



# Frog Constellation

by Bright Clouds – SFUCCS January 2017

# Intention

- Bright Clouds children love going for walks around the SFU campus. On our walks we often see different types of art, so we decided to be more intentional on our walks and dwell deeper with a specific art piece on campus.
- With the upcoming conference in April "Offering In-Depth Learning Experiences for Infants & Toddlers Through Teacher Research", featuring Margie Carter & Deb Curtis, educators from different SFUCCS programs will be facilitating the conference and taking our guests on a culture walk around the SFU campus. Since Jahtania and Tamara will be the facilitators at the conference, we thought what better way to share a story of an art piece than through our children's eyes.
- We decided to pick an art piece and regularly visit it with our children and the children from Malaika. We wanted to visit it with another program to strengthen our relationships and create a closer community.
- The art piece we choose was *The Frog Constellation*, because of its characters that our young children could relate to. The statue is of two humans sitting on an animal, the one in the front is holding two animals.

# First Encounter



Children and the educators were all mesmerized the first time we encountered *The Frog Constellation*, as we did not expect it to be the size it is. Once the children walked around the statue, and saw it from different angles, the educators asked them what they were looking at.

Andrew: "Daddy"

Thiago: "Mommy"

# Closer look and feel



After looking at the statue, some children pointed out some of the features they recognized.

Thiago: "Eyes, mouth, nose"

When we asked the children what the figure was holding in his/her hand they said:

Thiago: "Mau, mau" (cat)

Emma: "Frog"

Andrew: "Bye gator"



# Revisiting



The next day we printed a photo of our visit to the *Frog Constellation* so the children could revisit their excursion from the previous day.

Jamie who did not see the statue the day before pointed at the photo and said:

“Big children” (two characters)

“Train” (pointing at the animal on the bottom)

“People watching. Andrew right there. It don’t have Jamie in here too. Jamie go next morning.”



# Second Visit



Even though it was a second visit for some children, for many it was their first encounter with the statue, so we let them explore it by looking at it, walking around it, and touching it.

Andrew: "It's fishes, in his hand. Too high"

Educator: "What's too high?"

Andrew: "Daddy too high"



# I see you



Theo : "Mamma, Mor"  
Emma: "Mammy, daddy"

Most of our children saw their parents in the two characters.  
The animals that they saw on the other hand ranged from frogs,  
fish, alligators, and cats.

# Frog Constellation & Clay



The educators at Bright Clouds thought about revisiting the walks to the Frog Constellation with children, and we thought that we would share some of the photographs we took there, and invite the children to make the statue out of clay.

We heard the children repeat these familiar words:

“Mummy, daddy, frog, fishy”

# Creating the Statue with Clay



Emma, Thiago and Tamara worked on building the statue together. While Tamara created the large figures, Emma and Thiago worked on the details.

Emma: "Hat, hair, frog"

Thiago: "Ball"

Tamara: "TT, we finished the body, could we use your ball as a head on the statue"

Thiago: "Yes"

Once the statue was completed, Emma and Thiago were excited to show it to Ling.

Emma then brought the statue back to the table, and we talked about adding more details.

Emma: "Eyes, mouth, nose"





The following day Emma & Thiago showed an interest in the statue again. Emma worked on it for a long time (Tamara helped with the initial shape) carefully adding details.  
“Hat, hair, daddy, mama, Emma, frog, ney-ney”

Thiago started to create his family: “Daddy, Romeo, TT” naming his family members, interestingly by size. Thiago’s new born brother Romeo was the smallest creation, Thiago the middle, and his father the biggest one. Remarkably Emma & Thiago both saw their families when they looked at the statue.

Theo pointed to the statue recognizing his peers. He then rolled up a piece of clay and said "*I am making Frog Constellation*". I was at first surprised to hear him use the full name of the art piece, but then remembered how much Theo loves stories, and how rich his vocabulary is.



# Collaborating with Malaika



As we have been visiting the *Frog Constellation* with the children and educators from Malaika, we thought we would visit each others centers as we learn about the statue through different languages. We visited Malaika, whose children have been drawing the statue, and the children from Malaika visited Bright Clouds, building the statue from clay.



# Reflection

Visiting the *Frog Constellation* statue over the last month with Malaika has been a powerful experience. Not only are the educators and children forming stronger relationships by visiting the statue together, and reflecting about the statue through visits to each others centers, but through collaboration we are learning about the same topic in similar and different ways.

While children in Malaika are showing an interest in Frogs, children in Bright Clouds are showing a strong interest in Family Diversity; seeing their parents and themselves in the statue.



# Introducing Diverse Family Dolls

Since children see their families in the statue, we decided to provide children with diverse family dolls to see where their imagination would lead us.



# Children recognizing themselves and their family members in the dolls.



# Connections made



While admiring the fresh flowers on the table, smelling them and naming them Theo exclaimed, "I love pink. You put flowers in the water. I love those flowers. I must turn them". As he turned a jar around, one of them tumbled over, spilling water onto the table. Theo extended a river of water on the table and said : "I'm drawing a bird, I'm making a frog constellation in the water".

The next day while playing with family dolls and loose parts, Theo picked up a 'telescope' as he named it and said " You can see the stars through the telescope. It's a candlelight sticking through the telescope." Theo's rich vocabulary and opulent imagination stuns us every day as he makes connections through play.

We have been visiting the *Frog Constellation* for more than three months. Recently we have ventured into the 'Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology', which the Frog Constellation is in front of. The children enjoy connecting their current interests to pieces that they see in the museum. Thiago saw a buffalo tusk, and thought it was a "dinosaur". Masks hanging on the walls reminded children of "monsters" they have been exploring at Bright Clouds. A piece that draws the most children in is a life size bear.



While revisiting the statue children converse:

Jamie: "Mommy over there. Drive. I have mommy at home, and daddy at home."

Emma: "I have daddy and mammy, grandma and grandpa."

TT: "My baby home."



# Painting the Frog Constellation



Theo: "Don't believe it to see it. Painting picture of Frog Constellation. Making the frog. Painting brown, painting red, only red"

We noticed that children loved to paint over the lamented photograph of the statue, so the educators decided to print a photograph of the statue and place it on a wooden canvas.

Once the wooden canvas painting of the *Frog Constellation* was completed, we were inspired to continue exploring the statue through paint by projecting a photo of the *Frog Constellation* onto a large canvas along side some paint.



With the statue now being at their level, the children were able to get an even closer look at the details of the art piece, without being distracted by its naturally large size that normally peers over all of us. The children showed us an even deeper connection, being physically closer to the family presented in the *Frog Constellation*, that they viewed as their own.

## Description of the *Frog Constellation* from the SFU website.

*Frog Constellation* is Hart's tribute in cedar to a small shamanic piece, depicting a man and woman straddling a huge frog, carved by an unnamed master of Haida art, probably in the 1870s. Hart spent three-and-a-half years on the work. He calls it his "PhD."

"The frog is quite powerful in our thinking. It's one of the creatures that can go in two worlds, in the water and in the upper world, our world. . . The frog is one of my family crests, but I don't know the family story, how that came to be one of our crests."

Hart saw the original piece that inspired him, only once, a glimpse in a photo. "I asked an old gentleman here (in Haida Gwaii) about it. The story is an old Haida love story. The frog king took a young man's lady, and he couldn't find her. . .



## Our Reflection

Throughout our visits to the Frog Constellation and our explorations with it in our center, one thing that was constant in our conversations about the statue was the idea of family. After reading the story behind the statue, we are amazed that the children were able to feel and see what the artist was trying to portray in his work. A strong presence of the love that the children have for their families was emanated in our space, often depicting themselves as the frog being held by their loved ones. Throughout our time learning about the art piece we are reminded of the *Hundred Languages*. Art has an amazing way of speaking to us, of telling us a story, without having to use any words.