face daily in creating nurturing experiences for the children under our care?*

What Works is a multi-week virtual conference designed to answer this question by shining a spotlight on strengths-based approaches to transformational change in early childhood education learning environments.

Co-sponsored by a wide range of agencies and organizations dedicated to the education and welfare of California's youngest children, this online conference is underwritten in part by a grant from the Packard Foundation to the Institute for Teaching and in part by additional funding from the California Teachers Association. The \$79 registration fee is waived for members of the sponsoring organizations.

Because the conference will be conducted entirely online, participants may attend whenever their schedules permit, without the burden of travel costs, loss of classroom time, or the inconvenience of being away from home.

In this conference, some of the country's foremost thought leaders, practitioners, researchers, and educators in strengths-based strategies will join participants in an online learning community, where together we can...

- **...explore** strengths-based methodologies and how they can be implemented in both public and private schools,
- **...share** questions and concerns with peers and experts from schools all over the state,
- **...study** white papers and articles on positive approaches to early childhood education,
- **...discover** where we can go to find additional resources to infuse our work with best practices when working with very young children, and
- **...receive** practical tips, models, tools, and training materials for implementing the new ideas and methods learned at the conference.

Conference Design

What Works: Strengths-Based Approaches to Early Childhood Education

The conference will convene online during the 3 weeks from October 26 to November 14. The agenda for this virtual conference will resemble a face-to-face conference, but will offer participants many more opportunities for interaction, discussion, knowledge-sharing, and practical applications of forward-looking ideas.

The conference will include both **Virtual Conference Hall Presentations**, with keynote addresses, multidisciplinary panels, methodology workshops, and “shining example” presentations, as well as **Professional Networking Opportunities**, with the help of many different types of virtual venues and online resources.

It is not necessary to attend the conference during any specific hours, as the presentations and follow-up discussions will be “always available,” that is, they can be accessed on the internet at any time, from any location. Even the evening live workshop presentations will be recorded and available in the conference website. Discussions will be open and ongoing throughout the duration of the conference.

- ***What Works: Fostering Collaboration***

Welcome presentations by thoughtful leaders in Early Childhood Education.

- Carolyn Doggett, Executive Director, California Teachers Association
- Dick Gale, Manager, Institute for Teaching
- Others TBA

- *Framing the Issues*: Yale Wishnick, former Manager, Institute for Teaching

- ***What Works: Reflecting on What Matters***

Each week a panel of respected and forward thinking policy makers, researchers and preschool teachers will engage in free-wheeling explorations of the present and future of early childhood education.

Conference attendees can participate by asking questions, posting comments and engaging one another in continuing dialogue following each panel.

- **Panel #1: Discovering Our Strengths and Capacities**

What strengths can we draw upon to create uplifting experiences in our preschool classrooms? Instead of looking beyond our classrooms, how can we energize the strengths that already exist within ourselves, our colleagues, and the extended families of the children under our care?

Panel #2: Envisioning the Best of Tomorrow

Building on the strengths identified by the first panel, what can we envision for the care and education of our youngest children of tomorrow? An opportunity to dream about the future as we would like to see it.

Panel #3: Leveraging Our Strengths – Starting Now!

We have discovered our strengths and envisioned our future: now we must design the path from here to there. This is where we explore the techniques, approaches, and strategies that result in preschool teacher-driven change.

- ***What Works: Building Our Skills***

Online workshops for building skills in a variety of strengths-based approaches to working in early learning environments with young children, parents, and colleagues.

- Workshops topics, include:
 - **Appreciative Inquiry**
 - **Nurtured Heart Approach**
 - **Positive Deviance**
 - **Resilience**
 - **And other approaches TBA**

- ***What Works: Learning From Each Other***

- Presentations of Shining Examples of existing strengths-based programs that can serve as models of what is already working well in California.
- Conference attendees can nominate teachers, classrooms, and programs to be recognized as exemplars in fostering ideal environments for early childhood education and care.

- ***What Works: Building Connections***

- Engage with ECE colleagues from around California in a variety of professional and social networking activities. Build connections that affirm, validate and expand the invaluable work you perform with young children every day.

For further information regarding the design of the **What Works Conference**, please contact:

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