



THE HUNDRED LANGUAGES OF CHILDREN

At the Rose and George Teller Preschool, we believe that children are extremely capable and that they have deep, complex thoughts and ideas. We believe this because we see it every day. Occasionally someone will dispute this idea. They will claim that since children can have limited vocabularies, they cannot possibly express complex concepts. This is where the idea of “The Hundred Languages of Children” comes in.

The origins of the phrase The Hundred Languages of Children comes from a poem written by Loris Malaguzzi. Malaguzzi founded the preschools in Reggio Emilia Italy, a school system from which our school takes inspiration. In the poem, he relates that children have many different ways of expressing themselves, but the adult world will often tell them that the hundred languages don't exist - that there is only one way of expressing yourself – verbally. But that children see the other ways so clearly and it is the first instance of children feeling misled by adults and when disillusion begins to set in. If you are interested in seeing the entire poem, someone made a video of it and put it on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=174pYUcwn7w>.

At the Rose and George Teller Preschool, we believe that children have the right and the ability to express their thinking, theories, ideas, learning and emotions in many ways. Because of this belief, we have an obligation to provide the children with a wide range of materials and media, and welcome a diversity of experiences, so that children encounter many avenues for thinking, revising, constructing, negotiating, developing and symbolically expressing their thoughts and feelings. In this way, teachers, parents and children can better understand each other. These languages can include drawing, paint, clay, wire, natural and recycled materials, light and shadow, dramatic play, music and dance. They can also include expression with words through metaphors, stories or poems of the children's interpretations and reflections about their experiences or through special design, such as maps and three dimensional constructions. In fact, there is not a separation between what it is traditionally considered artistic expression and academic education.

An example of how we put these concepts into practice can be seen in the extended exploration that we have been involved in since January. During this time, we have been examining the concept of change. We also noticed that the children were extremely interested

in the variety of bugs that they were finding on the playground. As a combination of these two interests, we purchased ladybug larvae and some adult ladybugs. We have been watching them grow and change for about two weeks now.

During our morning meeting, we give the children an opportunity to express their curiosity through questions – what do ladybugs eat in the wild? Do they live in Israel? Do all ladybugs have spots? These were among the myriad questions that were formulated by the class. Books, the internet, parents and bug experts were all consulted to find the answers.

Children also made observational drawings of the ladybugs. The detail in these drawings – created by 2 and 3 year olds – clearly shows the level of knowledge that they are gaining. Then a more comprehensive and larger color two-dimensional model was created, with different children adding different features to the model. This model was then used to create a papier mache ladybug – taking their understanding to three dimensions. Wire, beads, pipe cleaners, wood pieces and other materials were made available to the children for them to customize the papier mache ladybug. Teachers talked through the process with them, but did not direct their choices or the final product's look. In fact, no teacher hand touched the final product – it was a reflection of the knowledge and understanding of the children.

Even their dramatic play evolved as their understanding of ladybugs deepened. At first, they would fly around the room and say they were ladybugs, but do things that children do. Over the course of several days, they adapted their activities to mimic the ladybug lifecycle and their understanding of ladybug activities.

Another area where children expressed their knowledge was the block corner. Several children got together and wondered how insects play. They decided to build an insect playground. During their planning phase, they decided to take sketchpads out to the school playground to record the different elements on our school playground and discussed how to best adapt them to insects. They then drew plans and finally used their plans to create the block structure.

Throughout the process, teachers encourage children to represent their ideas on a particular topic in multiple languages, and find that the process of moving between languages supports children in their understanding and learning.