

Using Shaving Cream in the Classroom

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So here's what started to happen: I'd be at a gig, doing a hands-on session and I would start to demonstrate a shaving cream activity and as I reached for the can my brain would go into this slow-mo matrix kind of feel because I could already feel the energy change in the audience! I would brace myself, and say (to myself) "Here it comes! Be ready!" And sure enough, as soon as I would start to shake the can... BAM! It started!! One hand up. Two hands up. Three hands up! Then I'd say to myself, "Here we go..." And the comments that followed were always the same.

WE ARE NOT ALLOWED TO USE SHAVING CREAM IN THE CLASSROOM!

I try very hard to not displace my frustration onto the workshop participants. They didn't make the rule. They are trying to figure it out. Trying to find a compromise. Trying to change it. (Or break it!) My frustration is typically not with people in the audience, it's with the people (and, for the record, who are they anyway???) who are making the rules.

I look at the can of shaving cream. I think to myself, "Good grief! Why is it under such attack?" I step away from the activity tables and announce, "We are now, once again, deviating from our regularly scheduled program so that you can hear my now oft-presented monologue about shaving cream!" From California to New York to Florida to Maine I hear the same thing over and over... no more shaving cream. What I do **not** hear are rational reasons why this (supposedly) deadly toxic hazardous substance is no longer allowed.

In Florida (long before I moved here) this issue built so much momentum that folks actually started to tell me that it was a *law*. A law?!?! Yes, a law. When I pushed for specifics (you *voted* on this??) they back-pedaled a little and said yeah, well, it's not a *law*, it's a *statement* from Department of Health saying shaving cream was no longer allowed in child care centers. So I called them. No one in the department was aware of such a statement. I asked if they would put it in writing and mail it to me. They did. In a letter dated December 23, 2005 the Florida Department of Health stated, "The Department of Health/ School Health Program does not establish regulations for preschools and child care facilities."

I also called Colgate Palmolive, headquartered in New York City on December 21, 2005. I spoke with Emily Lowenstein in Consumer Affairs who informed me that, "Shaving cream itself is non-toxic and not harmful in any way to human life." I asked for a follow up letter on company letterhead. In a letter dated January 6, 2006 she wrote, "You can be assured that Colgate-Palmolive will introduce products into the marketplace only after their ingredients have established an exhaustive scientific record of safety and efficacy."

My concern is that as early childhood educators we are giving up our power. As a profession we are guilty of accepting too many rules, regulations and policies at face value without having been a part of their design and we are willing to implement them without thinking critically about them. We let too many people boss us around. Now I am not telling you to be rude to anyone - I am saying we need to be better advocates for good practice, need to get better at standing up for ourselves and need to start questioning ridiculous policies! The real issue at hand has nothing to do with a can of shaving cream per se, it's about finding our collective voice and using it.

Reality check: Starting to question **does not** mean that we spend all day challenging everything and everyone that comes into the room! But it does mean that when we are told we can't do something, we speak up and ask, "Why not?"

What page is it on?

In no particular order I offer, for your reading pleasure, my stock - yet heartfelt & honest - responses to the most frequent comments I get regarding shaving cream. But before I do, I am going to share with you the point I believe to be most important in this silly debate: if you **trust me** on a daily basis with the lives of children, in a 12:1 ratio, (or whatever your ratio is) who are actively playing inside and out, climbing up slides and on playground structures, splashing in water tables, digging in sand boxes and maybe even interacting with animals, **yet don't think I can be trusted to appropriately supervise their exploration of the contents of a can of shaving cream**, we have a whole different and much more serious problem on our hands.

breathe

FIRST COMMENT: The can says, "keep out of reach of children."

RESPONSE: So does toothpaste, hand sanitizer, hand soap... the list goes on! If this is the card that is going to get played, then we need to be consistent. If one thing in the building with a "keep out of the reach of children" label gets banned then *everything* in the building with the same labels needs to be treated the same way. Not just the item (in this case the shaving cream) that someone doesn't like and finds to be "messy," fun, inconvenient or whatnot.

Reality check: True statement! In many cases, the can *does* say that. But here comes the loophole! Keep the *can* out of reach of children. When exploring shaving cream on a table or in the sensory tub the adult is the dispenser of the cream, make sure you provide enough for exploration and when the children are finished exploring, the can gets put back in the cupboard. If this is the compromise, take it. It's better than not being able to use it at all.

SECOND COMMENT: Shaving cream is hazardous.

RESPONSE: Not true. The cream itself is not going to kill anyone. Unless they eat the can. And the cream. Just kidding! But seriously, if you are a person who isn't going to notice a kid hunkered down in the book center noshing on a plate of Barbasol, you need a new job. Shaving cream itself is not a hazardous or toxic substance. If it was, people would not be putting it on their faces and legs. But if you want to get technical, the *aerosol* propellant that pushes the cream out of the can could be considered hazardous... **IF THE KIDS ARE HUFFING THE EMPTY CANS!** And, again, seriously, if a group of four-year-olds huddled behind the the block area passing around an empty can isn't grabbing your attention, you probably need to be fired. Good gracious!

Next up, a series of random but related commentary!

RANDOM, YET RELATED: Part A

The "Well Well Well, Isn't That Ironic" essay challenge of the day is as follows: Some programs are NOT allowed to use shaving cream because of the aerosol propellant but ARE allowed to use foam paint that is propelled out via (wait for it) aerosol. Discuss.

RANDOM, YET RELATED: Part B

Three "Let's Be Proactive" Tips: 1) Make a list of all the amazing things you can do with shaving cream. For bonus points, drop in some of the concepts children are learning about and being exposed to when you use shaving cream in the classroom, 2) Compile letters of love from past clients, parents, families in support of activities such as shaving cream, 3) Ask to be on the agenda of your next staff meeting or school board meeting and present your findings.

RANDOM, YET RELATED: Part C

A potential compromise (and/or) something neat to explore: Use the old fashion shave powder. The *what?* Get shaving POWDER and add water and then let the children mix it in a shaving cup with a

shaving brush! This is a neat experience in and of itself! Look for these items in a drug store or ask the pharmacist. Take pictures. Post it on Instagram. Celebrate your loophole discovering ability!

RANDOM, YET RELATED: Part D

Reminder of the Day: If we are going to put our eggs in the “we can’t use it because it’s hazardous” basket then we must be consistent and examine ALL the products in the school environment that have a cautionary label. (Kitchen ingredients, bathroom supplies, bug sprays, pest control products, yard sprays & chemicals, air fresheners, cleaning products, etc.) Not just the shaving cream!

THIRD COMMENT: But we are not allowed to use it.

RESPONSE: Who told you that?

COMMENT: My director, boss, lead teacher, co-teacher, principal, etc.

RESPONSE: Who told them that?

COMMENT: I don’t know.

RESPONSE: Find out.

Seriously! Are you being held accountable to fact? Or fiction? A rule? Or a personal preference? And if it is a fact, then what page is it on? Fake rules (read: personal preferences) as in, “I don’t *like* shaving cream so I am going to tell all the new teachers that it is not allowed. No one said we can’t do it, I just don’t want to be bothered.”

Find out.

FOURTH COMMENT: Licensing says we aren’t allowed to use it.

RESPONSE: Have you read your licensing regulations? Do you have a marked up, oft-referenced copy on hand as a go-to resource? ****crickets crickets****

If you have not read your regs then someone else has all the power and you have to take their word for it. And by “read the regs” I don’t mean memorize, I mean be familiar enough with them to know if a specific regulation stating **YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO USE SHAVING CREAM** is actually written in them. Licensing’s job is to enforce the regs, not interpret them.

FULL DISCLOSURE: Years back I got frustrated with how prevalent it seemed to be that *licensing* was the default excuse for not being able to do this or do that, so I took it upon myself to read all the regs for all the states to see for myself what they all actually did and did not allow. And while the ins and outs of that project could be its own article, for the sake of staying on topic, when it came to shaving cream, at the time of this original writing (2006) it was not a banned substance. You could use it no matter what state you lived in. I did the heavy lifting last time, you’ll need to read your regs and see if anything has changed - it’ll be good for you anyway. We need to have working knowledge of anything we are expected to be aligned with. If we don’t, then the person who does is the one with the power. Taking someone’s word (or personal interpretation) as gospel as to what a document says without having read it ourselves can backfire. At some point we must take responsibility and do our own homework.

FIFTH COMMENT: We can’t do shaving cream because we do ECERS / FCCERS / ITERS.

SIDEBAR before I respond: There is something you need to know. And it’s kind of a big deal. When people tell me they can’t use shaving cream because of being aligned with a rating scale it tells me that they are being held accountable to a document they have not been expected to read. For me this is a serious problem. But I digress.

RESPONSE, PART I: Nowhere in **ECERS-3** does it say you can’t use shaving cream. I can confidently say to someone, “Please show me where it says I can’t” because I’ve read it and because I’ve read it I know it doesn’t say anything of the sort. So the burden of proof is on the naysayer.

RESPONSE, PART II: The **FCCERS-3** it doesn't mention "shaving cream" anywhere in the document. However, I could see how there might be pushback from a naysayer in the "art" section - unless you read it all the way through - as it states that with proper supervision (meaning an adult is within an arms reach of the child) you *can* use items that "are not recommended for children under the age of 3" (I could see someone saying this about shaving cream) unless it specifically says "toxic" on the label. Which shaving cream does not. So if shaving cream is a developmentally appropriate activity choice for your group (regardless of how old they are) you can use it but if your evaluator shows up, and there are children under the age of 3 using it, you need to be within arms reach of the children or it could lower your score.

RESPONSE, PART III: The **ITERS-3** it does not specifically say you can't use shaving cream, but it implies that *the can* (like sharpie markers, small beads, loose marker lids and other choking hazards) cannot be *accessible*. So in theory, if exploring shaving cream is an appropriate activity for the group, they can *use* the cream, but technically they shouldn't be able to access the can themselves. It continues to say that with proper supervision (meaning an adult is within an arms reach of the child) you *can* use items that "are not recommended for children under the age of 3" unless it specifically says "toxic" on the label. Which again, shaving cream does not. So if your ITERS evaluator walks in and you are doing shaving cream, as long as you are within arms reach of the children (which I'm sure you would be anyway) you are just fine.

Now, in the same room, same situation, same scenario, if the evaluator comes in and the cans of shaving cream are *accessible* on the table or there are *accessible* cans on the floor at your feet or extra cans on an open *accessible* shelf you probably will get a lower score because the cans are *accessible*, not because you are doing shaving cream.

At this point it is important to point out that the **ITERS-3** scale covers a very wide wide age range. Believing that older toddlers should have opportunities to explore sensory materials like shaving cream is very different than thinking the same material is appropriate for infants. And I hope that common sense, not a policy, is what dictates that we aren't doing shaving cream in the baby room!

As I wrap this up I want to state something that I have said in other articles, *choosing* to get a 1 or a 2 is different than *being given* a 1 or a 2. In my world this is big difference as it's a reflection of my intention, not just semantics and word play. What do I mean by this? I mean that if I have hired a team of people who have made a choice to have shaving cream accessible and they can articulate the thought process behind their choice instead of running and hiding and freaking out when someone with a clipboard walks in, I'll take the hit (along with articulate staff!) any day of the week! It is my intention to have people working with young children who can articulate clearly and confidently the intention behind their choices. Which is so very different than just saying, "We aren't allowed to do that."

Breathe

I'm sure that at some point you will get to hear my shaving cream monologue first hand! But until then, I wanted to be sure this was up on the new website for anyone who might need to give it a (re)read and maybe use it as a resource. Stay strong. Keep your chin up and know you are surrounded by colleagues who encourage your advocacy and your passion. Remember: he who owns the language owns the debate.

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