

Book Study Reflections, October 2019

Lynn Kulik

Our first in-depth Book club met to discuss Ann Pelo and Margie Carter's book From Teaching to Thinking was held on Thursday, Oct 10th held at Union Cong Nursery School from 6:00pm-8:00pm

Lynn Kulik and Kathleen Berkowitz had a lovely conversation about the first four chapters. We highlighted passages that spoke to us and dove into what it means to be a pedagogical leader that embraces thinking with our colleagues. Our favorite quote was the "power of the Awake mind" The reflection style of the book was refreshing giving us the ability to examine two different voices and their thoughts. We liked the comparison of teachers to students and that a leader using a collaboration style with their teachers will reconnect a teacher to the "why" something is being done; hopefully helping a teacher feel comfortable with stepping out of their comfort zone. We agreed how easy it is for leaders to fall into the fix it mentality and shared ways to try to allow educators to take risks in their teaching and ultimately ask the question of "why am I doing this activity?" The 4th chapter challenged leaders to connect to the schools' mission, vision and values to keep leaders and their colleague's teachers grounded in their practice. At the end we both had ideas we wanted to implement and try in the coming months.

November and December 2019

Kathy Berkowitz

In November, we continued our book study *from Teaching to Thinking*, chapters five through seven. A new way of thinking about professional learning became evident. As leaders we asked the questions, "Are we creating a culture of inquiry within our organization? Is it all encompassing, promoting community and collaboration, fostering relationships with all stakeholders?"

Ann Pelo writes, "*Professional learning is focused on bringing teachers, children, families, and administrators together as a research collective - as a community that learns.*"

The contrast to this type of professional development was "*drive-through training.*" We immediately had the image of getting quick, convenient, training hours - "fast food". In contrast, we need to take our time, ask meaningful questions, be thoughtful, self-reflective - "slow food", as the authors say, a new avenue for professional learning.

The pedagogical leader must hold the space for inquiry creating a culture of practice, a practice of research and study and one that includes families. Is our parent participation a more "passive, teacher-directed role for parents"? How can we create new relationships with parents, move to a new mindset, a new language, true partnerships, alliances?

Our first Zoom meeting in December was a success as we discussed chapters eight and nine on the Thinking Lens as a tool for research! "*The Thinking Lens invites us to work mindfully*

within our subjectivity, as we co-construct meaning and action.” It is a tool, a protocol for thinking, for the teacher to better understand him/herself and how that affects working with the children. *“If we don’t pause to notice our responses, we react. But when we stop to feel what we feel, we can spin forward into inquiry, inventiveness, and intentionality in our teaching.”* This way of working leads to teacher research. In becoming a teacher researcher, we must ask more questions as opposed to delivering more answers, be more aware of our values and intentions in our work.

Our new word of the day was, Hyperoppery! It means to look beyond the surface, to see over and through. How can we look “through” the children’s play and “see” deeper into their experiences?

Our conversation concluded with how our own beliefs and values play into our everyday life with the children. *“We do not really see through our eyes or hear through our ears, but through our beliefs. When we observe children, we observe them through our beliefs, our expectations and blind spots, our life experiences . . . The Thinking Lens doesn’t ask us to strip away these lens - which would be impossible - but to be conscious of them, to know they exist, and to work mindfully with them.”*

January 2020

Eleanora Linder

Our fourth book study stimulated a contemplative discussion of chapters 10 & 11 of our book *from Teaching to Thinking* by Ann Pelo and Margie Carter. The authors continued to challenge our “thinking lenses” into the world of embracing the many perspectives of others. In doing so, we would find ourselves expanding and connecting in ways that only solidify and authenticate our community of researchers. Disequilibrium is a given as we explore coming together this way. This is a good thing, in fact “a lively place to make camp.”

As inspired educators intent on valuing all perspectives ~ the child’s being of utmost worth ~ we teach children about empathy and generosity of spirit as they navigate through differences and conflicts with one another. As we use this thinking lens we are reminded of a practice that intentionally, thoughtfully and reflectively:

1. Takes the children’s points of view (What are they trying to figure out? What are the interactions? What is the challenge? Are they exploring understandings/misunderstandings?)
2. Examines the environment. How does the environment shape the child’s experience ~ the materials, the time allotted, the role of the teacher in creating an invitation for awareness, exploration, expansion and relationship?
3. Collaborates with others to expand our perspectives. Our favorite quote was the voice of Carla Rinadi, “If you believe that others are a source of your learning, your identity, and your knowledge, you have opened a very important door to the joy of being together. We are not separated by our differences but connected by our difference. It is because of my difference that I am useful to you because I offer another perspective.”

The group commented on how indeed do we see children as they enter into conflicts and disequilibrium with their peers? How are natural interactions with the world and others a home for perspective taking, curiosity, hypothesis, direct influence? What is really going on? We all have our perceptions and pre-existing perspectives and views of what we think is happening. A simple water & bubble play engagement can render different observational perspectives. Is this

about the science of bubble formation ~ how are they formed? Is this about the sensual pleasure as the child explores texture, touch, etc. Is this about relationship ~ bath time at home as a loving ritual with family members? Children in the dramatic play area create kitty scenarios. Was it about being good or misbehaving? And if this hypothesis is right, how would an educator nurture, and present an environment for the children to further explore and consider?

We discussed the challenges of new teachers making new pathways in the field of early childhood education where teacher-directed curriculum, standard assessments of teaching strategies and lesson plans, and classroom environments stifle the creative mind, the mind free to take on new perspectives from the child, the families, and other teacher-researchers. How can we encourage and open the hearts and minds of our teachers and empower them as advocates of change? Advocates of disequilibrium perhaps? Strong and brilliant thinkers and planners.

Yes, planners. Chapter 11 brought us to a practical pedagogical practice that turned this word “on its head!” We do not plan for a particular outcome or expectations to meet some standard and pre-conceived knowledge to attain. No! We can plan for experiences, environments, mindsets that nurture the development of the child as a thinker. We must honor a child’s “purpose inside their play.”

The Thinking Lens model says an educator co-creates and becomes a companion to children investigating projects, questioning and embracing knowledge and understanding to “strengthen children’s thinking about their pursuits.” Educators are self-aware of their own perspectives and offer an array to children to honor their “intellectual, emotional and relational meaning” of their play. Loris Malaguzzi one of the founders of the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy reminds us to think of the hundred possibilities for the meaning and direction of children’s play.

In closing we had more questions than answers ~ as usual! I guess you can say we were able to look through a *Thinking Lens* as presented by Ann Pelo and Margie Carter and let our disequilibrium, our perspectives, our collaborative conversation as teacher-researchers come forth to bring us closer to one another and therefore inspire and enhance our understanding, points of view and advancement!