

Reflections...
November 2, 2019

Voyagers Community School Roundtable 2019 – Really Seeing Children

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On November 2, 2109, a group of educators committed to noticing, celebrating and extending the creative and cognitive capacities of children joined NJEEPRE for the second roundtable of the year at Voyagers Community School in Eatontown. The topic for this roundtable focused on the role of provocations, materials exploration and reflection in supporting educators to *see children* and *see children with others*. The group discussions were based on sections 2 and 3 of *Really Seeing Children* by Deb Curtis. The dialogue included conversations about creating organic and aesthetically pleasing spaces, the “less is more” theory, and how to slow down and see children’s eagerness for relationships.



Upon entering Voyager school, our host Diana Cascone invited us to take a tour of the school using a provocation ***Can you spot???*** We used the list provided to find many interesting pieces of documentation, equipment, tools, materials and projects that represented a learning environment that supported both the children and the teacher’s work.

During our opening gathering, we were asked to introduce ourselves by sharing a personal novel or interesting fact about ourselves – even people who had worked together for many years were surprised to learn something

new from a colleague. We had an interesting mix of attendees, amongst them - a veteran, skate boarder, a world traveler, and a Peace Corp volunteer. It is no wonder we have so many perspectives about education. This sharing made it possible for us to begin to form new relationships and connections to one another and continue a path of reflection in our small groups.



Small group topics were guided by discussion questions based on ideas presented in the chapter readings. We were asked to think about the ways we are treated that make us feel as though we are seen and heard by our families, colleagues, friends and community. This sparked a lively conversational sharing about the need to be listened to and the need to listen to one another. How do we support children in these ways and follow their lead in nurturing self-awareness, esteem and their desire to play together? It is only through listening that we can begin to see each other, and really see children as competent and capable. Being heard allows us to feel open to sharing our ideas and talents without judgement. Conversely, being intentionally present affords us the opportunity for collaboration, reflection and relationship building.

Complementary conversations focused on empathy and making the kind acts that children carry out every-day visible to others. We referred to an excerpt from our readings where Deb Curtis noted recent research findings such as "*children actually understand love and morality before they are three.*" At one time it was thought that very young children could not exhibit sympathy for others, but day in and day out we see examples in the classroom. Marveling at and documenting these moments through panels and books, not only honors children, but also gives them the opportunity to revisit their prior experiences and develop positive social interactions.

Some of us engaged in dialogue about materials in the classroom and how they can be transformed into open invitations for children to explore and

create. We considered the complexity of allowing our work with children to unfold in a way that responds to the children's exploration without being preoccupied with standards. Although challenging, it was agreed that if we continue to see children and help them to see themselves by providing an environment with possibilities for rich investigations, our focus will stay clear. Once again, we referred to an excerpt from our readings: *"Seeing children – noticing the details of their action and words and seeking their perspective to catch a glimpse of how they experience the world – brings joy and deeper understanding to my work and life."* When we note and help children notice the detail of their discoveries through conversation and images, we deepen our own understanding as well.



Another group thought a good deal about the amount of materials in the classroom and how they should be organized in a way that is inviting and not too overwhelming. That led to an analysis of group projects and the benefits of working in small groups versus the whole group. It was agreed that project work involving an initial core group can provide a natural opportunity for children to share the learning process with their peers. When we create opportunities for children to be seen in a competent light, they can see themselves as valuable contributors to collaborative work.

As the morning ended, we came back together to share reflections from our small group experience. Many of the team leaders focused on the value of teacher/child engagement, quiet observation and intentional invitations as being the key to help children notice the details of their discoveries. Visualizing yourself in relation to others was a good way to really see children and how they might feel and experience life at school with their friends and teachers. It is through staying present in the moment with children and being open to seeing the complex ways in which they work and interact that we create a culture of really seeing children.

Join us at our next roundtable on Saturday, February 8th, 2020 @ 9:00-12:00 pm

A Child's Place School, Lincroft NJ. We will be considering the role of the teacher-researcher in our daily practice of studying more about how children learn.