Environments and Attitudes that support Curiosity & Inquiry

Susan Stacey

introduction and background

• Inquiry as an ‘umbrella’
• Emergent Curriculum, Reflective Practice, Pedagogical Documentation
• No matter how we name our own practice, if it is play-based, flexible, responsive…then it involves inquiry
• Frameworks?

we are born to inquire

• Children want to know how the world works
• How do we respond to this curiosity?
• Protocols for reflecting upon children’s actions:
  • The Cycle of Inquiry
  • What, So What, Now What?
  • The Thinking Lens (Carter and Curtis)
  • See, Think, Wonder (Project Zero, Harvard)
The original Cycle of Inquiry

Reflecting with others on observations, experiences, anecdotes and narratives

What intrigues or puzzles me – what do I wonder? Specifically, what are the children trying to find out?

What does it all mean? Search for patterns and insights

What do we offer as an invitation? As support?

How do the children respond?

Continued observation and formulation of questions

The Missing Middle

Learning to Pause

• Think about when to push forth. Do we know what children are curious about, and why?
• Consider when to wait.
• Think about when to forget about it for a while!
Examining the child's Cycle of Inquiry and how this reflects their curiosity and actions.

Observation: Thinking about how we see

- 'we see what we know'
- 'we have to be aware that we have a perspective'
- Slowing down to really notice before we interpret

With thanks to Madeley Nursery School UK.
studio areas as a place of curiosity
The natural world in a small corner, addressing how things grow, or not

The classroom as a workshop for ideas, and to nurture curiosity
Inquiry is supported by promoting curiosity through...

- Supporting 'risky thinking'
- Making thinking visible & records what we are all curious about
- Supporting teacher growth in the form of asking questions and finding answers
- Nurturing and supporting relationships

Studios are:
Safe places for considered risk-taking
Places of diversity in all forms
Places of Adaptability
Filled with failures, full of success
The meeting place of thinking and doing

With thanks to London Bridge Child Care Services Inc, London, Ontario

In the studio:
- We explore our techniques
- We form visions and work to achieve them
- We define problems and creatively engage to solve them
- We learn from conversations
- We integrate what we know in new ways with new materials and new goals
- We learn by doing, making, iteration, experimentation, and trial and error
- We reward initiative, creativity and risk-taking
- We see that there are no single, fixed solutions to problems

No studio? Inquiry anywhere and everywhere...
Intriguing materials that are provocative

- (Infant room, London Bridge, Ont)

Books that support children’s ‘finding out about stuff’
The children’s questions: How does our brain work? What does it do?
Using encounters with materials as a form of inquiry

- Prior knowledge
- Experiences
- Provisional ideas
- Questions

The child brings...

What happens?

- Encounters with materials (exploring, testing, revisiting)
- Developing curiosity

Thinking and learning

- New possibilities
- New directions
- Building upon ideas
- Knowledge through experiences

Encouraging interesting and alternate forms of expression...

...leads to interesting theories from children, and questions/ideas for teachers
Closing thoughts…

- “We are always amazed, surprised, incomplete. We must constantly update ourselves in response to children’s changes.”

- “We know where we aim to go, but ‘it depends’ how we get there…getting there will change, depending on the variables.”

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Books available in U.S. through Redleaf Press (www.redleafpress.org)

Or in Canada through Login Books (www.lb.ca)

Or Amazon!