O, CANADA

Director of Lower School Jane Clarke and Vs Group Teacher Will Sears share their expertise with Canadian educators through C&C’s Block Connection program

As a follow-up to over 14 years of outreach to public schools promoting indoor unit blocks, C&C’s Block Connection program was recently invited to travel to northern Canada to talk for the first time about our outdoor yard materials. Through Block Connection, C&C teachers have consistently shared their passion and enthusiasm for children’s indoor block work with their public school colleagues, primarily in New York and New Jersey, but also internationally with educators in Iceland, Jamaica, and Russia. Now it was time to branch out again, with a different set of materials.

Determined to find colder winter temperatures, Vs Group Teacher Will Sears and Director of Lower School Jane Clarke travelled in December to northern Canada to talk for the first time about our Block Connection program. Inspired by C&C’s outdoor block video (available on our website), Canadian administrators contacted Jane, excited to start using these materials for their students in expansive outdoor play areas. The organization actively collaborated with C&C carpenter Steve Antonakos here in New York; Steve provided design dimensions and advice about wood and wood finishes, and they commissioned three full block yard sets from a local carpenter in Ontario. Jane and Will later found out that this was just the first step in a larger plan to expand this work across a network of schools in this part of Canada.

Once there, Jane and Will offered workshops to teachers, social workers, and other early childhood specialists to share the history of these materials and how the children currently work with them at C&C. As Jane described it, “This was a truly thrilling experience for Will and me. Not only did we see the eyes of teachers open wide with anticipation and excitement, we also had the pleasure of seeing different groups of children build with these blocks for the first time ever! It was uplifting to once again observe the natural way in which all children can engage so completely with these simple materials, with very little prompting from grown-ups. We plan to remain in contact with Jessica Plante and Dani Grenier-Ducharme, the initiators of this collaboration, and to continue supporting their plans to spread these efforts far and wide.”

“Play and inquiry are learning approaches that capitalize on children’s natural curiosity and exuberance.”

From the Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT) Framework, Ontario Ministry of Education

When Jane and Will saw this quote, central to the work of their Canadian hosts, they knew they had found like minds.

ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY OF EDUCATORS

Through C&C’s Block Connection program and Educator Visits, our faculty members are able to share their expertise with teachers from across the country and around the world. In 2018-2019, 65 teachers and administrators visited C&C, and 36 have already been welcomed this school year. These experiences enable them to bring valuable insights from C&C’s educational practices and pedagogy back to their own schools. This expanding initiative seeks to fulfill C&C Founder Caroline Pratt’s vision of making a real change in how all children are taught. The program is offered free of charge to public school educators, and we are delighted to be holding two workshops this year for the teachers at Wyckoff School District, NJ. These trainings are in addition to several workshops that will be held at C&C.

Thank you to Jane, Will, and all of our Block Connection teachers, who work tirelessly to share their expertise with our wider community of educators!

A local workshop in Ontario created three full sets of outdoor blocks for the Canadian schools, relying on C&C carpenter Steve Antonakos’ precise specifications.

A video about the C&C Block Connection program, including footage from last year’s workshops, is available at www.cityandcountry.org/videos. C&C gratefully acknowledges the Tietz Family Foundation (connectionsplus.org) for its ongoing support of Block Connection and the School’s efforts to share its expertise with the wider educational community.

Elise also has an article in the current issue of Parents League Review (2020) entitled “An Open Letter to Parents: Thoughts from an Admissions Director.”

OUT OF THE OFFICE AND INTO THE CLASSROOM

Director of Admissions Elise Bauer recently stepped back into the classroom, this time sharing her experience with future educators from Bank Street College of Education in her new role as Adjunct Professor. During a week-long course, she expertly guided her students in ways to use blocks to offer children important opportunities for learning. Elise’s students explored innovation, critical-thinking, executive functioning, and collaboration, as well as social studies, math, science, and literacy development.

Elise also has an article in the current issue of Parents League Review (2020) entitled “An Open Letter to Parents: Thoughts from an Admissions Director.”

Parents: Thoughts from an Admissions Director.

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