



INSPIRING NEW  
PERSPECTIVES  
VISION. GROW. EMPOWER.



# CREATING A CULTURE OF APPRECIATION

FOR A THRIVING ENGAGED WORKPLACE

AN EARLY CHILDHOOD INVESTIGATIONS WEBINAR  
<https://www.earlychildhoodwebinars.com/>  
JANUARY 11, 2024

PRESENTED BY: SUSAN MACDONALD

Inspiring New Perspectives

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# welcome

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## Welcome to **Creating a Culture of Appreciation for A Thriving Engaged Workplace**

Join this inspiring webinar to kick off the New Year by embracing authentic ways to acknowledge and validate the unique strengths of each staff member in your program. It is no secret that resilient and motivated teachers are better equipped to offer children joyful learning environments. To help teachers stay engaged and motivated, program directors, supervisors, and professional development providers must intentionally implement strategies that help educators feel respected, appreciated, and valued.

Presented by author and early childhood leadership expert Susan MacDonald, the session will highlight current research studies showing that workplace appreciation increases engagement and reduces employee turnover and absenteeism. You will be inspired to set in motion ripples of positive energy and enthusiasm to strengthen workplace relationships, enhance collaboration, and bring a renewed sense of joy to your school culture. We will explore

- Positive communication techniques
- Appreciative Inquiry strategies
- Daily practices for building engagement.

This reflection guide contains a variety of tips, strategies and resources to help you create a culture of appreciation!



# About Susan

**Susan MacDonald** is the founder of Inspiring New Perspectives, a consultancy focused on empowering educational leaders to create programs that deeply respect and nurture the possibilities that lie within each child, parent, and teacher. She has been developing and delivering inspirational courses and workshops for more than 25 years. Her background includes director of a Reggio-inspired preschool program, adjunct faculty at Lesley University and Wheelock College, and Commonwealth of Massachusetts licensing supervisor. She holds a master's degree in instructional design and several professional coach certifications. Susan is the past president of the Boston Area Reggio Inspired Network and past vice president of the Massachusetts Association for the Education of Young Children.

Susan is the author of two books, *Inspiring Early Childhood Leadership: Eight Strategies to Ignite Passion and Transform Program Quality*, *Inspiring Professional Growth: Empowering Strategies to Lead, Motivate and Engage Early Childhood Teachers*, and *Supercharge Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators*.

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# THE POWER OF APPRECIATION QUOTES

Appreciation can make a day, even change a life. Your willingness to put it all into words is all that is necessary. — Margaret Cousins

Appreciative Leadership is the relational capacity to mobilize creative potential and turn it into positive power – to set in motion positive ripples of confidence, energy, enthusiasm, and performance to make a positive difference in the world. — Diane Whitney, Amanda Torstein-Bloom, Kae Rader

Understanding what makes you and your co-workers feel encouraged can significantly improve your relationship in the workplace, increase your sense of engagement, and create a more positive work environment. — Gary Chapman and Paul White

Culture drives expectations and beliefs. Expectations and beliefs drive behaviors. Behaviors drive habits, and habits create the future. — Jon Gordon,

Gratitude is a powerful catalyst for happiness. It's the spark that lights a fire of joy in your soul. — Amy Collette

The degree to which I can create relationships which facilitate the growth of others as separate persons is a measure of the growth I have achieved in myself. — Carl Rogers

Positivity opens us. The first core truth about positive emotions is that they open our hearts and our minds, making us more receptive and more creative.” — Barbara Fredrickson

None of us, including me, ever do great things. But we can all do small things, with great love, and together we can do something wonderful. — Mother Teresa

Dust on gold doesn't change the nature of the gold. It's still gold...the key is to realize that inside everyone is gold that wants to shine. The value is on the inside. Help them find their gold. — Jon Gordon

Each day you are leading by example. Whether you realize it or not or whether it's positive or negative, you are influencing those around you. — Rob Liano

I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. — Dr. Maya Angelou

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# CREATING A CULTURE OF APPRECIATION

## TIPS AND STRATEGIES

### 1. ESTABLISH A CLEAR VISION

*Create and share a vision statement that reflects the values and culture of your program. A clear and concise vision statement provides clarity of expectations for everyone in the program. Regularly share examples of how you see the vision reflected in the day-to-day experiences. I have provided a staff meeting activity to guide you in creating a vision statement.*

### 2. BUILD A SENSE OF SHARED VALUES

*It is important to create opportunities for staff to share and discuss their individual values and aspirations for their work. Learning more about each other is a vital step in building a culture of appreciation. I have provided a staff meeting activity that inspires everyone to share their hopes and dreams.*

### 3. INTENTIONALLY ONBOARD

*Show appreciation from the moment someone commits to working in your program. Welcome them in meaningful ways and ask them to share how they like to be supported in the workplace. This article provides insights into the power of onboarding:*

<https://www.schoolceo.com/a/onboarding-can-be-a-powerful-teacher-retention-strategy/>

### 4. BECOME A STRENGTHS SPOTTER!

*Take time to notice the unique strengths of each individual. Let people know that you see them at their best and value and appreciate all they do. Learn more about strengths-spotting, assessing strengths, and asking interview questions that highlight strengths in this informative article:*

<https://positivepsychology.com/strength-spotting-interviews/>

### 5. EXPRESS GRATITUDE

*Personalized notes are an easy way to help staff to feel valued. These notes are often cherished and become a permanent reminder that their work matters. This article provides details on how to write messages of appreciation: <https://positivepsychology.com/gratitude-messages-letters-lists/>*

### 6. ADDRESS ENERGY VAMPIRES

*Individuals who drain the positive energy of others are often referred to as energy vampires. When these individuals are not held accountable for their negative behavior, they impact the culture for everyone. Jon Gordon offers clear ideas for dealing with energy vampires:*

<https://jongordon.com/positivetip/energy-vampires.html>



# CREATING A CULTURE OF APPRECIATION

## TIPS AND STRATEGIES

### 7. WEAVE APPRECIATION INTO STAFF MEETINGS

To support a culture of appreciation you need to consistently provide opportunities for reflection and discussion around what you value. Some helpful ideas:

- **Reflect on a list of quotes.** Have participants share a quote that had meaning to them and why. You can compile the listing of quotes or ask for staff volunteers to do. Focus the quotes on a variety of topics related to the aspects of the culture you want to enhance - peace, gratitude, positivity, strengths-based communication. The Power of Appreciation quotes in the packet are a good starting point.
- **Read children's books** with inspirational messages. Select some of your favorites and encourage staff to share theirs.
- **Create a Success Board!**

I have provided a step-by-step overview of this activity in the staff meeting ideas section of this guide.

- **Start a book group for the staff.** Consider one of these inspirational books:
  - o Chapman, Gary D., and Paul E. White. *The 5 Languages of Appreciation in the Workplace: Empowering Organization by Encouraging People*. Northfield Pub., 2012
  - o Stavros, Jackie and Cheri Torres. *Conversations Worth Having: Using Appreciative Inquiry to Fuel Productive and Meaningful Engagement*. Oakland: CA. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. 2018.
  - o Sturt, David, Nordstrom, Todd, Ames, Kevin, and Beckstrand, Gary. *Appreciate: Celebrating People Inspiring Greatness*. O.C. Salt Lake City, Utah: Trainer Institute Publishing, 2017
- **Watch and discuss a video** related to an aspect of your culture that you want to enhance. Some suggestions:
  - o Barbara Fredrickson – Positive Emotions Transform Us <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hKggZhYwoys>
  - o Dewitt Jones – Celebrate What's Right with the World [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gD\\_1Eh6rqf8&t=1s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gD_1Eh6rqf8&t=1s)
  - o Robyn Stratton-Berkessel Playful Inquiry – Try This Anywhere
  - o Michael, Jr. - Know Your Why - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ytFB8TrkTo&t=4s>

# CREATING A CULTURE OF APPRECIATION

## TIPS AND STRATEGIES

### 8. CELEBRATE!

Let your staff know that you value them by finding unique and joyful ways to celebrate the work they are doing. Gestures of appreciation do not need to break the budget; finding small ways to consistently show that you value the work they are doing will boost morale and keep the focus on learning and growing together!

- Share a special meal or snack
- Provide a small gift related to your vision and goals. (Consider cards with quotes, a group photo, an item from nature, or similar.)
- Plan a fun staff meeting activity. Think outside the box and ask staff for ideas.
- Work with staff to create hallway displays that reflect and celebrate all that they are doing. Consider a “Magic Moments” board where you and the teachers post pictures or descriptions of interesting and impactful interactions and activities.

### 9. EXPLORE NEW RESOURCES TO LEARN MORE ABOUT APPRECIATION IN THE WORKPLACE:

- 8 Unique Ways You Can Build a Culture of Appreciation in 2023 <https://blog.vantagecircle.com/culture-of-appreciation/>
- Coyle, Daniel. *The Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups*. Bantam Books, 2018.
- Crisalli, Linda. “Understanding and Managing ‘The Generations’.” *Exchange*, 2018, pp. 8–  
<https://www.childcareexchange.com/catalog/magazine/>
- Gallup Report: Empowering Workplace Culture Through Recognition <https://www.gallup.com/analytics/472658/workplace-recognition-research.aspx#:~:text=20x%20Employees%20who%20receive%20great,commonly%20recognized%20at%20their%20organization.>
- Whitney, Diana, Trosten-Bloom, Amanda and Rader, Kae. *Appreciative Leadership: Focusing on What Works to Drive Winning Performance and Build Thriving Organizations*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2010.
- Websites:  
*All Commons –Resources (articles, videos, books, and workshop materials) focused on Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Change* <https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/>  
*Authentic Happiness - Learn about Positive Psychology through readings, videos, research, surveys, opportunities and more.* <https://authenticappiness.org>

### 10. BEGIN EACH DAY WITH A POSITIVE ATTITUDE!

Every morning you have a choice. Are you going to be a positive thinker or a negative thinker? Positive thinking will energize you. - Jon Gordon

# STAFF MEETING ACTIVITIES

## CREATE A VISION STATEMENT

*This interactive activity provides an opportunity for staff to contribute to a shared vision for the program. First, each person creates a vision board that illustrates the program at its very best. Then, participants engage in concrete and inspirational dialogues about the program's future by sharing their vision boards. A program director or outside facilitator can lead this activity.*

## MATERIALS NEEDED

*Heavy card stock, markers, an assortment of stickers and post-its, magazines to cut up, images or photographs*

- **Create vision boards.** You can create the vision boards during the meeting or provide the materials beforehand and have participants come to the meeting with a vision board. Invite participants to imagine it is one year in the future and to depict their vision of what makes your program vibrant, energized, and an amazing place for children and educators to live and learn together.
- **Facilitate a vision-focused discussion.** Share some thoughts on the importance of having a shared vision. Use any of these or add your own ideas:
  - Provides clarity on where the program is headed
  - Fuels the energy needed to move away from the way we have always done it to what we desire to happen
  - Paints a clear picture of your program operating at its highest level of success
  - Highlights the professional aspirations of everyone in the program
  - Increases the passion, intentionality, and engagement of everyone in the program
  - Builds collaboration that is essential to program-wide transformation
- **Divide the staff into groups** of four to five people and have them do the following:
  - Share their vision boards
  - Summarize the key points of the participants' visions on a flip chart
  - Share their key points with the larger group
- **Form a vision committee.** Ask for a couple of volunteers to join you in crafting a draft vision statement. The committee can begin by creating a summary of the key points from all the groups and then work on a draft vision statement that is clear, compelling, empowering, and motivational. Share the draft(s) with the staff and ask for feedback before finalizing it.
- **Live your vision!** Create visually appealing posters with the vision statement and post them with photos that capture the vision coming to life throughout the program. Use the vision as the foundation for creating relevant professional development goals and learning experiences. Successfully weaving the vision into the daily life of the program will build a renewed sense of purpose and increase engagement.

## RESOURCE:

*This short video clip provides clear and inspiring information for creating vision boards.*

*How to Create a Vision Board – Jack Canfield <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iamZEW0x3dM>*



# HOPES AND DREAMS ACTIVITY

*This easy-to-implement activity guides you in facilitating a meaningful conversation about each teacher's hopes and dreams for the program and their work with children*

## MATERIALS NEEDED

*Index cards and pens. When doing this exercise with multiple constituents, I use a different color index card for the groups (parent, teachers, administrators, board members...)*

## PROCESS:

- 1. **Set the Stage:** Discuss with the group that you would like to get a shared perspective on their hopes and dreams for your program. This exercise can be very broad or specific. For a broad perspective, ask for their hopes and dreams for their program in the next year or two years.*
- 2. **Distribute index cards.** Ask each participant to write their hopes and dreams on index cards, one idea or thought per card.*
- 3. **Collect the cards.***
- 4. **Read the statements back to the group.** People are often reluctant to share and read their own cards, so create opportunities for all the cards to be read without having individuals read their own. You can ask for volunteers to come up and read the cards back to the group with you. Or distribute the cards back to the group and ask everyone to read one — again, ensuring that nobody reads their own card.*
- 5. **Debrief.** After all the cards have been read, ask the group: “What are the common themes? How do the hopes and dreams relate to the continued growth of the program?” Collect all the discussion points on a flip chart.*
- 6. **Create a Hopes and Dreams list.** Type up all thoughts on the index cards and the notes from the debrief. Share them with participants and use them as guide points for facilitating impactful changes in your program.*
- 7. **Optional Activity – Parent’s Hopes and Dreams:** You can repeat the above activity with parents. Their hopes and dreams will be inspirational to the teachers and provide an opportunity to link the parent’s and teacher’s hopes and dreams. After doing this exercise at a parent’s night in my own program, we decided to tie the hopes and dreams into our end-of-the-year family event. We created a video utilizing quotes from the hopes and dreams cards and photos from the school year. It showed the parents that we honored their thoughts and brought them to life daily in the program. The end result was a moving and inspirational evening where parents saw first-hand how valuable their thoughts were in shaping all aspects of our program.*

Created by: Susan MacDonald

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# CREATE A SUCCESS BOARD

## OVERVIEW

An impactful way to illuminate the positive experiences of your learning community is to create opportunities for highlighting what is working well. A success board is a fun, energizing way to visually capture the highpoint experiences of individuals and the group.

## PROCESS

- #1 SET THE TONE** ● Welcome participants into the activity with an energizing piece of music. Check out the link to *31 Songs to Celebrate Success* in the resources below to find a song to inspire your group.
- #2 BE CREATIVE** ● Have fun materials available to entice participation— multi-colored pieces of paper in different sizes and shapes, a variety of markers, colored pens, and stickers.
- #3 REFLECT** ● Ask participants to reflect on their individual moments of success over the past school year. Encourage them to think about all aspects of their work with children, colleagues, parents, and their own professional growth. Remind them that successful moments are not just major achievements, small everyday moments also have an extraordinary impact. Sharing an example from your own work can help others as they begin to think about their success.
- #4 SHARE** ● Fill the room with positive energy by asking individuals to share their successes. Depending on the group size and time constraints, you can do this as a whole group or break into smaller groups (classroom or age group teams work well). If you use small groups, ask each group to share a couple of impactful highlights with the whole group. Debrief after the sharing with a few questions:
  - What are some common themes?
  - What do our successes say about the impact of our work?
  - What helps us to create these positive experiences?
  - How can we continue to be successful in our work together?
- #5 DOCUMENT** ● Ask for a couple of volunteers to create a success board that you can display in your program. Having a visual reminder of the impact of your daily work is inspirational and energizing!
- #6 CELEBRATE** ● After the exercise is complete, have a small celebration for the group. Consider a special treat - a sparkling cider toast with a cheese tray or cake with a thank you message, or handwritten thank you cards.
- #7 OPTIONAL EXTENSIONS** ● **PARENT SUCCESS BOARD.** Provide an opportunity for parents to share the special moments that they experienced. Encourage them to think about impactful everyday moments of joy, wonder, and connection. You could repeat the above activity at an event or provide individual opportunities. Consider asking parents to share their thoughts by sending a letter about this activity and asking them to fill in slips of paper or submit their thoughts to you electronically. Adding the parents' thoughts and ideas to your Success Board will help everyone see that their work matters!

## RESOURCES:

31 Best Songs About Winning, Celebration, Victory, And Success

<https://www.musicgrotto.com/songs-about-winning-celebration-victory-success/>

Beyond "Great Job": Meaningful Ways to Celebrate Success in the Workplace

<https://carriewilliamshowe.com/celebrating-success-at-work/>

# Opportunities to Learn with Susan

## DESIGNING AND FACILITATING INNOVATIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES

Do you have a unique skill or talent that you would like to share with other early childhood professionals? Sharing your knowledge and passion is an impactful way to enhance your professional skills and improve the early childhood field! This four-part interactive workshop series will guide you in creating a professional learning experience that showcases a specific area of interest or expertise you would like to present to early childhood professionals.

Susan MacDonald will use her experience as a professional speaker and instructional designer to support you in identifying an innovative focus for your project and provide a framework for bringing your project to life. This series will focus on:

- Exploring key components of Instructional Design and Adult Learning Theory
- Developing a clear and concise focus for your professional development project. Some possibilities include staff meeting presentations, workshops, webinars, conference sessions, and presentations for parent or board events.
- Understanding how to write learning objectives that focus on meaningful outcomes
- Creating a detailed action plan and a timeline for completing your project
- Providing insightful tips and strategies for facilitating engaging, inspiring, and interactive learning experiences

Participants will have the opportunity to present their ideas and receive feedback from each other. Susan will share a wealth of valuable resources, including information from her soon-to-be-published book – [\*\*101 Ways to Supercharge Professional Development Experiences!\*\*](#)

### **COURSE DATES AND TIMES:**

The live course sessions will be held via Zoom

Cohort 1 from 1:00 - 2:30 pm EST on: [\*\*January 25, February 15, March 7 & 21.\*\*](#)

Cohort 2 from 6:30 - 8:00 pm EST on: [\*\*January 29, February 12, March 4 & 18.\*\*](#)

[\*\*CLICK HERE FOR COURSE DETAILS & REGISTRATION\*\*](#)

## **SUPERCHARGE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT EXPERIENCES!** **JUNE 22-27, 2024, ITALY RETREAT - MERCATELLO SUL METAURO, ITALY**

Are you ready to rethink how you are designing and delivering professional learning experiences? Are you excited to embrace new techniques and strategies for actively engaging participants in their growth and development? This retreat provides fresh ideas for building learning communities where adults are inspired and motivated to be life-long learners. Each day will be filled with interactive experiences that will help you expand your repertoire of activities and practices to create and facilitate impactful professional development.

During this retreat, participants will be active protagonists in group experiences and individual reflections that will guide them in:

- Exploring fresh ideas for bringing fun, joy, and positive interactions into their professional development sessions, team and staff meetings, and parent events.
- Enhancing their ability to provide meaningful and engaging professional development.
- Developing their capacity to implement concrete strategies and techniques for designing professional development that aligns with the needs of the participants.

This retreat is designed for individuals whose work focuses on supporting the professional growth of educators, including school leaders, curriculum coordinators, pedagogistas, coaches, and trainers.

Susan will provide a comprehensive reflection guide containing a wealth of valuable resources, including information from her soon-to-be-published book – [\*\*101 Ways to Supercharge Professional Development Experiences\*\*](#)

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# Susan's Books

## INSPIRING EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERSHIP

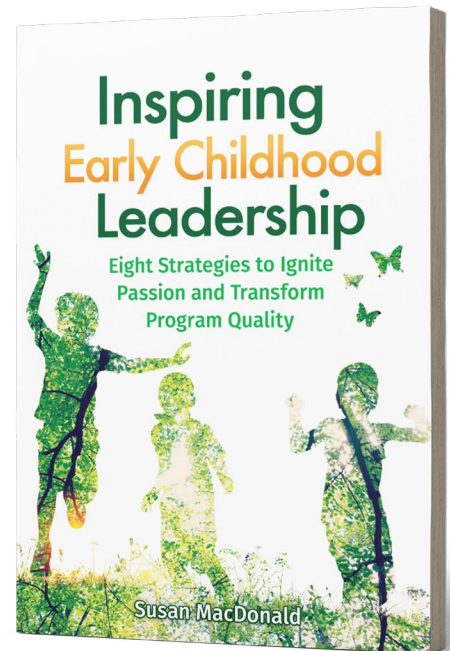
Eight Strategies to Ignite Passion and Transform Program Quality

A positive, strengths-based leadership system is the key to transforming the quality of early childhood programs. Inspiring Early Childhood Leadership lays out strategies designed to support program leaders in finding new ways to reduce the levels of stress on themselves and their staff, and move into a unified, engaging system for leading with passion, intention, and purpose.

Grounded in current research, the book incorporates decades-old best practices, making the strategies appropriate for leaders of all backgrounds. The book addresses common dilemmas:

- How do I motivate and inspire teachers?
- How can I be the most effective in observing and giving nonjudgmental feedback?
- How can I be more confident in my role as a leader?
- How can I manage my time more effectively?

Author Susan MacDonald's goal is to take leaders past their challenges with a vision of new possibilities so they can ensure a high-quality learning environments, fueled by positive, engaging energy.



[CLICK TO PURCHASE](#)

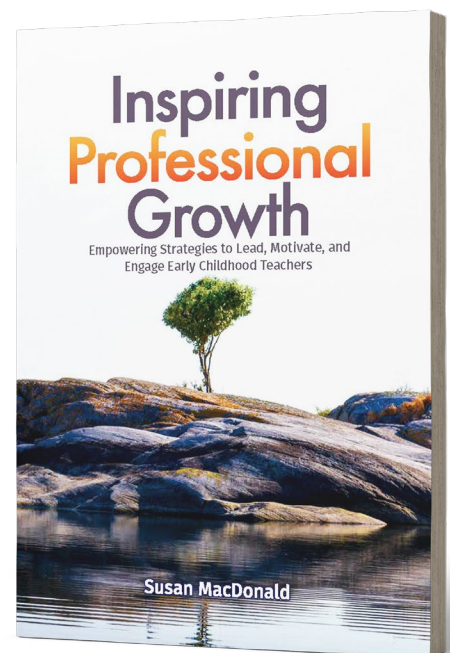
## INSPIRING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Empowering Strategies to Lead, Motivate, and Engage Early Childhood Teachers

You've probably seen it: frustration builds, teacher turnover rises, staff meetings become insufferable, indifference breeds throughout the school. Spark change! When your staff feels supported and empowered to grow and develop their skills, your program and the children will thrive.

Inspiring Professional Growth, the follow-up to Inspiring Early Childhood Leadership, addresses the need for offering nurturing and empowering professional development. This book provides leaders with a framework to create a system that supports teachers throughout their careers.

- Gain confidence in your leadership role
- Establish a growth culture
- Find effective ways to work with challenging staff members
- Cultivate collaboration and collective goal setting
- Facilitate meaningful professional development

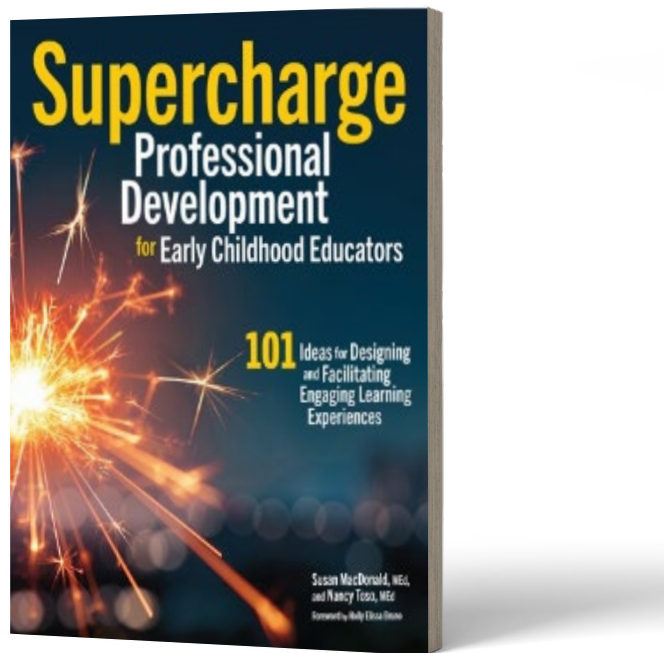


[CLICK TO PURCHASE](#)

# Susan's Books

## **SUPERCARGE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS**

101 Ideas for Designing and Facilitating Engaging Learning Experiences



**CLICK TO PURCHASE**

Bring new energy into your early childhood professional learning experiences! Supercharge Professional Development for Early Childhood Educators empowers trainers, workshop facilitators, and early childhood program leaders to transform their current professional development practices, offering innovative and concrete ideas for supporting educators. The timely and inspiring resources in this handbook will increase engagement, build collaboration, and enhance all aspects of any professional development program. The wealth of information and guidance in this handbook includes:

- 101 specific strategies, tools, and activities featuring well-researched techniques for engaging all adult learners with respect for the unique needs of individuals from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and experiences.
- Inspirational tips and strategies from highly regarded speakers, authors, and researchers, including interviews and video clips available via QR codes.
- Suggested resources for designing and implementing professional learning experiences.
- Planning tools and templates for designing a variety of professional development experiences.
- Examples of workshop activities with adaptations for group size, diverse adult learning styles, and live or virtual events.

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