



CHILD'S PLAY: Listening to our children can help us see things better.

PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

Showing our interest can cultivate theirs

SCHOOL OF THOUGHT
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A COLLEAGUE and I have been working on a project where we are seeking to listen to children. We want to understand children's perspectives about being in nature, about the places and creatures and features that interest them.

So, we are spending time with groups of children at a nature reserve. We have given children cameras to capture what matters to them, and we have asked them to show us and tell us, and to draw pictures so that we remember and can show others.

The children were so excited

to be with adults interested in understanding their perspectives. They led us around the nature reserve pointing out things they wanted us to notice, telling us about their experiences and their theories and ideas.

This is important for educators and parents to remember – children are making meaning all the time, and they long for us to stop and listen. So often we forget to listen and our focus as teachers seems to always be about imparting our knowledge.

Or, we are just too busy. We are rushing children on to “next” and interrupting their meaning-making, their conversations, play, and work, to get to the next place or the next piece of content. How often do we consciously give time to stopping and listening to chil-

“ HOW OFTEN DO WE CONSCIOUSLY GIVE TIME TO STOPPING AND LISTENING TO CHILDREN?

dren? And, to giving them enough time to make meaning and to share their ideas and understandings?

I learned so much from being with children and letting them take the lead. They were curious, they wanted us to see *with* them, to appreciate light, sounds, and discoveries.

One child, Fraser, taught us all about the elkhorn and stag-horn ferns. Some of us had noticed the nest-like mounds on the rainforest trees.

Fraser helped us understand how the fern grew and so our inquiry widened and our dis-

covery learning and delight expanded as we saw more and more ferns hidden amongst the forest. Forget Pokémon, we were excited about ferns!

I also learned afresh how by just “being there” we were supporting children's learning. Being present fuelled children's interests and engagement.

Showing *our* interest cultivated *their* interest and conversation and discovery learning.

We didn't take over, we were ‘just there being with and seeing with’. ‘We’ were actually essential to what happened. Not our knowledge or our wisdom, but our presence and interest.

As we look over the photos taken of the interactions, our presence really stands out.

There is a myriad of pictures of adults being awe-struck at what children are saying and sharing, of heads bent together

noticing something important, of adults looking with children to see what they are pointing at, of a child taking an adult's hand and leading them to a special spot to observe something inviting – the sparkles in a rock, a hidey hole for animals in the roots of a tree, or the shimmer of a spider web.

Learning is brought to life when we pay attention to one another and involve ourselves in face-to-face, person-to-person caring-for and being-there.

It is a wonderful thing to become receptive to children and what matters to *them*.

Children see the details, and the magic and extraordinary in the ordinary. Listening to children helps us see. It helps us see through our jaded, unseeing eyes, to see what was previously unnoticed, and to engage in the wonder of life.

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