Wonder of Wonders!
Harnessing the Wonder of Play through Provocations

With Sally Haughey
Founder of Fairy Dust Teaching

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Sally Haughey
Founder of Fairy Dust Teaching
Serve over 101 Countries
180,000 educators
National Board Certified
25 years of classroom experience

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My original dream was to be an artist. I went to art school and spent a decade painting.

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My passion for education began with my son. He was in kindergarten and sometime in the winter time - I received a call from his teacher. Mrs. Haughey, we need to talk.

I was working at my church’s office and the Preschool teacher in the Mother’s Day Out Program was leaving.

My goal today is to help you master play provocations that invoke wonder.
Today we will be covering in our conversation:

- Wonder & Play
- What is a provocation?
- How can we observe potential possibilities for provocations?
- What are the fundamental conditions of a highly effective provocation?
- The reflective process underneath provocations
- Next steps!

Today is about you and your authentic teaching practice.

Listen from the place of:

How can this support my authentic teaching practice?

How can this support the needs of the children in my care?

What I am presenting are my observations and understandings. It is not the "BIG TRUTH." It is my truth at this point in my journey.
What is the **foundation** of understanding we must have for creating highly effective invitations and provocations?

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**PLAY**

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All children are *wired* for play.

It’s one of the universal drives inherent in human nature.
Children are born knowing how to play and **WONDER** drives it.

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A three-month-old baby sees an object moving and **WONDERS** where it is going.

The baby tracks the object with her eyes.

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A six month old baby sees an a shiny red object and **WONDERS** what it feels like.

The baby reaches for it.
A nine month old sees an object and WONDERS what it does.

She crawls to the object to inspect it.

Wonder, interest, curiosity - whatever you name it - is sparking play and . . .

DRIVING development.

We intuitively know and understand that babies’ playful interests (wonder) are driving the development of important fine and gross motor skills.

We delight in their delight.
What I find so fascinating is that we abandon this notion as young children become more articulate.

Why is a four year-old’s interest in play no longer important as a developmental driver?

Where in the heck did we get the idea that worksheets are better for a budding mind than play?

The truth is that PLAY is what develops a child’s physical, emotional and mental growth.

I have coined it - Play-Activated Learning®
What is play?

Play is a set of behaviors that freely chosen, self-directed, and intrinsically motivated.

Our ROLE is to support those set of behaviors!

Children in play are in control of the content and intent of their play.
Play that we structure is not real play.

It is structured play.

Play that we guide is not real play.

It is guided play.

Structured and Guided Play are play opportunities that are grounded in the ideas of the educator, not the children.
What we do is FACILITATE play.
We get up underneath the children’s play urges and big ideas and SUPPORT their motivations.
Play-Activated Learning®

Children have FULL CHOICE in play.

Children are free to create their own meaningful context.

Children are free to use available materials as they wish.

The Educator is the TRUE ENVIRONMENT.

The Educator’s TRUE CURRICULUM is to see, hear, and value each child.

The Educator views children as collaborators.

PLAY is the driver of development.

WONDER is what sparks play.
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Let's define what I mean by *Invitation* and *Provocation*.

**DEFINITION**

*Invitation*

__a request for someone to do something;__

__a situation or action that tempts someone to do something__
An invitation INVITES children to explore. It invites them deeper into their own motivations in play.

The Farm Milk Stainer

An invitation is like a play spark. It invites children to explore materials in different contexts.

This invitation with a large farm strainer - unleashed this intense interest in moving, scooping, pouring, and spilling. So many play patterns and play urges to support and facilitate.
The INTEREST in this play invitation was so strong - I knew a provocation was the next step.

As an educator RESEARCHER, I am observing and wondering about the children's *play urges and big ideas* and testing my theories about THEIR play.

**DEFINITION**

Proevocation
-stimulate or give rise to a reaction;
-stimulate or incite someone to do or feel something
A provocation PROVOKES children’s ideas and theories on new level.

The play patterns and urges pointed to movement of the material.

I presented the boxes as a provoking idea for creating something that could provide lots of possibilities and hold more potential for narratives.

We started with one big box cradled on top of two sensory tables.

The children had lots of ideas and thoughts about what to add to their “machine.”

Boxes and tubes were brought from home and the hallways of the school. This grew to cover 1/3 of my classroom.

One day it was a pizza shop, another day a garbage sorter, and even a power rocket.

A provocation PROVOKES children’s thoughts, ideas and actions that extend an existing thought, idea, or theory.

A provocation invites children deeper into their motivations.
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The GOLDEN KEY to Wonder Filled Provocations is the observation of play.

I consider observation a form of loving attention. Observing play in a mindset of interest and love provides the space for MAGIC!

We are on a RELATIONSHIP path.

The heart of a provocation is the deep listening we bring as we co-travel with children.
The process of provocations begins with us becoming curious perceivers as we travel beside the children.

It is the state of being moved by the work of play.

We are witnesses to this incredible process innate in being human.

We observe children's play with a deep respect and honor.

They can feel our attitudes.

When we hold their play as the highest form of development and growth - they will BLOOM.

Think about - can you feel it when someone does not respect your work? It is palpable.

Children bring their full selves to play.

Play is the sacred space of young children.
**Educator Researcher**

A Journey of Wondering

How can I facilitate this deepening *relationship* to a play urge or big idea?

How can I *cultivate* social relationships around this deeper dive into play?

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**Our role is NOT to shape play but to support it.**

The children have already given it form.

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**Our work is to keep what is ALREADY *unfolding* in the children’s play supported and facilitated with resources and materials.**
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**The Turtle Family**

One day my four-year old class found a family of turtles on the playground.

Claire declared they needed a home. Before long, I was carrying a box of three turtles into my classroom.

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**Turtle Poop**

The next day we arrived to an aquarium filled with turtle poop.

I told the children that it was not healthy for the turtles as there was not enough space. We had to release them.
The Turtle Release

We put the turtles in a box and went to the edge of the school yard and released them.

Claire began crying.

“They will think we don’t love them.”

Letters to a Turtle

A large group of the class followed Claire (some joining in her tears) and began writing letters to the turtles.

Claire asked to deliver her letters to the turtles at the edge of the school yard.

Letters to a Turtle

By the Pre-K

The Story of Our Turtle

This week we had the excitement of three tortoises finding their way to our classroom. We put them in a habitat and hoped to keep them.

But when we learned they had too big and too much pen. We knew we did not have enough room to keep them and their expansive pen.

We decided to let them go. We wrote these letters to let them know how much we cared about them and their happiness.

Mrs. Hagley’s Class
May 11, 2007
Chesnee Elementary School
Tulsa, Oklahoma
Why was the letter writing a window for provocation?

The children were emotionally attached and engaged. It was a REAL moment of wondering.

*How do the Turtles feel about their release?*

This moment had a rich potential for the children’s theories and ideas about what the turtles were feeling.

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A highly effective provocation is built upon existing motivations from the children.

The best condition is the children’s emotional investment in the interest.

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**Provocation Unpacked**

**Built Upon Current Interest:**
A deep interest present in the community: Turtle family.

I leaned into that interest: *Agreed to bring turtles into classroom.*

1. A huge wondering arose upon the release of the turtles: *Will they feel lonely?*

2. A group of children have an idea: Claire, Sara, and Maggie decide to write letters.

3. I get up underneath their ideas and wonderings and provide support and scaffolding.
I could have dismissed their ideas and moved on. Instead, I listened deeply and acted on their theories.

I provided them the resources and materials to provoke their ideas into motion and even further.

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**WARNING:**

What I am providing you in regards to provocations is just the tip of the iceberg. It is just one point of view of a multi-faceted way of being with children.

It is more a way of being than a technique.

The journey of provocations is more like the path of an artist. It helps to look at the different skills involved but ultimately, it is an expression of being an educator.

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**Truth**

There is not cut and dry formula for provocations. It arises in the moment, the now, with children.
The Secret

Reflection of your process of providing invitations and provocations is essential.

This is where we see our blindspots.

This is where we work to uncover our limitations and constraints in supporting children.

- What really worked? What created deeper engagement?
- What did not work? What got in the way of the children's momentum?
- Which of the 100 languages did the children use to express their ideas and thoughts?
- What opportunity might I have missed?
- Did I bring my sincere interest? Did the children's ideas move and inspire me?
Thank-you!