I attended the Ball State University Early Childhood Conference on October 22, 2005. The conference was designed for teachers who work with young children, and most of the people attending were preschool teachers, daycare teachers, and kindergarten teachers. I was a presenter with Heather Schilling and Candy Preston, but we also went to some of the other sessions. I gained a lot of knowledge and ideas from presenting and from listening.

The keynote speaker at the conference was Judy Fujawa, an early childhood educator and author. I took a lot from her keynote address, “The Wonder-Filled World of Young Children through Snapshots, Stories, and Song.” She used the three elements in the title of her address to remind the educators to keep the wonder in children. She used the letters from the word wonder to make her points.

She defined wonder as the state of mind produced by something new, unexpected, or extraordinary. I thought about our methods classes, and the way I am taught to teach. Manchester College pushes for hands-on activities, guided discovery, and children constructing their own knowledge. That is what it means to keep the wonder in children. I really had to reflect on some of the lessons I had written over the years. Even though they have not been taught to students, they are still a reflection of how I would teach a subject. I not think that all of them are designed to instill and keep the wonder in children. I need to do better.

She discussed giving children opportunities to discover and invent with interesting materials, as well as providing meaningful experiences. In an education world that tells me I do not have enough time for anything except literacy and math, this was an educator telling me that I need to give my students large blocks of uninterrupted time to explore and build their own
knowledge. Before I get my own classroom, I need to really think about how I can find a happy medium to meet all the standards and give my students time to discover and wonder.

The keynote speaker really gave me some great ideas about how to use interesting materials, but mostly she gave me ideas upon which to reflect. How do I want my classroom to be? I want the wonder-filled children, but I have to create the situation in my classroom so they can wonder, question, and discover on their own.

I also learned a great deal from my own presentation, but in a different sense. Presenting at a professional conference was a first for me. We presented “Encouraging Emergent Literacy: Activities to Engage Preschoolers.” I was able to talk about some activities that I did with my special needs preschoolers during the Early Learners Grant time. We gave them ideas and materials for literacy activities, and we also invited them to share and elaborate on our ideas. I think that is best way to learn as a professional. I was there as a presenter, and I was gathering new ideas from the audience. They had all kinds of ideas about how to change and elaborate or adapt our ideas.

I really learned how important professional discussion and development truly is for teachers. I am not alone in the education of my students. I will have a multitude of ideas around me in my school in the other teachers. It is also something that I can put into practice now. My classmates are professionals, and we can really help each other by sharing ideas, lessons, and thoughts on important topics. We learn from each other.

The conference was a great experience, both as a member of an audience and as a presenter. There is so much I can learn from professionals out there, and there is much to be learned from the children. Hearing stories about children can teach lessons about children everywhere.