Flexible and fluid thinking

**What’s involved in learning**

- Seeing people, places, and things in new ways
- Expressing unique and imaginative ideas

Open-ended play materials encourage children to think in new and fresh ways!

Elicit and support innovative uses of materials and equipment.

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Bring INDOOR materials OUTSIDE allows for flexible and fluid thinking.

**What would you do with a box?**

~ Loo Elton Little Acorns Daycare Centre

The Chatham Day Care Center encourages the use of familiar materials in new settings.

In the outdoor play area chalkboards are mounted on the fence and paper to paint is fastened to the roof.

~ Loo Elton Little Acorns Daycare Centre
NEW BRUNSWICK CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK For Early Learning and Child Care ~ English

In 2008, "The Stick" was inducted into the National Toy Museum in the United States.

There is no right way to play with mud, sand and water. The sheer pleasure of raw materials entices the child to dream, explore and invent new ways to use them.

~ Dorothy Hill (1977)

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Inclusiveness and Equity  Compassion and Caring • Living Democratically • Individuality & Independence • Social Responsibility • Communication  • Imagination, Creativity & Play • Spirituality  • Zest for Living and Learning • Inclusiveness and Equity

Display art and artifacts that show different ways of using media  • Provide open-ended materials that inspire children  • Encourage children to create their own dramatic play props

What equipment can be added to the playdough centre?

This is hair made with a garlic press!

How flexible are you about where materials are used? For example, can the blocks be taken to house keeping?

COOKING OUTDOORS!

Snow muffins anyone? Yum!

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How flexible are you about where materials are used? For example, can the blocks be taken to house keeping?

BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER

Go Away, Big Green Monster, by Edward Emberley
Can't You Sleep, Little Bear?, by Martin Waddell
Where The Wild Things Are, by Maurice Sendak
Everett Anderson’s Goodbye, by Lucille Clifton
The Ghost Tree, by Bill Martin Jr. and John Archambault
My Grandson Lew, by Charlotte Zolotow
Flexible and fluid thinking

Beautiful Things

We called our collection of found and recycled materials “Beautiful Things”. To begin our project, we sent a letter to families along with paper bags asking if children could bring in items from home. When the bags were returned we categorized the items and put them in to baskets on our art shelves. Materials included beads, old jewellery, stickers, different colour paper, zippers, and buttons. The collection drive was a huge success.

The children have the freedom to choose what they would like to use from the art shelf. We label everything and all the materials are within their reach. We cover a long table with paper and children may paint or collage anytime through the day.

We add new materials to our art shelf as often as we can. Lately we have been focussing on finding natural materials, such as moss and pebbles, to add to the collection. I went with my grandson to explore in the woods behind my home to find items for the collection. We found moss and have added it to the shelf. The moss adds an interesting twist to the beautiful collages.

Mary Cole  Kids Choice Childcare Ltd.

“Recycling has become part of most people’s lives. But before some items hit the recycle bin, they can be reused to create toys and art. This kind of ‘recycling’ inspires the imaginations of children and adults alike. Because there is no right or wrong way to create with junk, it encourages a child’s creativity and helps develop problem-solving skills”

~ Canadian Child Care Federation (2001)
Weisman Topal and Lella Gandini (1999, 6) Adapted from Cathy
Materials to Collect:

- wire
- shells
- feathers
- sponges
- small seed pods
- costume jewellery
- wood scraps
- containers
- broken jewellery
- tape
- string
- ribbon and yarn
- old keys
- small machines that don’t work (i.e. watches and clocks)
- corks
- bottle caps
- leather remnants
- holders and other extruded objects
- plastic sock holders
- baskets
- cardboard pieces
- paper of differing weights, textures, and colors
- nails
- screws and bolts
- small mirrors
- bottle caps
- leather remnants
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- nails
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- small mirrors
- corks

Why this matters:

Found materials, such as the “beautiful things” brought in by the children and educators on these pages, present many opportunities for flexible and fluid thinking. Children can explore ideas for sorting or categorizing and experiment with the aesthetic of what is beautiful to them, both in the items they select and how they see these items within the finished product. Children will also make decisions about which items will be most useful for building different creations. All around, they are seeing new possibilities in these every day items.

Other Possibilities:

- Welcome to the robot museum.

Robot made by: Maggie
Robot’s Name: Doctor Robot
Comment: “It helps doctors checking people. It makes medicine in them (tall tube). From (the end of) the other tube, the medicine comes out.”
Symbols and systems of representation

What's involved in learning

- Making up their own words, marks, and movements
- Negotiating the meaning of symbols with others
- Taking up and reshaping cultural experiences
- Developing awareness of the imagined and ordinary worlds they move between as they play

At play, children are empowered to use language on their own terms, in their own ways, and at their own time.

Erin and Rachel prepared and cooked S'mores following the written recipe. After eating the S'mores, they decided that the recipe needed pictures so they added their illustrations.

Together the children decide how to make a house with their bodies.

Pamela Nuttall Nason and Anne Hunt (1999, 1)
“Oops, the basketball net fell down... 
...now it’s a bus!” — Lauren, Kevin, Moose, Ben

BOOKS TO READ TOGETHER

Imagine a Night, by Sarah Thompson
Imagine a Day, by Sarah Thompson
Imagine a Place, by Sarah Thompson

Making Movements
While playing outside, I watched Spencer draw a large circle with a stick. He then laid down on the ground and, keeping his arms and legs straight, tried to shimmy around. I was confused as to what he was doing until I heard him chant, “Tick Toc...Tick Toc... Look Erin...I’m a clock!”

~ Erin Brewer  Sussex Early Learning Centre

Making Marks

PLAYING WITH WORDS

Making new versions of old favourites

“I’M A CLOCK!”

“I’m a clock!” — Sarah Thompson

Making new versions of old favourites

~ UNB Children’s Centre
Symbols and systems of representation

Clothespin Creations

I purchased some clothespins from the local Dollar Store to hang artwork on an indoor clothesline - what we call the art string. At one of the NB Curriculum Framework professional learning meetings, I had noted the idea of introducing clothespins in a basket to encourage fine-motor development. Excited to implement this idea, I showed the children how to clip the clothespins on the side of the container they were stored in; I left it at that, hoping they liked the idea. They seemed very interested in the clothespins and before long began connecting several pins to create various objects such as snakes and boats. I was awe-struck with their creations and snapped a couple pictures.

Within the next couple of days the children attempted much more detailed and complex creations such as dragons, robots, and even Ninetendo Wii remotes! I have even seen them attach a clothespin to pieces of decorated cash-register tape and run around with them like kites. At that point, I offered to put on some music and they had a blast dancing around with them - as some have done with scarves or ribbons. How great that I can facilitate the passion that they have shown in the clothespin construction. Another awesome creation was when one child took a plastic toy pear from the dramatic play kitchen and attached a clothespin to the stem to create a nozzle for bug spray.

Not one day has passed in the last 2 months that the children have not picked up the bucket of clothespins and built something. Now, I am seeing the younger children start to imitate the older ones who initiated the clothespin frenzy. The infants (11 months and 15 months) will often head for the pins and either carry them around or try connecting two of them. It is amazing to me how the children have demonstrated the ability to engage in hours of imaginative and meaningful play through the creation of symbols.

With the accumulation of masterpieces, I thought “What better way to share them than an Art Show!” so I invited the parents to a potluck and art gallery premier. We had a 10 minute slide show of the pictures and each child had a wall space, “Featuring…” It was a success!

Cassandra St Louis Precious Gems Play Center

Why this matters:

Cassandra is creating an environment conducive to learning by:

• Watching the possibilities unfold and making materials available, such as recyclables, popsicle sticks, and clothespins of different colours.

• Drawing on Enid Elliot’s suggestion of “being present” in observing children’s play

• Celebrating and documenting the children’s clothespin creations by featuring them in an art show for families.
Other Possibilities:

How else could we extend this play?

- Adding different styles of clothespins such as wooden or metal: comparing and contrasting their styles, what they are used for, how they work, which is stronger, etc.

- Providing mark making materials for representing their creations.

- Adding some glue, paint, and other art materials near the clothespins and seeing what happens!

- "Rocket ships" – Alison & Caleb
- "It's bug spray" – Alison
- "A big, long boat" – Caleb
- Reese playing with some clothespins too!
- Sharing our “jets” with Caleb’s Grampy.

- "Wii remotes" – Alison & Caleb
- "Snake car" – Alison
- "Snake set-up" with a firepit for the snakes to roast marshmallows.

- "Bambi" – Caleb
- "A collar for Mooey" – Alison
- "A reindeer!" – Erik

- "A robot" – Erik
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Create Imaginary Scenarios

What’s involved in learning

- Creating social spaces and shared narratives
- Creating alternative systems of power
- Coping with emotional pressure

In imagination, [children] fully enter worlds that... include their re-told experiences, the stories they have read, and the movies they have watched. When adults play with children they can likewise enter those worlds not to observe but to participate with children... ~ Brian Edmiston (2007, 12)

Imagination and Creativity

Children’s play themes involve big and serious issues which commonly include death, loss, loneliness, abandonment and being cared for or nursed. Weapon play certainly provides opportunities for these themes to be explored and also involves the common dominant theme in children’s play – namely power and being in control or controlled by others. ~ Diane Rich (2005, 4)

Dead Everything

By Lauren

The princess was walking to the zoo. A pirate came and killed the princess.

The unicorn kissed the pirate. The knight killed the pirate. The fairy killed the pirate. The princess woke up. The pirate killed the fairy. The princess woke up and killed the fairy.

The dragon killed the fairy. Horses and unicorns and dragon killed the fairy. The unicorns and knights and princesses and horses and fairies and pirates are all dead.

The end.
Much to the children’s delight, Roberta Miller used a large cardboard box to enclose an area of the room. The children made signs and designs on the new wall and the space was used as an imaginary house, a dungeon, a jail and then a doghouse before the wall started to fall down from so much use!

- Big Bear Preschool

**Books to read TOGETHER**

*Roxenboxen*, by Alice McLerran and Barbara Cooney

*Changes, Changes*, by Pat Hutchins

*How to Catch a Star*, by Oliver Jeffers

*Puff the Magic Dragon*, by Peter Yarrow and Lenny Lipton

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**Building Block Worlds**

From the earliest ‘pretend I’m the mama and you’re the baby,’ play is the model for the life-long practice of trying out new ideas. Pretending is the most open-ended of all activities...Pretending enables us to ask ‘What if?’

- Vivian Gussin Paley (2004, 92)

Joshua

*This stegasaurus is getting ready to leave on a rocketship with all the other dinosaurs.*
Create Imaginary Scenarios

“You need to comb it first!”

The previous evening Olivia had a hair-cut and I invited her to draw a picture of the experience. I displayed her work on the wall in a dramatic play area.

One of our roles as educators is to “play along, and provide ideas, materials and information for children to enrich their imaginary play.” I provided a prop box and invited Olivia to the hair salon. When Brooklyn arrived we invited her to join. The girls decided together who would be the first person to have a haircut.

Brooklyn asked, “Olivia, are you ready?” Olivia sat in the chair and Brooklyn placed the black hairdresser’s cape over her shoulders. Olivia looked at me and stated: “Brooklyn is getting my hair done.” Brooklyn asked Olivia, “Did the hairdresser do this?” Olivia nodded her head in agreement.

Brooklyn then asked, “Olivia, did that hurt?” She responded “No” and then asked, “After you’re done, can I do yours?” Brooklyn replied, “O.K.”, as she applied shampoo from the bottle to Olivia’s hair. Olivia instructed, “You need to comb it first.” Brooklyn agreed and said, “I like this one,” and chose a black brush to brush out Olivia’s hair.

Fred had watched with interest the interactions between Brooklyn and Olivia in the hair salon. When Olivia left the salon, Brooklyn said, “Fred, sit down,” and she placed the client’s cape around his shoulders. Fred sat patiently as Brooklyn brushed his hair before cutting and drying it.

Brooklyn, I wonder who will be your next client? If I need a hairdresser, I should make an appointment with you because you pay such close attention to your work.

Maria Gillis  Unicorn Children’s Centre Inc.
Why this matters:

Through this dramatic play, Olivia revisited her experience of the previous evening as a client having her hair trimmed. Also, Brooklyn did not need or desire for me to intervene or to direct her activities with Olivia and Fred. She used her imagination and her experiences to participate in her own way. As educators, we encourage children to “represent their experiences in their own way.” I often wish that the children’s parents could observe their children firsthand here, seeing the variety of expressions on their faces, hearing the language development, and appreciating the roles the children have chosen to play.

Maria Gillis  Unicorn Children’s Centre Inc.

Other Possibilities:

Local industries and parents’ work varies from community to community, but it is always a rich source of experience that children make sense of through play. In New Brunswick, local occupations such as fishing, farming, and logging industries offer fruitful possibilities for play scenarios; in addition, there the are perennial favourites such as playing hospital, school, house, library, store, post-office, and hair salon.

YMCA Preschool and Afterschool Adventures

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YMCA Preschool and Afterschool Adventures
For Reflection

Do you take time to play with open-ended materials as a way of exploring your own creativity? Think about how the children may view and represent their world.

Think about cultural notions of play. What do you consider play? What do families in your centre think about play? How do children view play?

When children share their symbol making systems (mark making/storytelling/symbolic representation) how do you honour their systems? How would you encourage children to share their systems with other children and families? How do you document their process?

Are materials and props in your room easily accessible to children? Do children select their own materials? Think about the variety/range of materials available. Can children transport materials from one area to another? Consider how often you change and rotate materials throughout your room.

How do you inspire children and enhance their imaginative potential? Think about materials that inspire. What experiences and role models have been sources of inspiration recently for the children’s play and art work in your centre?

How do you intervene when fantasy play (e.g. superhero play) is disruptive? For example — do you enter as a character? Do you change the tone of play by dropping your voice to a whisper as you enter the play? Do you redirect or refocus the play by inviting children to draw, paint, or scribe superhero stories?

How do you create spaces and time to connect with families? How do the lives of families enter imaginary play? As the educator, how do you share play scenarios with families to gain insight into children working through complex life situations?
Inclusiveness and Equity          Compassion and Caring • Living Democratically • Individuality                     And Independence • Social Responsibility • Communication        • Imagination, Creativity & Play • Spirituality  • Zest for Living and Learning • Inclusiveness And

Morgan

Francis

dressed as a bee.