

AAAF

Listen—The Bricks Are Talking!

Architects and other construction industry professionals use bricks all the time, but how often do they stop and look—really look—at an actual brick? When did you last hold one—and did the brick “speak” to you? A diverse group of people seated around a conference table in Washington, D.C., recently were challenged to do just this—hold a brick and tell what it “communicated” to them.

The challenge came from Judith Landau, of Learning and Leadership for Families Inc. (LLF), a Washington-area educational organization partnering with The American Architectural Foundation (AAF) to explore a new approach to teaching design concepts in the classroom. The “Messages of the Built Environment” pro-

gram has begun a test phase this fall in several schools in the Baltimore-Washington metropolitan area. The goal of the program is to help children in Head Start classrooms—and their parents—interact more positively with their built environment by better understanding its “messages.”

At the conference table were not only executives from LLF and the AAF, classroom teachers, and communications professionals, but also an official of a labor union supporting “messages” activities in one community, parents of preschool children participating in the new program, and a couple of Head Start program coordinators. Landau passed a standard, eight-inch red around the table and asked each person to hold the brick long enough to experience some

aspect of its significance.

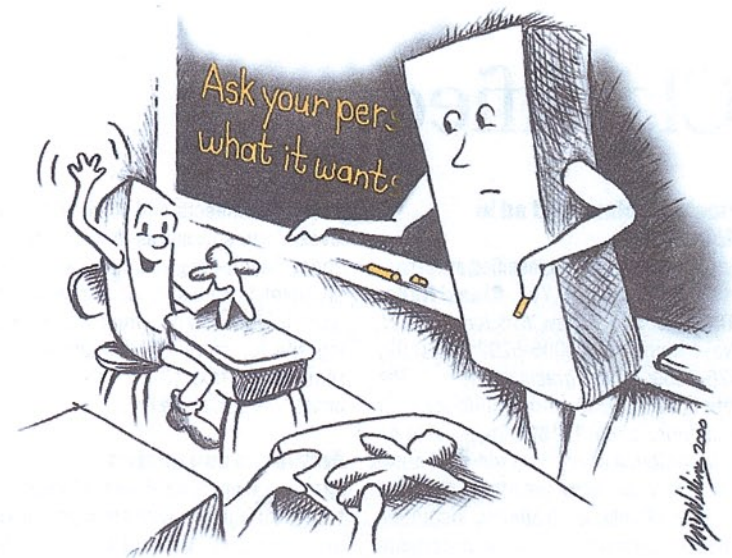
Responses around the table ranged from the obvious (“heavy,” “solid,” “hard”) to the truly insightful. One participant said it made her feel cool because it reminded her of her childhood home in New Orleans, which had a brick cellar that was always cooler than the outside temperature. Another said the brick represented the “harnessing of nature.” Yet another said “civilization.”

Using the uniquely successful vehicles of Head Start agencies and Title One elementary schools, “Messages of the Built Environment” will teach parents to “read” their physical surroundings. The parents share this newfound knowledge with their children, whose social and scholas-

tic achievement improves as a result. Pooling the strengths of the AAF and LLF, the program ultimately will produce a tested and documented curriculum with comprehensive materials for preschool and early-elementary settings that will

be ready for nationwide dissemination by fall 2002.

The program received initial funding from the National Endowment for the Arts and earlier this year received a \$196,995 grant from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation.



“My person says it has to go to the little bricks’ room!”