

Parent as Documenter Seeing Children as Scientists



A parent in the Pre-K program at Blake School captured photos and text of her children's ideas about a spider discovered in the house (during winter in Minnesota, an unusual time of year to discover live "bugs"). She wrote in an e-mail to the children's teachers:

I thought you would enjoy this. There's a big discussion going on right now - what to do about a spider in the house. I've heard everything from "get it!" to "lets give it a pot/bucket (small tupperware container) to live in and then when the weather gets warm we can move it outside". After talking about it they agreed that "spiders are important because they eat insects". They decided to make spiders out of black construction paper, put them in the "bucket" and place the bucket on the floor below the spider (which is on the ceiling). Their experiment is to find out if the real spider will see their spiders and crawl to the bucket to be with them (thinking it's 'mom and dad'). If it does, they decided it can live in the bucket until it's time to move outside. If it doesn't...maybe another experiment??

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The children's parent wrote again the following day...

Ooohhh,

This just keeps getting better...

We left the house for a few hours on Friday and when we returned they checked the "bucket" - but no spider. They searched the ceiling and found that the spider moved from the hall to the far side of the kitchen. After a lot of "Wow, how did it get SO far??" the discussion began over how to attract the spider into the bucket (they decided on food) then what kind of food; people food, play food or spider food (they decided on spider food and shared ideas of what that includes; crickets, butterflies, mosquitoes, flies, ladybugs) and finally how to find spider food (they didn't know where to find it in the winter so they decided to make it out of construction paper). They each made a bug and put it in the bucket with their construction paper spiders, positioning the bucket on the floor under the spider on the ceiling.



Next, Abigail started to interview Sam about his choice of spider food. She marked a piece of paper as he talked as if she was taking notes. Then they got out a map of the United States, talked about where this kind of spider could be found and started marking locations. They waited and watched for a response from the spider and after a while moved on to something unrelated. Quite a while later they noticed that the spider moved again...so they moved the bucket to follow the spider. Over the course of the weekend the spider moved a few times, making its way into the family room - with bucket following it. Today, Sunday, they seemed a little disappointed that the spider kept "moving away" from their spiders and spider food - but it has turned the discussion into, "where is it going?"



Sam reported to his class on Monday morning about his and his sister's experience with the spider...

There was a spider in our house and we did a experiment because we gave it a nice habitat in our house, because spiders are very useful because they eat bugs that hurt people. He was right in the hallway and we put the bucket under the hallway and we went to my Nana and Papa's house and when we got home it was so funny because the spider moved to the bathroom! And then the next day when we looked downstairs he was in the family room! And we also made food for him. I made a cricket and Abi made him a dragonfly. He didn't see the food, I don't think. He scampered... he climbed on the ceiling! This morning we couldn't find him.

One of the teachers invited Sam and Abigail's mom to reflect further on what prompted her to document the experience. She wrote:

Their enthusiastic conversation over spotting the spider is what initially caught my attention but it became so interesting that I couldn't help watching them. I stayed in the background "just to see" what would happen but had no idea what it would blossom into. As their conversation began to take the shape of an "experiment" I started taking pictures. I found myself watching them in complete awe. They displayed an amazing confidence and ability to call upon themselves for everything they needed. I saw imagination, curiosity, creativity, attention to detail, resourcefulness, collaboration, analytical thinking - all spilling over in abundance as I observed them! And they never tired of their exploration. They moved on to other things but always came back when there was more to do or when curiosity summoned them.

As I reflect on the experience I realize it turned out to be an opportunity for me to turn off "problem solving mom" and practice what I'm learning from my kids and Blake Pre-K teachers about giving children room to question, explore and learn their way through the things they find interesting. To get involved, set the direction and/or answer their questions is something I find myself doing at times without thinking, but this experience reinforced something I'd much rather do without thinking - which is to take pause. I see more than ever that they have these amazing and beautiful brains and hearts that need the nourishment of independence and encouragement to figure things out themselves in order to truly thrive. This is something I "knew" but can now say that I "get it".



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