

Zien

WORKSHOPS AT THE RESOURCE CENTER

We offer workshops with three goals in mind: first to provide people with a chance to develop specific skills in a subject of interest to them; second, to use the subject to explore extensions into other related areas starting from a point of deep personal interest; third, to use the experience to analyze the learning process itself.

While many of our workshops start with the creation of materials for children's learning, we do not limit ourselves to this approach, because we want to provide help across a spectrum of problems facing teachers. Through a broad offering we hope to contribute to the growth of the general understanding that improvement in learning opportunities for children, not to mention adults, rests on seeing the problem in its broadest scope, including the whole complex relationship between "I, thou, and it". In any case, an initial concern with the materials of learning ultimately involves us in the totality of the learning process. While we might start with materials, we have a deep concern for the extensions into expression, logical thought, and personal relationships that are inherent in them. Also we are concerned to correct the still widely held misconception that greater amounts of materials in a classroom will almost automatically create better learning situations. In our view, real learning comes not only where there is a rich supply of materials, but also where learners are allowed to act on their interests and to follow through to the end the trail of learning that their initial interests suggest.

In addition, we are, as an institution, interested in the idea of providing for adults, who happen to be working with children, learning opportunities that meet their own needs as adult learners. We try to provide the experience itself, without necessarily surrounding it with professional considerations, such as the possible uses of learning skills or attitudes learned by the adult in the classroom. This can lead us far afield from the creation of learning materials for children.

The strongest case we can make for the wisdom of providing learning opportunities for children based on their interests is to provide that very same arrangement for the teacher. The significant behavior of teachers in the classroom grows out of what they are as whole human beings. What they are as human beings, or perhaps, what they feel they are, grows as it does for all of us really, out of a sense of power over significant aspects of their lives; not a sense of power over others, but their own lives, and so over their work. It seems better to us then to help teachers learn what is important to them as whole human beings, not just as professionals. To illustrate this, let us take the example of someone learning to play the recorder . . . Our focus is on helping him learn to be a better recorder player, to master the technique needed to play the instrument. To be sure, it might be helpful at some point to help with ideas about how to teach the recorder. The main focus is, however, on the thing itself. If learning the recorder is important enough for him to invest time and thought, then it ipso facto has to change the way he deals with children's need to play, to hear, or to write music. The teacher's newly gained sense of self power, a sense of competence, enlarges the teacher's view of himself, and of the potential of others. It is this that we are after because it could make a difference in a child's and teacher's experience in school.