

Thought Ramblings

Wickliffe Progressive Community School • Parent Newsletter

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Making Learning Visible at Wickliffe: Year 2

What Is Making Learning Visible at Wickliffe?

Last year Wickliffe began a partnership with Project Zero staff and the Graduate School of Education at Harvard University. Specifically, we have been working with Mara Krechevsky and Melissa Rivard (who are known to us as Mara and Mo) on a collaborative adventure called Making Learning Visible or MLV. Three core ideas that underlie our MLV work are: 1) participation in *group learning* experiences deepens and extends the individual learning experiences of children and adults; 2) the act of *reflecting on the documentation* of learning processes and curriculum content deepens the understanding of children and teachers; and 3) understanding and creating knowledge, culture, and core values of a democratic culture. For a much more complete description of MLV and to view some images of Wickliffe's work, simply go to our website and click on the MLV link.

I would characterize our MLV work last year as "exploratory". Teachers, parents and even children explored a variety of ways to learn in groups and how to document learning. I've described this work in more detail in newsletters (which are also available on our website). However, here are a few quotes from teachers, parents, and children that reveal some of our learning that took place during the 2006-2007 school year:

"I see the power of empowering children -- by valuing their words, by documenting them -- I see them as generating more of their own curriculum."

Teacher

"Looking at documentation gives us time to be very thoughtful and look at teacher and child learning at a deeper level."

Teacher

"This is taking us back to our roots."

Teacher

"Real excitement that my child is part of a school where she is learning the value of group work and gaining ownership of her learning in doing so."

Parent

"I am taking away a realization that we will continue to see the benefit of MLV increase exponentially over the years."

Parent

Our work last year culminated in a Spring Exhibition which featured words, images, and artifacts that "made visible" the learning of children, teachers, and parents. Parents, teachers, administrators and educational consultants from inside *and* outside the district attended the exhibit to learn more about making learning visible at Wickliffe. In fact, as a result of this Exhibition, officials in the governor's office, the Ohio Department of Education, and educators in Massachusetts have expressed interest in learning more about our teachers' work to develop other authentic and imaginative ways to assess children's learning.

The Vision and Hope for Year 2

While Year 1 was an “exploratory” year, I believe our work in the coming year with MLV will be one of “*skill building*.” Teachers, parents, and children will continue to build on their knowledge of how group learning and documentation build deeper understanding and knowledge. We will also more fully understand how documentation and learning in a group furthers the development of the individual and *apply* this understanding to classroom life. Here’s *some* of the things you may see children and teachers doing in Year 2:

- ◇ teachers using a protocol (similar to ones used in other professions such as medicine) with children and each other to clarify and articulate something they’re learning
- ◇ children documenting something they (or their group) are learning through photography, audio, or simply using a pencil to illustrate and record quotes
- ◇ parents using documentation techniques to capture learning at school or home
- ◇ teachers using something learned at Harvard/Project Zero called “Thinking Routines” with children to deepen their thinking about a concept in an academic content area
- ◇ children reviewing documentation in order to *reflect* on the experience and seek out other perspectives in order to generate new ideas about what is being learned
- ◇ the staff making their learning visible (in the same way we ask children to do) for the larger community in order to extend *and change* the conversation about teaching and learning beyond Wickliffe’s classroom walls

In this year of MLV “skill building” we will challenge ourselves to take our Ten Principles to the next level. We will take our learning in the abstract with Mara and Mo and make our learning apparent in very concrete ways in the classroom...and beyond. I predict that we will struggle, be confused, wonder together, have sudden joyful epiphanies, backslide, skip forward several steps, and ask ourselves as the song “Stop Making Sense” puts it -- “How did we get here?” Oh, it will also be fun. Sounds like another exciting year of school-wide learning at Wickliffe to me.

Postscript

In their most recent visit, Mara and Mo also shared that what we are doing in our learning community at Wickliffe is:

“focusing on the learning and not just getting the work done” as well as challenging false dichotomies.” They’ve also challenged us to think about *assessment, achievement, and accountability* in a way that is more imaginative and consistent with our Ten Principles here at Wickliffe. In our continued journey together to make our learning more visible we welcome the challenge to build upon our belief in authentic and imaginative focus of student assessment. I hope to address alternative assessments “for student learning” in a future issue of *Thought Ramblings*.