

IN PRAISE OF “EXCHANGING”

BY NANCY ROSENOW

I like what Margaret Mead wrote about an ideal society having a place for every unique human gift. It's probably what drew me to the early childhood field — the notion that my fellow professionals and I could help children discover, develop, and ultimately contribute their unique gifts to the greater good. The longer I've been in our field, though, the more I've come to believe that before we can truly help children celebrate their gifts, we have to first celebrate our own. That isn't always easy. When the nobility of the work we do isn't readily lauded or even acknowledged, it can be discouraging and begin to affect the way we feel about ourselves.

Telling our stories helps. That's where reading *Exchange* magazine comes in. It's full of great stories — the “here's what I've learned” and “this is what I believe” variety. Reading these stories together as a staff is a great way to begin discussions that go deeper than typical day-to-day conversations.

Year ago, as a young program director, I found that buying *Exchange* for every staff member was one of the best professional development investments I could make. Discussing articles together started us on an amazing journey. At first our discussions focused simply on our reactions to the articles: “I agree with what she wrote” or “I'm not sure I see it that way.” But slowly, over months and years as we talked together, a subtle change took place. More and more we began volunteering our own “this is



what I've learned” stories, and sometimes even “this is what I do well” stories.

And then we began having ideas. Lots and lots of ideas. One person would hand me an article by Jim Greenman or Rusty Keeler and say, “I've been thinking about what we really need to do in our outdoor space now. I'd like to tell everyone my ideas when we're together next.” Another person would stop me, point to an article on working with children with challenging behaviors and say, “I'd like to do a presentation on this topic at our next staff meeting.” Soon, many people began volunteering to share ideas at staff meetings. One person brought in the book, *Please Understand Me*, about the Myers-Briggs personality indicator and encouraged us all to figure out what our individual personality types might be. (Suffice it to say that many lively discussions ensued.) Others talked about how certain articles touched them and re-confirmed their belief in the value of our work. Reading *Exchange* together both tied us to our larger field and helped us discover our own gifts.

So, buying *Exchange* magazine for each person is now a tradition, as is reading *ExchangeEveryDay*,

