

Curriculum Report  
Library  
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As Diane's sabbatical replacement this year, I had the fascinating opportunity of spending a school year surrounded by books. The obvious part of my job was this: to connect children (and teachers) to books, to promote a love for books and reading, and to maintain and care for the collection itself, affecting it to a small degree by purchasing books for it. As the year progressed though, there were many other things which also came clear to me in thinking about the library, about Miquon and about being a specialist here.

I, who have been an avid reader since second grade, was amazed to find that after a happy "honeymoon" in the library, I had to adjust to having my world revolve totally around books. I passed through a short stage in which I felt like thrashing my way out of the mountains of books that surrounded me. I was surprised by thoughts like: "Aren't there more immediate and important ways to learn than through books?" What I came to see was that the books were just the vehicle for connection with something else, something deeper that has to do with relationships, meaning, and why we are all here in the first place.

That the library is in many ways the heart of our school became real to me. With its lovely windows, Diane's red geraniums and the hum of bees in the observation hive—not to mention the potential excitement of the stories, artwork and information housed in thousands of book, it is a welcoming spot. Diane's warmth and spirit are part of the place even when she's on sabbatical! It is the place many children begin their school day at Miquon as they chat with Megan or their friends, draw or read. The library is often open during choice times and children come in to use the bathroom or say hello; for quiet or conversation. Teachers come through to find a needed book and parents to stop in to check the lost and found, give a message or talk. Events like Grandparent's Day or Open Houses begin here, and all sorts of meetings are held here. Children's artwork, hawks and owls, computers, beautiful glossy book jackets, dusty volumes, class-made books, the yearbooks and Miquon's archives are all housed here.

The 150 children who make up our school also became real to me. Their interests were what made all those books completely relevant. It was a new thing to have my relationships with kids develop almost solely through questions about books. However, those questions ("What are you reading?" "What was the last book you really liked?") soon led to my learning more about their various hobbies, delights, pleasures, interests. Each of those 150 children began to emerge as individuals. I could now see the young child who couldn't get enough books about history, the 6<sup>th</sup> grader and the kindergartener who emerged as lovers of "scary" books, the girls immersed in horse stories, the boy who liked finding unusual treasures like books on tape or slides.

I began to know the children through their interests, and also by the stage of reading they'd reached. I became able to anticipate the nursery and kindergarten children who craved endless train books (all boys!) and princess stories (all girls!) and were not to be dissuaded. The predictable childhood patterns emerged: loving picture books, finding books that could be easily read, beginning chapter books, developing interests in books in

series then genres in fiction, and moving on to real interest and commitment to different authors.

The children themselves carried out countless invitations and injunctions to one another to read. Through the grades there was a constant sharing of “You’ve got to read this book”, “Read this—it’s first in the series”, “Her books are so good!” This peer communication was a powerful seller. Some children made lists for me of the good books I just had to read, and I still have a stack to get through based on their recommendations. It was gratifying too to see the truth in the saying that teachers bless books by reading them aloud. If we were reading a certain genre, like mysteries or Arthurian legends, these books became highly desirable to kids.

There were things that didn’t go over so well—Lynn’s group found Alice in Wonderland “too random and unpredictable”, and some chapter books were just too long for once a week reading. It was challenging to promote authentic discussions about what we were reading, and I feel I’ve only begun to plumb the possibilities here, especially when working with 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. Kids differ not only in their points of view, but also in their level of commitment to a particular book and desire to participate. Leading a meaningful discussion is a challenging task.

But there were times when we were all in the moment of the story together: light dawning as we perceived the enormity of Melisande’s problem in being cursed with hair that would grow twice as fast every time it was cut, laughing and crying as we read Love That Dog, feeling the heartbreak and courage in Nory Ryan’s Song... I learned from Joan at our lunch time meetings with the Book Club as she allowed the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade participants the opportunity to bring out points that they found relevant, then deepened their thinking with questions or new information.

Stepping into the role of a specialist helped me to better understand the role they play at Miquon. I was delighted to find that at lunch the specialists often had a chance to share insights about children. I saw more clearly than ever how their knowledge of the children over time is a tremendous resource to the school. The part of my job that I treasured most this year was feeling a connection with every child in the school. I had been afraid I would miss knowing the children of one class in depth, but found to my joy that this was exchanged for connection with each child at Miquon, and many opportunities through every day to offer a listening ear for joy or solace to children of all ages. There would be the lost favorite toy, the injuries, the squabbles to sort out, the birthdays and lost teeth to celebrate, the 6<sup>th</sup> grader sadly anticipating leaving.

Being a specialist this year also let me help to bring about a couple of events for the school as a whole which drew us together in wonderful ways. Artist, poet and author Ashley Bryan’s visit last year had made me want to create more opportunities to connect with poetry and with one another. A “poetry slam” seemed the answer. In talking it over with Joan, she offered to have her group do the first poetry slam, thereby modeling it for the rest of the school. The children in her group read many poems, choosing from these to create a poetry anthology unique to each child. They each also chose a poem to share with the school. Keeping in mind Ashley Bryan’s advice about finding the poem’s voice, they rehearsed and finally gave an enthusiastic performance.

Late in the winter Joan and Jeri’s kids helped me to announce the second Poetry Slam, open to the whole school. Kids of all ages began searching for their favorite poems, and the 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders helped them rehearse. We had lots of funny poems,

poems for word and rhyme lovers, poems expressing the beauty of the world and deep feeling.

While I am not a storyteller like Diane, I love stories, especially those from people's own experience. We had two assemblies in which teachers could sign up to tell a tale. These were so much fun. There was wonderful variety in our own stories and they served to model for children the possibilities in being storytellers themselves, either orally or as writers.

I've been a Miquon group teacher, co-teacher, parent, now librarian and next year I'll be an assistant teacher: through all of this it is clear to me that a child's time at Miquon is much more than that of being in a particular group, with one particular teacher. It is very rich, layered with relationships and experiences throughout the school and over time. Similarly, being the librarian here is much more than being in charge of the books. It has been a wonderful opportunity to connect on so many levels with everyone at Miquon. I am so thankful for this year in the library, at the heart of this wonderful school.