

MEET THE FACULTY

Dr. Leslie Van Gelder

●●● NOW IN HER 10TH YEAR AS A FACULTY MEMBER

in The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership, Dr. Leslie Van Gelder is passionate about helping students pursue their interests through research. Here, she describes what drives her own research and how she shares her experiences with her students.

HOW DID YOUR RESEARCH IN FRANCE START? My late husband, Kevin, also studied archaeology and had worked in a cave in

Australia in the 1970s where he became fascinated by lines people had drawn with their hands. These lines are called finger flutings and became a passion of mine. In 2001, we were granted permission to work in Rouffignac Cave in the Dordogne region of France. After 10 years, I've completed our study there.



“Stay humble to your subject and appreciative of what you're researching.”

WHO WERE THE INDIVIDUALS IN THE CAVES YOU'VE STUDIED?

Although we'll never be 100% sure, we think we've been able to identify eight individuals clearly and at least three were children. I think the presence of children in the creation of cave art captures our imaginations. Much of our work has suggested there might be more complex and multilayered

use of the caves than previously thought. Children don't tend to leave behind a lot of tools, so being able to see what they created or drew on the walls of a cave helps us see them more clearly.

WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ANSWER THROUGH YOUR RESEARCH?

I'd like to know more about the people who made the finger flutings. For a long time, they've lain in abstraction because we couldn't differentiate individuals. I like unraveling those lines and

finding the 5-year-old girl who liked to be held up or the boy who was on a woman's hip, drawing with his right hand while she worked with her left. Each panel has a story to tell that is both very familiar and also completely new to us.

WHAT IS THE KEY TO GOOD RESEARCH?

To ask questions that can be answered and not to ask questions to which you already know the answer. It's also essential to have good colleagues, a willingness to read the literature in your field, and always to be open to new interpretations. Stay humble to your subject and appreciative of what you're researching. If you're you'll be more open to letting it guide you.

WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO YOU TO PUBLISH AND PRESENT YOUR WORK?

I feel an enormous sense of responsibility to share what I learn with both my academic community and the general public. I encourage all of my students to present and to publish. Perhaps because I'm active in the scholarly community, I want to make sure my students are having those kinds of experiential

