

Concealing and Revealing with Transparency

November 19, 2003

Dawn, the atelierista, has invited the children to draw, offering pastels, pencils, markers, white paper, and various types and sizes of plastic dinosaurs in response to an interest expressed a previous day.

Liana (5.0 yrs) draws a body of water with a colourful dinosaur beside it.

Is your dinosaur a plant eater, or a meat eater?

Liana considers this question for a moment, and then replies, **“A plant eater”**.

Oh – so I guess it would have to be able to hide from the meat eaters

She ponders this, and then agrees.

How could your dinosaur hide?

Behind a tree.

So it could hide behind a tree and the meat eaters wouldn't be able to see it. What colour would the tree be, to hide this colourful dinosaur?

“Brown.”

(Although her dinosaur was coloured rather fancifully, when faced with a problem, Liana gives an answer rooted in reality.)

At this point, she is offered a new medium – an overhead transparency and markers. The acetate sheet is secured over her original drawing with tape.

There, now you can draw a tree to hide your dinosaur.

Liana selects a brown and a green marker and draws the outline of a tree that is large enough to conceal her dino. She then colours in the green foliage over the dino's head.



She switches to the brown marker and begins to colour a border around the inside of the tree trunk, leaving the dino exposed.



If a meat-eater came along now, could he see the dino?

“No.”

Liana’s response is puzzling, as the dino is clearly visible.

If we lift this clear sheet up, what do you think it will look like underneath?

“The colour will be on the paper.”

The reason for Liana’s decision to leave the middle of the tree trunk clear becomes apparent. She did not want to cover over her original drawing permanently.

Let’s lift it up and see.

We peel off the tape and lift the acetate sheet.

Liana smiles when she sees her dino intact, with no tree.



We replace the acetate over her drawing, and she picks up the brown marker and works diligently to conceal the dino.



This episode reveals many things. This was the first time Liana had used transparent sheets, and we shouldn’t have assumed that she would understand that her original drawing would be protected. If she had had previous exposure, she would have had a different knowledge base to draw on. When we realized how she had interpreted this process, her problem-solving skills became clear.

Perhaps even more significant is the fact that Liana was willing and able to negotiate a compromise between her desire to preserve her drawing and our provocation to find a way to hide her dino. Given that she thought the marks she was making on the transparency were actually being transferred to her paper, she showed great generosity of spirit in collaborating with the challenge we offered. She did this without any discussion. She could have simply walked away. Instead, we learned together about clarity and transparency.