

## Michael's story

Written by Debbie: 2004 - 2005

Michael has been involved in a project called 'above and below the sea'. A number of children and their families had been visiting the beach to collect resources to contribute toward the children's investigations. Debbie, as one of the teachers, recorded an occasion when she saw Michael and his grandmother in the car park of the centre.

### *Michael's learning story (1a)*

*"I heard him talking with his grandmother about going to the beach. Of course my ears perked up - great, more connections being made to our project focus. I talked with Michael and his grandmother about how great it would be for them to find 'unusual' things on the beach. They both went off chatting amongst themselves about their trip to the beach. The next time I saw Michael was with his Mum, they both came and found Katrina and myself to show us the things that Michael and his grandmother had collected on their trip to the beach. In came Michael with a box that was almost too big for him to carry - he very proudly put the box down, and Katrina and I started to look through the things that he had picked up. There were large pieces of seaweed, pods, shells, driftwood, crab shells and normal 'beach treasures'. Then there were some unusual things that no one else had brought in so far - sea sponge, shells with hair growing out of them, and beach flowers! We asked Michael if he wanted to bring them in to group time and he said yes. We talked about a safe place to store them until then, and decided on the top of the lockers." (Debbie, August 04)*

As teachers, our prior knowledge of Michael was that he had not as yet contributed resources towards the development of a project. He seemed to sit on the periphery of the group time activities and was very quiet when encouraged to contribute to group conversations. His mother also seemed to 'sit on the periphery' in her knowledge about the regular cultural practices of the group time. So it was with some surprise and delight when Michael and his mum proudly produced the 'treasures' that Michael and his grandmother had collected from their beach trip.

Michael's story - using Rogoff's three lenses - told by Debbie

**Michael's learning story (1b)**

*Group time came and we were all excited by this big box that Michael had behind him when he was sitting down. I asked if anyone had brought anything to do with our project and Michael said that he did. We put the box in the middle and bit-by-bit I started taking things out of the box, and as I did I asked the children if they knew the names of the different natural beach resources. Out came the seaweed, shells, crab shells - all the children quickly named these items. The seaweed with the pods came out, and with a little encouragement Michael was also able to name the pod. It started to get a bit tricky though when I pulled out the sea sponge - but it didn't take one child long to call it a sponge - the children all had to take their turn in holding the sponge, unfortunately it got broken up slightly. Michael seemed to take this very well, considering how proud he was of his treasures! The children were amazed by the beach flowers! The discussion amongst the group flowed throughout the group time - all because of Michael's trip to the beach with his grandmother and the 'treasure' they both found together (Debbie, August 2004)*

What happened to all those 'treasures' Michael collected from the beach? The story continues...

**Michael's learning story (1c)**

*During the group time the resources were all displayed on the floor in the middle of the group. After group time finished we wanted to leave them on display. It was the end of the day and Michael wanted to take all his treasures home again. Mum wanted him to keep some at the centre and so we both encouraged him to just choose a few special things to take home. I got a plastic bag and then Michael chose a few special things that Mum was saying could either go around some pot plants, in the garden, or better still - make a display in the house. Michael was very satisfied with the items he chose and went away very happily. (Debbie, August 04)*

This story was added to Michael's profile book with the addition of a question for Corrina, "What happened to the 'beach treasures' once Michael and you got home?"

Corrina, Michael's mother, responds by writing in Michael's profile book.

**Michael's story (1d)**

*"When we finally got around to it we put the goodies from the beach into a big blue pot that we have outside by the garage. In the pot we have pansies and daffodils growing. It is decorated with shells and driftwood. I must say Michael didn't want to know much about this*

*probably because it took a week to do, and dad decided to fix the car at the same time I did this. So the beach lost, and fixing cars won! However I would definitely say Michael really enjoyed his beach project.”*

*Cheers. Corrina*

His grandmother was also asked if she would tell the story of going to the beach with Michael. She also wrote in his profile book.

***Michael's story (1e)***

*After picking up Michael from the centre we came home and sat out on the deck where Michael had fish and chips and a doughnut, with a drink for lunch, then we went across to the beach to find some 'goodies' for Michael's project. Michael really talked my ears off with. "We'll go to the beach, eh Nan... Look Nan a crab!... There's a stick Nan!" On arriving at the beach though Michael's first sentence was.... "We won't go down there though will we Nan?" Michael was pointing to where the surf was breaking, for some reason Michael does not like the sea, although he does enjoy playing in the sand. It was a great day weather wise, and both Michael and I had a lot of fun that day on the beach. (Michael's grandmother, August 04)*

In Michael's story we can see that there have been many opportunities for the project to be discussed between Michael and his mother, grandmother, teachers, and other children in his group. Every time each person discusses it with Michael his understanding of the project grows. Michael's family trip to the beach was an example of how joint participation with people he trusted has supported him to develop confidence to participate in other social settings, as well as developing his understandings even further. Michael's confidence to participate and contribute to group-time discussions significantly developed during this project. Michael's development could not be attributed to his participation in the centre alone. He benefited from continuity in his experiences between home and centre. Michael brought the results of those interactions into the group work in the centre; all experienced change and learning as a result, and Michael showed increased level of participation and self-confidence. The use of Rogoff's three lenses for analysis proved to be an effective tool in supporting teachers to strengthen their understanding of a socio-cultural view of teaching and learning. Changes they made to documentation were reflective of this. The teacher researcher team developed a sequence of photographs based on Michael's experience to visually represent the way in which they background and foreground the focus of interest when documenting stories.

Michael's story - using Rogoff's three lenses - told by Debbie



#### **Intrapersonal lens**

Michael is the focus of the observation



#### **Interpersonal lens**

Interactions and relationships are taken notice of



#### **Cultural/institutional lens**

Centre practice, environment, resources and the language used become the focus

Individual children’s learning is noticed and celebrated without being disconnected from the social context of the centre. Teachers gained a greater appreciation of the ways in which centre practice, relationships and individual participation are mutually creating each other. The ways in which Michael’s participation in this project was documented enabled teachers to focus on his learning as well as acknowledging supporting relationships and influences.

#### **Michael’s Transformation of Participation comes into view.**

Teacher awareness of Michael’s developing confidence to participate and his emerging enthusiasm for learning in relation to a project influenced the choice of the next centre project focus. Michael was provided the opportunity to consolidate this social learning by participating in a project in which he held a high level of interest. During this second project, “Things on wheels,” Michael’s development as a ‘ready, willing and able’ learner clearly came into view. The knowledge teachers had gained about Michael during the first project contributed to the way they acknowledged his transformation during the second project. In the first project he was seen to make the first tentative steps in participating in a group project with support from his family. In the second he became a key player in the project; his enthusiasm influenced the direction of this project.

Teachers have individual non-contact time to complete learning story documentation. They also meet together weekly as a group to reflect on the project journey and make plans for future experiences that could support and extend learning. During one of these meetings the three teachers involved in the ‘Things on wheels’ project with the children reflected together on Michael’s transformation. Their insights were documented using the frame of the three lenses, intrapersonal, interpersonal and cultural/institutional, as a teaching and learning story to share with his family.

## Michael's learning story (2)

Written by Debbie- September 04

### ***The intrapersonal lens: Michael's participation***

*Over the last few weeks Michael has brought in something new to do with wheels almost every day! One particular day he brought in his very special cars from home. Dad wasn't too sure about whether Michael should bring them in, but Michael's mum, Corrina, reassured him that they would be safe on the top of the lockers until group time. Michael was so proud that day! Since then Michael has brought in a variety of items that relate to the 'wheels' project, they have come in different forms.*

*We've had photos of Michael's Uncle Mike's and Shane's many cars, cars that race and cars that make a lot of noise! We've had amazing photos of Michael's Dad's truck with Michael driving the truck (well sitting in the drivers seat anyway). We've had skateboards, dump-trucks, and more racing cars! Every time Michael brings something new in, he contributes more to the discussion and reveals more knowledge about trucks and things with wheels!*

### ***The Interpersonal lens: Relationships that supported Michael's learning***

*We believe that a key person supporting Michael's learning is his mum Corrina. Ever since I first discussed with her the possibility of this as a project focus due to the interest that I know Michael already had, she has been supportive of Michael's interest 100%. Every time that Michael brings something new Corrina gives the back ground information of the item. Like the fact that he uses the dump truck to pick up and dump the garden weeds!*

*Every time Corrina gives the teachers this background information, it allows us to remind Michael of this information, and tell the rest of the group. Michael's Dad also plays a big part in his learning experiences as he takes Michael for rides in his big work truck, and puts Michael on his knee to 'drive' the truck through Eastgate car park! Michael's extended family i.e. uncle Mike and Shane, also play a part in Michael's learning experiences as Michael brings in photos of their cars, and times that they have raced at Woodford Glen Raceway. The children and teachers of the older learning group support, and are also supported by, Michael's learning. More and more children are contributing items from home that relate to the 'wheels' interest, and I am sure that this is due to Michael's huge interest and passion he shows for 'anything with wheels'.*

Michael's story - using Rogoff's three lenses - told by Debbie

### **The cultural institutional lens: Centre practices that supported Michael's learning**

- *Daily group time – Michael can anticipate a time in the day when he knows his voice is heard, his contribution is acknowledged.*
- *'Bringing items from home' - Michael's interest in the project is 'visible', and makes connecting links with home and centre.*
- *Recording group time - Michael's conversation is documented, allowing teachers to reflect on his learning at a later date.*
- *Same three teachers - Michael has relationships with people who know him well. His learning is followed in detail through learning story documentation, and conversations between teachers and with Corrina.*
- *Corrina's participation - Michael is supported to build on the familiar and to make sense of the unfamiliar. Michael gained familiarity with project work practices through the support of his family and began to confidently participate. Ongoing conversations with Corrina supported teachers to gain contextual knowledge to support their work with Michael.*
- *Learning and teaching stories - Documenting Michael's learning allows for Michael's family to have an understanding of what his learning looks like when he's at the centre*

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### **The importance of stories about Michael's learning**

Michael's story became a significant example for teachers of how the learning community functions. It resonated in a number of ways with other continuous stories teachers had been collecting about individual children. The use of the three lenses of analysis provided teachers with a tool that enabled them to identify the interrelationship between their practices and the outcomes of the experience for individual members of the community. Use of the cultural institutional lens contributed particularly clearly to teachers acknowledging how their practices respond to individual children's participation. Previously this had not been recognised. Through Michael's story teachers were able to see how the individual is supported to engage in learning, and how individual participation (i.e. Michael and his family) contributes not only to their own learning but also to the learning of the social group.

Project work practices had evolved over time, often in response to the needs of a particular project at the time, and had become part of the way things are done here to support community participation in projects. Teachers identified how the practices established in the centre had created

a 'project work culture' characterised by the regular time of the day when children and adults come together to discuss the project, documentation that both informs and invites parental participation and the regular expectation for children to bring things from home to share and talk about.

### **Documentation as a pathway to parental participation**

Michael's story provided clear examples of how 'project work' documentation acts as a tool through which parent expertise and interest is called on. Parental interest is captured more strongly when it has particular relevance to parents' own experiences. Some parents become key participants in the course of a project where they were being viewed as an 'expert'. In the example above, both Michael's parents joined in. As a result of authentic parental participation they saw themselves, and were viewed by the teachers, as major contributors to all children's learning. Further data also showed that those parents who can be identified as key participants during a project often continue their centre participation in other ways beyond the focus of project-work. An example of this was that over the period of two projects, two 'expert' parents subsequently joined the centre management committee.



### ***The awakening of teacher identity: Learning through visual art development***

Two art teachers were employed during the course of this research project and provided the teacher researcher team the opportunity to explore the notion of identity in relation to the vision they held for the art teacher's role in the centre. The research team was aware that within a learning community the art teacher would be influential on the way things would be done in the centre as well as to the ways other participate. The research team was concerned not with the individual person with but with the approach each art teacher adopted. As visual art began to take shape in the centre teachers began questioning pedagogical approaches to visual art. An art teacher whose time was given solely to facilitating, planning and documenting visual art teaching and learning offered teachers a mirror through which to view and think about their own practice and beliefs.

Visual arts - the awakening of identity