

Tools of the Mind Has Transformed PPS Pre-Kindergarten Classrooms

by Kelly Petrin, Applegate Headstart Teacher

When you visit a Headstart classroom in PPS, you can order a taco at the taco cart, or help fix a car, or get an x-ray. You can ask a student to check your math work or look carefully at a flower and take turns describing it.

Role-playing allows children to stand on the shoulders of someone more capable while they build their cognitive flexibility, working memory, and language use.



With the Tools of the Mind curriculum, created by Dr. Deborah Leong and Dr. Elena Bodrova, children engage in role-playing, along with typical preschool activities (the base layer) and easy sensory/ manipulative play (the sensory layer).

In August 2016, nineteen Pre-Kindergarten educators and I began our training as pilot teachers for Tools of the Mind. We moved furniture in our classrooms to create six distinct play areas and decorated and shared ideas for props, to help children step into role-play.



The role-play is fun, but it's so much more than that. Engagement comes from working within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Children develop self-control, impulse control, and working memory through the benefits received from peers, language use, and external mediators.

Through experience, we have learned vital lessons: to trust the curriculum, add just one thing (i+1) when scaffolding, and to maintain universal high expectations. We learned with each other and we all came to love the curriculum. As a result, our students are happy and engaged, as they learn both socially and academically - at higher levels than we'd ever seen before.

Pre-K educators teach remotely

Our PK/Head Start teachers and support staff have done an amazing job launching a [PK Remote Learning Website](#) to support home learning during our COVID-19 closure!

This website - a collaboration between the Early Learning Department and all 13 PK/Head Start sites - includes teacher videos, home activities, and web resources in all content areas as well as multilingual resources and supportive tips for parents as teachers. On a weekly basis, content is updated and archived for future use. Kudos to our PK educators for embarking on a steep technology learning curve in service of kids and families!

PPS launches emergency childcare

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, PPS launched a childcare program at Rieke Elementary (since moved to Capitol Hill). We couldn't have achieved this without the amazing support of Frank Leavitt in Facilities and Whitney Ellersick in Nutrition Services. By contracting with Champions, a licensed childcare provider, children received care from staff with years of experience in school-age care.

Opening an emergency child care center is a great example of PPS departments and partners working together to support the children of frontline essential workers. If you or your staff hear that families need to access child care services, there is still space.