

Mrs. Wendolowski's 2016 NAEYC Experience

Each year, the National Association for the Education of Young Children holds a conference to bring together professionals interested in learning, connecting and growing in their understanding of developmentally appropriate practices. In her address to the attendees, CEO of NAEYC, Rhian Evans Allvin, described the conference as, "the largest and most important gathering of early childhood educators." This year, the conference was in Los Angeles, California. and I was lucky enough to attend as a 2nd year member of the YPAC (Young Professional Advisory Council). Being a member of YPAC has opened so many doors for me and I am so proud and grateful to learn from the experiences of other young members of the early childhood community from all over the country. This year, the group gathered to reflect on projects we've been working on throughout the year, and how we continue to build engagement within NAEYC for other young professionals. YPAC organized a "Bowl and Brew" event at Lucky Strike at LA Live. Here, we met with other young members of NAEYC to learn about what great contributions they are making to their schools and early childhood communities. Also, we bowled and brewed.



One of the highlights of my experiences at NAEYC was listening to keynote speaker, Sonia Manzano. You may know Sonia for her 40 years of playing "Maria" on Sesame Street. Latina Magazine named Manzano, a Carnegie Mellon alum, as one of the "25 Greatest Latino Role Models Ever" for her contributions to enriching diversity on television. She is also a prolific writer and has written children's and adult books. In her message, she shared a story of being the face of Latino culture on television and about how her real life shared so many similarities to that of Maria, the character she played. She didn't want to be a Latino character that only shared the kind of food and music that Latino Americans enjoy but to give accurate depictions of how her family loves and lives together. The importance of media representation cannot be ignored. When watching a television program or reading a book, children need to see themselves. They need to feel that, whatever race or nationality, they are a part of the community. Positive role models representing different cultures in the media is one way to send that message. Sonia titled her keynote speech, "E is for Equity," and her story and message were clear that all children deserve the highest level of education regardless of where they live or how much money their families make.



I attended many sessions during my time at NAEYC. I selected sessions that I knew could be helpful in enriching our themes this year. I specifically enjoyed a session entitled, "Play Attention: A sensory exploration of mindfulness in the early childhood classroom." Right now, the preschool is doing the Healthy Mind and Body Theme, so attending this session gave me several new breathing and relaxation exercises that I've already incorporated into my gym classes this week! I've benefitted so much from hearing the ideas of other educators, from how to teach kindness to engaging students with inquiry-based science and social studies experiences. I appreciate this NAEYC experience because I returned to Pittsburgh with new ideas to use in the classroom, cards and email addresses of colleagues I've met, and the memory of some really good sushi.