



6-1995

## Matters of Consequence

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### Recommended Citation

Laycock, Mary (1995) "Matters of Consequence," *Teaching and Learning: The Journal of Natural Inquiry & Reflective Practice*: Vol. 9 : Iss. 3 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://commons.und.edu/tl-nirp-journal/vol9/iss3/6>

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## Matters of Consequence

Christina is four years and seven months old. Ron, or Dr. Ron as we've been calling him since his *very* recent graduation from medical school, is twenty-five years and seven months old. Christina and Ron are hunkered down by the side of the pond in the woods that border the cornfields on one side of my sister's farm. Christina has invited Dr. Ron to engage in some imaginary fishing with her and so, as the rest of our family toasts marshmallows around a campfire, Christi and Ron crouch, shoulder to shoulder, on the pond's edge, engrossed in conversation about the possibility of getting a "bite" on their lineless "poles."

Talk, conversation, questions, explanations, demands, and stories are a few ways in which Christina is making meaning and defining who she is these days. The verbalizing is ceaseless as she tests the fit between herself and her world. So far her surroundings appear to provide comfort, satisfaction, and challenge. For the most part, adults and children in her experience listen, respond, and expand upon the talk she initiates. Occasionally, we find ourselves exhausted by our efforts to attend to her endless pronouncements and questions.

As those of us around the campfire listen to the "fishers" by the pond we notice a break in the flow of words. Christina reestablishes the rhythm of the exchange with her estimation of the quality of Ron's and her discourse, "I know you are a big tall man," she says, "but you talk just like a kid." Dr. Ron responds to the compliment without missing a beat, "Thank you, Christi, I'm glad you think so. I like talking to you."

Those of us who are eavesdropping on the conversation smile and quietly congratulate ourselves on a job well done. We are, after all, responsible for sending into the world a shiny new medical doctor who listens and knows how to talk to children and a child who not only refuses to be ignored but knows that she is both a communicator and an evaluator of the discourse she initiates.

Our membership in an extended family that values written and spoken words affords us opportunity to imagine fish, lines, and bites, and create space in which to appreciate each other's gift for talking "just like a kid." As Dr. Ron's Auntie M and Christina's Mea Mau, I am more than teacher and learner, I am both benefactor and beneficiary of the power, meaning, and transformational possibility of speaking and listening in those intimate spaces we create together.