

Philosophical Conversation

In the early years

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Catch the sunbeam and eat it!

A beam of light comes through our window and we see many dust particles suspended in the air. It's quite intense and children notice them. A child tries to catch a sunbeam and the rest of the children follow and do the same. They all jump and try to catch the sunbeams. Some of the children try to catch a sunbeam with their mouth and eat it. When I ask them what would happen if we ate a sunbeam, these are some of the answers I get:

- We will become sunny like a sunbeam (Vasoula)
- Our body will have sunbeams and we will become little suns (Vasiliki)
- Nothing is going to happen. It's a game. We don't actually eat them (Michael)
- We pretend we are eating the sunbeams (George)
- Yes, you cannot really eat a sunbeam. It is transparent (Emily)
- Is it diaphanous like Jesus Christ? (Eleni)

Teacher's food for thinking

I guess it has happened to all teachers trying to start their lesson – something happens that distracts children's attention. A sunbeam might be perceived as something unimportant that should not distract the children from the lesson. I have to admit that this particular sunbeam was extremely elegant! It looked like a transparent gold rope piercing through the window! It was so pretty that it deserved to be observed and fully appreciated. It was an aesthetic natural gift that made our morning unique. Children who are sensitive to beautiful stimuli, couldn't put this sunbeam aside. The sunbeam allowed space for children to move and jump as high as they could to catch it and laugh. Preschool children learn more when they are in constant movement instead of being obliged to sit on a chair for long time. I felt so happy being able to admire the beauty of a sunbeam while letting children express their imaginative thoughts.

When I saw some of the children pretend eating the sunbeam, I thought what would happen if we really ate a sunbeam. This I asked the question and I was

looking forward to hearing the children's answers. There were some realistic answers (You cannot eat a sunbeam, it is transparent, we pretend we eat it) and some others were completely imaginative (we will become little suns). These answers create mental images that were both pretty and pleasant. This particular incident made my day and made me think how lucky I am when I can peep at reality through children's eyes and let my attention get grabbed by little moments that could have gone unnoticed.

Children like playing imaginatively. They know that they don't actually "eat" the sunbeam but through their imaginative play they experience as if they truly eat it. Children experience the "false" as real and they get much pleasure out of their game. Is there anything better than happy children chasing after sunbeams?

Finally, I have to point out that after children played with the sunbeam, they sat back on their chairs waiting for the "lesson" to start. They sit down on their own after six minutes playing with the sunbeams. If I had rushed them to sit down and start our lesson, children wouldn't be happy, their minds would be absorbed by the sunbeams and they wouldn't pay attention to the lesson. More importantly, I would have missed all this lovely play and I would have spent much more time putting pressure on everyone including myself. Children deserve six minutes for free playing, don't they?

Concept: Important and unimportant things

- Is a sunbeam important? Why? Why not?
- Is it important to play with a sunbeam?
- Is the lesson in the classroom more important than playing with a sunbeam?
- What makes something important?
- Can something important for you be unimportant for someone else?
- Is there something that is important for everybody? What is this? Why is important?
- Is there something that is unimportant for everybody? What is this? Why is unimportant?
- Can you name little things that are important?

How important are ...?

	Very	Not very	Not at all	?
My parents				
A flower				
The bees				
The sun				
My friends				
Lady Gaga				
A glass of water				
A golden ring				
A new doll				
My old doll which was given to me as my first birthday present				
A superhero				
A book				
A song				
A snail				
An elephant				

- Make a list of the things that are important to do.
- Think of unimportant things and write them down. Why are they unimportant? Could they be important to someone? In what way?
- What is important for: you/ your parents/ your friends?
- **Rating what is important and what is not.** Use a rope and a set of pictures of things that might be important or unimportant things. Children are encouraged to put them in a line (rope) from the less important to the more important. This can also be done using children's drawings of what they consider as important and unimportant things. Discuss the outcomes of the activity with the children? Do they all agree?