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One hundred languages: Children are communicators



Norm Blaseg
FIRST PERSON

Educators in Rainbow Schools are exploring the many different languages four- and five-year-olds use to communicate their growing understanding of the world and how it works.

Materials such as clay and wire, as well as dance, drama, music, drawing and printing, are languages through which young children readily express meaning.

The philosophy of "One Hundred Languages" originated in the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, and has inspired educators who work with young children to provide many and varied opportunities for children to demonstrate their thinking.

"When educators know what children are thinking, it helps them to connect with children, and to build on their existing understandings," says Superintendent Sharon Speir, who is leading the implementation of Early

Learning Kindergarten in Rainbow Schools. "With this information, educators can ask relevant questions and have meaningful dialogue."

Our Early Learning Teams facilitate children's thinking by observing and listening to them as they engage, explore, investigate and communicate.



When educators know what children are thinking, it helps them to connect with children.

Sharon Speir, superintendent of Early Learning Kindergarten

An amazing example came from an Early Learning classroom at Princess Anne Public School. Five-year-old Precieuse drew her conception of the world on the blackboard in her classroom.

The image was particularly interesting to Ramona Shawana, an Early Childhood Educator. As a person with First Nations heritage, she immediately connected to the drawing through the lens of her own culture.

"I see in her drawing reference to the four directions," she said. Precieuse shared her personal connection with Congo, a place that her dad visits regularly.

Traditionally in Africa, the Grand-

fathers would travel from village to village with a story stool telling stories to children, similar to that of the legends told in the Ojibwe culture by elders. Ramona Shawana introduced a story stool that was made in Africa to the classroom as a means of providing a learning experience that would be relevant and meaningful for Precieuse. She immediately identified with the designs on the stool and referenced furniture in her own home that was very similar.

Many young children's languages of expression come through the arts, which often serves as a vehicle for children to understand different cultures as well as to express their own culture. Here we see an example where drawing allows a child to express her connection to culture.

We know that young children have an innate need to make sense of the world. The arts in the Full Day Early Learning Kindergarten program provide a vehicle through which children can express their growing sense of self and their interpretation of the world.

According to the Reggio Emilia philosophy, "the child has a hundred languages ... a hundred ways of thinking, of playing, of speaking; a hundred worlds to discover; a hundred worlds to invent, a hundred worlds to dream."

Norm Blaseg is Director of Education for Rainbow District School Board.

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