

Reflections....

September 28, 2019

Macculloch Hall Roundtable 2019 – Really Seeing Children Mary Porcelli

On a beautiful Saturday morning at the end of September, a group of educators gathered for the first roundtable discussion of the year at Macculloch Hall Historical Museum in Morristown. We were teachers, administrators, college professors, and students. Some were old friends and some new to the group. Our host, Cynthia Winslow, shared stories of learning activities offered during the museum's summer program and invited us into the garden to find "poet-tree" under the Magnolia, the Holly, and the Sassafras trees. We decorated garden journals made from recycled envelopes and had an opportunity to wander through the garden before breaking into small groups for discussions.



The topic for this year's roundtables is "Really Seeing Children". The discussions will be supported by readings from the book of the same name, *Really Seeing Children* by Deb Curtis. Saturday's discussion was focused on cultivating the ability and skills to understand how and what children are learning.

Some of us gathered under the sassafras tree, others on the back porch. Once we began pulling apart the ideas from the book guided by discussion questions provided by Cynthia, the conversation began, stories tumbled out, connections were made, and ideas were sparked.



We shared the challenges of looking at children's work through the lens of our own lived experiences. When we seek to document children's learning, we can make mistakes about what is really going on because of our own implicit biases. However, if we slow down and take a close look at what is happening, we might see things that we hadn't noticed. One way to do this is to discuss thoughts and ideas about children with colleagues. In sharing puzzlements with others, it is possible to break through our own lens to get a clearer picture of the child.

Another dialogue was centered on the Lillian Katz quote, "We overestimate children academically and underestimate them intellectually." For children to become lifelong learners and engaged thinkers, it is the intellectual pursuits that should take precedence. However, academic learning, seen in so many data driven classrooms these days, is about skills and tasks. Often there does not seem to be time set aside for children to wonder or for teachers to take the time for seeing children.



Building relationships with children and families was a thread through all our conversations. Knowing the children well and understanding who they are and what is happening in their lives can give us insight into their thinking and behavior.



As the morning drew to a close, we came back together to share our insights. It wasn't surprising that in our discussions we came to similar conclusions. Seeing children is not simply observing and writing notes. It is about slowing down and taking time. It's reflecting alone and with others. It's about moving away from what we want to believe or what we think we see and seeking out the point of view of the child. Only then can we consider where to go next.

Join us at our next roundtable on November 2 at Voyagers Community School in Eatontown.
We will be considering how to plan the environment to so that we can really see children.