

Really Seeing Children

With Deb Curtis

Session 1- Becoming a Teacher Researcher

In this session, you will:

- Learn to use a “Thinking Lens” for reflecting on your observations of children.
- Develop observation skills, including using photography to collect and study the details of children’s competence.
- Understand the nature of children’s brains and how this impacts their sensory/motor development and learning.
- Complete an assessment of the Sensory Motor Elements in your Environment



It is not easy to Really See Children

or offer children what they deserve and could benefit
from

Complexity of caring for and educating groups of
young children

Sharing the care and education of children
with their families

Negotiating the promise as well as the potential
problems in working with regulations
and outcomes.

Where do we Begin



We want to know what the children think, feel and wonder. We believe that the children will have things to tell each other and us that we have never heard before. We are always listening for a surprise and the birth of a new idea. This practice supports a searching together for new meaning. Together we can become a community of seekers.

Louise Boyd Cadwell

What is your response to this quote? How does it relate to your work with children?

What should we practice?

- Slowing Down
- Seeing yourself as a teacher researcher
- Understanding the nature of children's brains
- Observing closely for the details of children's actions and ideas rather than their behavior
- Taking photos to help you see
- Waiting before responding
- Studying notes and photos to make meaning





Let's Practice
with
Marco's Idea



Moses'
Idea



Think about what
would you do in this
situation?
Why?

Did your thinking include reference to your values or learning goals for the children?

How might the environment and materials be impacting this situation?

To what extent did you think about details that engaged your curiosity and show the children's competence?

Did you consider the children's point of view?

What other perspectives might you consider (families, director, co-teacher, regulations)?

How did exploring these kinds of questions influence your idea about what you would do?



Cultivate Yourself as a Reflective Teacher

Use a Thinking Lens

Know Yourself

Examine the physical/ social/emotional environment

Find the details of the competent child that engage your heart and mind

Take the child's point of view

Collaborate with others to expand perspectives

Reflect and take action

Knowing yourself

What captures my attention as the children engage, explore and interact?

What delights me as I watch and listen?

What in my background and values is influencing my response to this situation and why?

What adult perspectives, i.e. standards, health and safety, time, goals are on my mind?

Finding the details of the competent child that engage your heart and mind

What do I notice in the children's faces and actions?

Where do I see examples of children's strengths and competencies?

What do I think is valuable about this experience?

Seeking the child's point of view

What is the child drawn to and excited about?

What might the child be trying to accomplish?

Why might the child be interacting with others this way?

What developmental themes, ideas or theories might the child be exploring?

Examining the physical/social/emotional environment

How is the organization and use of the physical space and materials impacting this situation?

How could we strengthen relationships here?

How are schedules and routines influencing this experience?

Considering multiple perspectives

How might the child's culture and family background be influencing this situation?

What questions might we ask to get the perspective of the child's family?

Who else or what other perspectives should we consider?

What child development or early learning theories should we consider in this experience?

What desired early learning outcomes do I see reflected here?

Considering opportunities and possibilities for next steps

What values, philosophy and desired outcomes do I want to influence my response?

What new or existing relationships could be strengthened?

Which learning goals could be focused on here?

What other materials and activities could be offered to build on this experience?

What new vocabulary could we begin to use?

A Thinking Lens™ for Reflection and Inquiry



Know yourself



Examine the physical/social/emotional environment



Find the details of the child's competence that engage your heart and mind



Seek the child's perspective



Collaborate with others to expand perspectives.

Consider opportunities and possibilities for action





Practice
Seeing
Details with
Photos

Meet up with
children's minds
not their
behavior



Oscar's Idea





Kiran's Idea

Use the Thinking Lens for Reflection

Know Yourself

What is your reaction to this story? What captured your attention as you heard the story and saw the photo?

How might the environment and materials be impacting this situation?

Find the details of the children's competence

What details did you hear in the children's actions and interactions that show their skills and competence.

Seek the children's point of view.

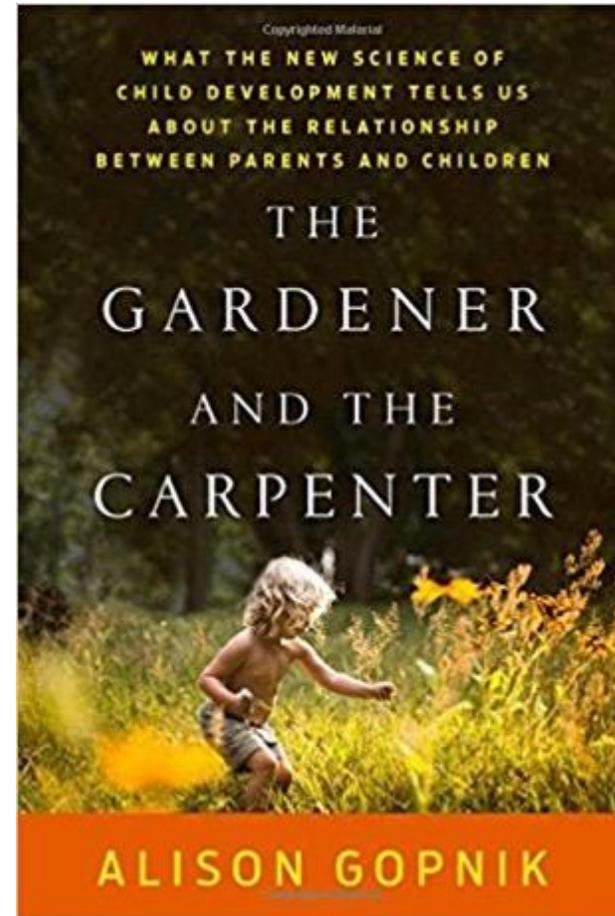
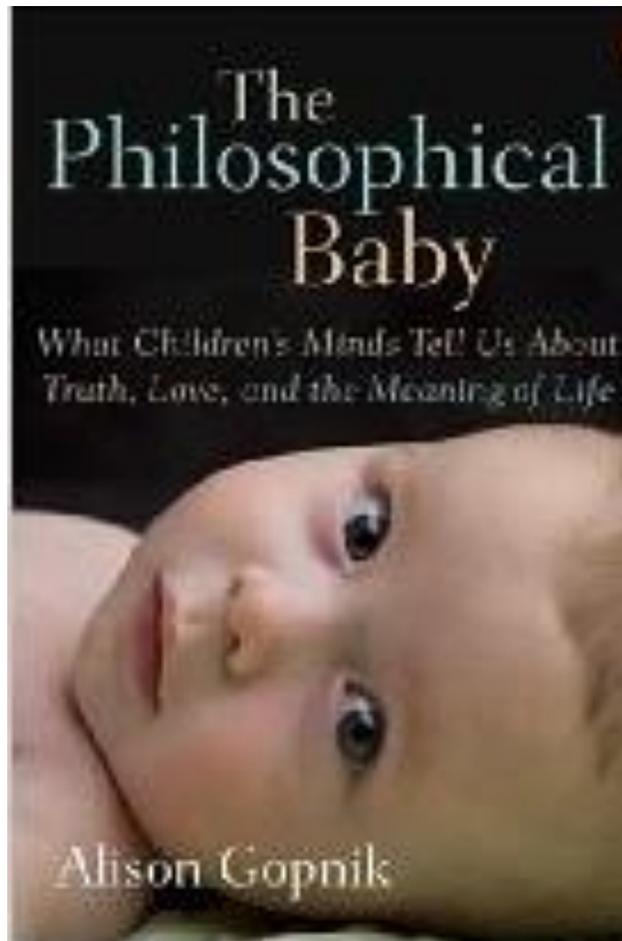
What do you think the children were drawn to and trying to accomplish with the different ways they explored the materials?

Expand your perspective

How might theories of brain development and learning inform your thinking here?



Expand your Perspective
Consider the nature of children's brain development



“Children see more, hear more, feel more and experience more than adults do. They are far better learners than we are. These remarkable learning abilities reflect special features of children’s brains, features that may actually make young children more conscious than adults.”

Allison Gopnik





Research shows that even the youngest babies have learning abilities that are more powerful than those of the smartest scientists and most advanced computers. They are able to see more possibilities and have an innate drive to hypothesize, experiment, problem solve and use trial and error to learn.

Children are Extra Sensory Beings

Young children's brains have what scientists call "plasticity" This means they have very flexible brains and are able to take in more information than adults. They are easily attracted to everything around them and have an innate drive to study to learn about the world.



Sensory Motor Development has been central to the Early Childhood Profession

The preschool years are a critical developmental period. Children desperately need to have a multitude of whole-body, sensory motor experiences on a daily basis in order to develop strong bodies and minds.



The 7 Sensory Systems

1. Visual
2. Auditory
3. Tactile
4. Gustatory (Taste/Mouth)
5. Olfactory (Smell)
6. Proprioceptive System
7. Vestibular System

Visual

The Visual System is responsible for sight. By perceiving color, pattern and light, this system provides visual images to our brains.

What do your babies see in their environment?



This system processes and interprets sound. It determines the direction, loudness, pitch, and duration of sound waves.

Sounds effect energy levels.

Voice: low is best ; high pitched and animated will increase arousal level

What do children hear in your environment?

Auditory



Tactile (touch)

Located in our skin, the tactile system is the largest sensory system and every surface of our body connects to it.



Gustatory/Mouth



The Gustatory System is primarily responsible for our sense of taste. Different tastes can be used to help with state of arousal (calming, organizing, alerting).

Alerting Foods tend to be cold, sour/tart, spicy, minty or crunchy.

Calming Foods are warm, smooth and sweet.

Other:

Breathing

Proprioception (heavy work to the jaw): Gum, fruit leather, straws, exercise water bottle, harmonica, blowing bubbles, breathing exercises, etc...

What opportunities are there for gustatory experiences in your program?

Olfactory (smell)

Odor influences the flavor and taste of food. Smell also creates memories and associations that influence our choices and preferences.

Scents can calm or alert us.

What can children smell in your environment?



The Motor Story

Children have an innate desire to move all the time.

New neuroscience research shows that active learning —“where the learner is doing, moving, acting, and interacting”—can change the way the brain works and can accelerate children’s learning process. A lack of movement negatively impacts brain development.

Emily Cross Researcher, Bangor University



Vestibular (movement)

The Vestibular System regulates our balance and is very sensitive to subtle changes in position or movement. Located in the inner ear, this system is responsible for monitoring and maintaining equilibrium. It is also responsible for organizing all other sensory input.



Proprioceptive (muscle and joint input)

The Proprioceptive System is located in the joints, muscles, and tendons. It is the second largest sensory system. This system processes sensory information provided by tiny receptors that monitor the contracting and stretching of muscles and the bending, straightening, pulling, and compressing of the joints.



Follow up Activity

Assess Sensory Motor Elements in your Environment

Observe children at play in your environment. Then draw a floor plan of your indoor environment. Label the following elements using the identifying number. Leave space on your floor plan to make lists where suggested.

What can children see?

- Put a 1 to identify specific areas where there are soft colors, natural materials and orderly arrangements where children feel calm, soothed and focused.
- Put a 2 in all the places in the environment where the children see natural light, shadows, pools of light, different textures and patterns, magic and wonder. Places and objects that invite their curiosity and engage their desire to explore.
- Put a 3 where there are walls filled with lots of primary color and unorganized displays, shelves full/cluttered with toys that could be overstimulating to children.

What can children feel?

- Put a 4 in all the places where there are different terrains for children to walk, crawl and scoot on, surfaces and substances of different textures and temperatures, weights, hard/soft, squishy, stiff, bouncy, responsive, to touch with their hands, feet, faces and bodies, other.

What can children hear?

- Make a list to describe sounds that children hear in your program; birds singing, wind rustling, water flowing, animal sounds, human voices (loud/soft), music playing (loud/soft), clocks ticking, traffic, airplanes, machinery, other.

What can children smell?

- Make a list of the fragrances and aromas that children experience in your program—smells from home, clothing, blankets, stuffed toys, natural fragrances from flowers, trees, wood, poopy diapers, human-made items such as disinfectant cleaners, bleach, artificial room deodorizers, perfume, food cooking, other.

What can children taste?

- Make a list of the tasting/mouthing experiences throughout the day available for your children. Opportunities for *alerting* foods that tend to be cold, sour/tart, spicy, minty or crunchy. *Calming* foods that are warm, smooth and sweet. Mouthing opportunities (heavy work to the jaw) such as chew toys, fruit leather, straws, water bottle, harmonica, blowing bubbles, breathing exercises, other.

How can children move?

- Put a 5 in all the places where children use their active bodies and large muscles to climb, jump, crawl, scoot, run, walk, push, pull, slide, swing, balance, roll, lift, bounce, hide, throw, go up/down/over/in/out, etc.
- Put a 6 in all the places where children can spread out, work with an abundance of materials and pursue big ideas.
- Put a 7 in all the places where children can use their hands and fingers to grasp, bang, poke, stack, shake, squeeze, pat, fill, pour, fit something together, and take something a part, build and create designs.
- Put an 8 in all the places where children can feel powerful, independent, and competent.

Examples of Environments For Sensory Motor Engagement





































Ball
Exploration



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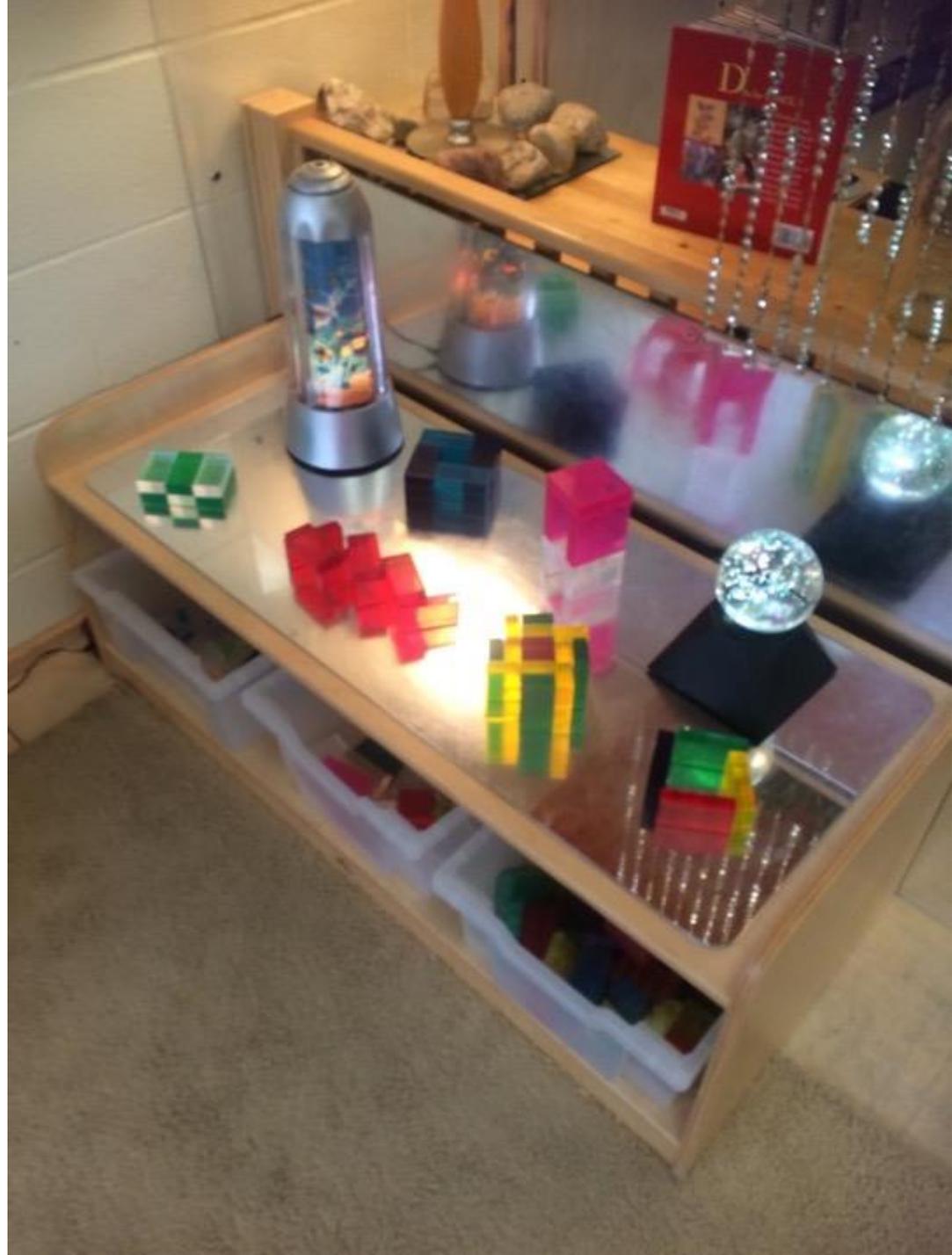




Glitter and Shine

The children were drawn to the iridescence of gems and sparkles. As I watched their play I thought the reflective light and textures caught their interest. However as their play continued it became evident it was more about manipulating and following. They picked up, moved, dumped and played like games in the different drawers. Many times the children opened and closed the drawers to see what was placed in them. Their actions of putting different glitter objects in and out of the drawers was repeated many times. Someone took better working together without needing a word. Respect, trust and caring is seen in this play.

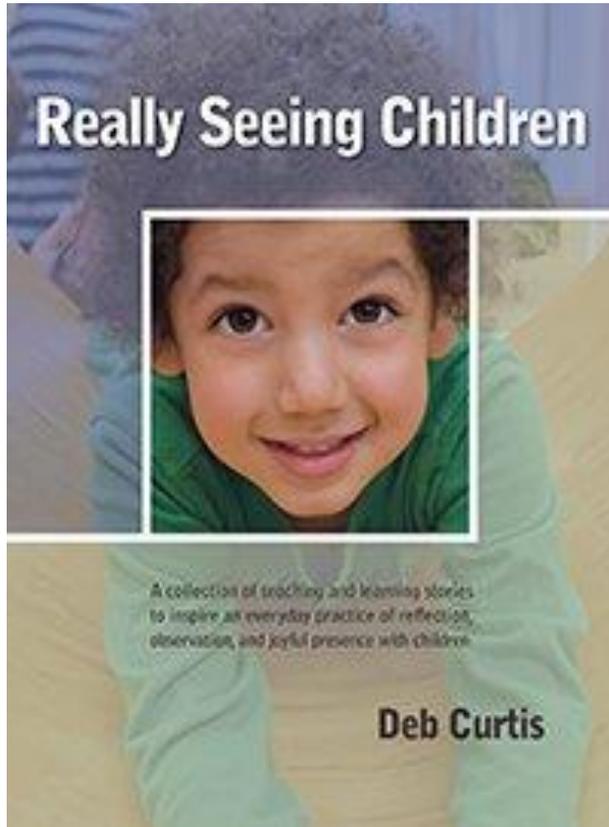




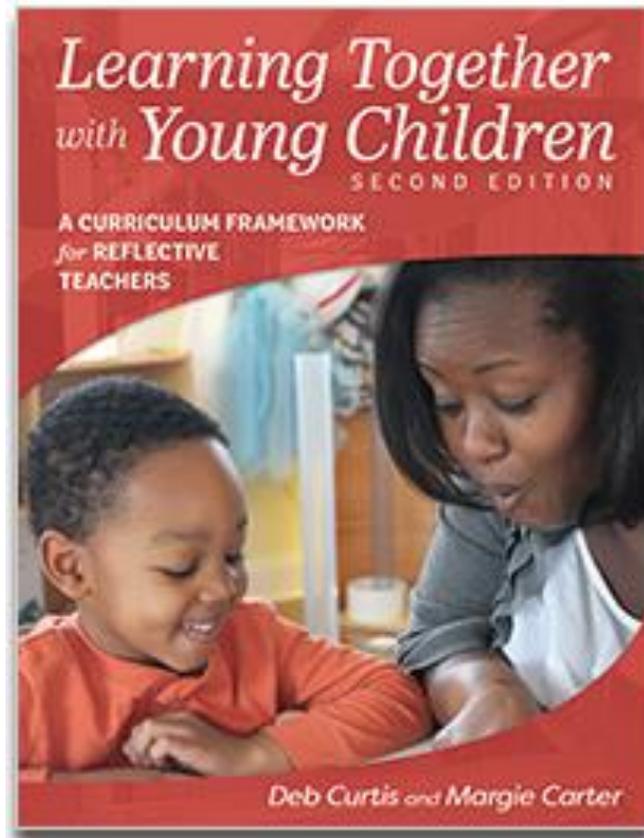


To enter into a style of teaching which is based on questioning what we're doing and why, on listening to children, on thinking about how theory is translated into practice and how practice informs theory, is to enter into a way of working where professional development takes place day after day in the classroom.

Resources from Deb



childcareexchange.com



redleafpress.org

Facebook Page:
Reflecting in Communities
of Practice

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