

The Potential in Just One... one seed, one child



A bag of maple seeds was offered to a group of children during a May afternoon, a seasonal provocation offered informally and with a sense of curiosity about how the children might respond.

One child's (Michael, age 4.10) initial expressions of interest prompted me to begin photographing his explorations.



Michael's attempt to "fly" a seed suggested that he had some previous experience with maple seeds. What was he thinking? Was he testing a theory? His explorations were observed and documented in order to be studied. He shared seeds with others and there were some unheard conversations with peers, but his individual interactions with the seeds continued.



The length and quality of Michael's attention to the seeds, in the midst of an afternoon of children playing outside, suggested a depth of thinking, even an internal mental dialogue.

This is the point where I, too often, interrupt a child to probe for his/her thinking and/or try to extend an experience, a teaching behavior I'm beginning to believe often interrupts more than it supports.



I did not engage with him this time, but continued to observe and photograph.

Michael, very focused on the seed up-close, peeled off the seed coat to reveal the kernel.



It was both remarkable *and* not so surprising when Michael planted his seed in the class's garden, which was, at that point in the year, just dirt where the weed growth was being removed in preparation for spring planting.

His mom later shared that he carried a maple seed home (where there is no garden) and planted it in a pot near his front door.



Intrigued by Michael's relationship to the seed, I visited him the following spring, to talk about seeds. I shared the photos from his seed explorations to prompt conversation. Michael, recalled the day in detail – how he played with the *helicopters*, how he planted one of the seeds at home and watched it in its pot. He read from Ken Robbin's *SEEDS*, a book I brought to share with him, text which affirmed his own thinking.

What is the message in this small story? For me it is that the inner life of every child is richer than we typically imagine. That children's lives *outside* of school are interconnected with their lives *in* school although we infrequently make the connections between home experiences and school learning. That children, when allowed to follow what intrigues them, are capable of deeper thinking and

more purposeful action than we often believe possible and that we rarely allow time for. That spontaneous and real-life experiences are powerful in the learning life of a child and that they can precede the learning that comes from books and planned experiences.

But the most powerful message for me became clear in my conversation with Michael one year later. I asked him if he knew where the seeds had come from. Here are his words, taken from the transcript of that conversation.
M = Michael and ML = Ms. Loftus, the teacher.

M: *I know, if they have seeds in them, then they came from TREES!* (his voice escalates)

ML: *You're right! They came from trees. Do you know what kind of trees?*

M: *Ah, let's see, helicopter trees? Because one grows into a tree, then it makes more and then all of them grow more and then more and then more and then more!* (again his volume escalates)

ML: *One could turn into a lot more?*

M: *Yeah...because it has those seeds inside of it.*

Michael grasped and described the exponential power in the seed. It happened within Michael's own cognitive processes, as best as I can verify, than in any lessons delivered to him about seeds.

