**Cultivating Creativity in Young Children**

As Halloween approaches, I am reminded to dust off my tooth fairy costume in preparation for the big day. Donned in a white robe, wings, and a sash holding “just in case” supplies like dental floss and coins for unexpected lost teeth, it has become tradition for me to flit down the hall from room to room with my toothbrush wand reminding children to brush their teeth after consuming the traditional trick or treat candy that night. Children take the clean tooth pledge, and faculty members are awarded happy tooth stickers as evidence of their class’s commitment.

Of course, I’m not the only one clad in fantasy clothing that day. There are princesses, dragons, cowboys, and superheroes all dressed for the occasion. This day of make believe creates memories for young children that will last a lifetime, but as early childhood educators, we have the opportunity to nurture the creative and imaginative spirit in children each day. From story time to the dress up corner, playground, and beyond, children are often provided opportunities to engage in pretend and play activities. Daniel Pink, author of *A Whole New Mind*, names creativity as an essential 21st century skill and validates the importance of developing this quality in order to prepare for the challenges of the future.

As early learning educators, we must continue to seek new and innovative ways to foster creative thinking in young children. In addition to professional development opportunities such as the recently held Florida Kindergarten Council Convention in Orlando, a wealth of information is literally at our fingertips. Social media networks such as *Twitter* and *Pinterest* now connect us with educators throughout the world that share the same passion for developing young minds filled with inventive ideas. Model the love of learning by becoming acquainted with these resources if you have not done so already.

We have a unique opportunity to influence the future through active engagement in the lives of early learners. By providing open-ended experiences through manipulative play, art, storytelling, journaling, conversation, and more, we can have a profound influence on the potential of the children we serve. Embrace the challenge of cultivating the creative talents of tomorrow’s global citizens, and enjoy being a part of their world of wonder today. And one last thing……..don’t forget to brush your teeth!