**MASTER MYTHS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION**

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*Tell me and I forget. Show me and I remember. Let me do it and I understand. - Confucius*

I am sure there is an exhaustive list of master myths at work in the public schools.  I will focus on one I observe daily that has a detrimental effect on our students.  Children of all ages are expected to sit passively and receive information, or process information they are given on their own. Yet we are not all auditory learners.  Most children are kinesthetic learners, and research shows that experiential learning is most valuable. Educators and philosophers as far back as Confucius understood this concept.

Brazilian educator and philosopher Dr. Poulo Freire referred to the “teacher as expert” model as the “banking model,”   Dr. Paulo Freire stated that too often education involved “banking,” with the teacher making “deposits” in the students and that model does not work. (Gee 68)  Frier was of the belief that dialogue was necessary for learning, with all parties working together. He further believed that dialogue wasn’t about “deepening one’s understanding”, but was to make a difference in the world.” (Mark K. Smith 2002) When we talk of literacy we talk of reading and writing, but little is said of speaking, of conversation. Students of all ages are told to sit still and listen. Freire ties in dialogue to the otherwise outdated reading/writing as literacy mindset.

Those of us in early childhood understand fully the need for children to ‘use their words,” to play with sounds and language through speaking, singing, reciting nursery rhymes and nonsense words until they master the phonemes required for speech as babies, then master stringing sentences and paragraphs together in Preschool years. Early childhood educators encourage dialogue with teachers and peers, the sharing of ideas and stories.  We plan opportunities (activities) to allow children to interact and to explore language through role play, shared reading experiences, books/cd’s/tapes, storyboards, felt boards, puppets and more.  Early childhood educators scaffold children’s interactions with peers to model conversation, conflict resolution and to provide daily opportunities to apply concepts learned to their own lives.

Unfortunately, Preschool is the last place this will be freely allowed throughout the school day. As early as kindergarten teachers will expect 5 and 6 year old children to sit still and listen as they impart their wealth of information onto them. (Banking) This practice is followed throughout all grades with only a small fraction of time given to students to freely discuss ideas and concepts, debate issues, and collaborate.

I often speak about the word gap between socio economic classes. The statistics compare children in urban setting vs. suburban setting, with the former typically starting Kindergarten with about 5,000 words at their disposal; the latter with 20,000 words.  This 1500 word gap never closes.  How does one develop and hone language when one is not allowed to use it? Freire understood this concept and the other social issues that surround education.  Freire stated that poverty and hunger severely affected his ability to learn. This influenced his decision to dedicate his life to improving the lives of the poor: “I didn't understand anything because of my hunger. I wasn't dumb. It wasn't lack of interest. My social condition didn't allow me to have an education. Experience showed me once again the relationship between social class and knowledge" (Stevens, 2002)

Education must allow for children of all ages to experience firsthand and not just listen and watch. I was recently in a public school, and observed a teacher taking a small group of middle school students into the library to do a science experiment. She had a bottle of Coke and Mentos. The kids were so excited. I heard one say “We gonna get to do this?” Another said “I can’t believe she’s gonna let us do this in school!” The teacher laid out all of the materials and said she would demonstrate. Their faces fell and they fell back to bored and disinterested immediately. Why do we tell students in so many ways they are not capable, they are not trusted? The teacher could have brought them outside or in a stairwell and used a plastic bin to catch the overflow when the combination of the Coke and Mentos foamed over the top of the bottle. This was such a lost opportunity and sadly repeated in too many schools. “*Let me do it and I understand*.”