

THE POWER OF PLAY IN THE OWLS CLASSROOM

Children ages 2.5–3 years old

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ECE 450

WELCOME IN!

The Owls classroom aligns with Developmentally Appropriate Practice as “caregivers organize the space into interest or activity areas, including areas for concentrated small-group play, solitary play, dramatic play, and construction” (Copple and Bredekamp 97).



LEARNING THROUGH

ART



The children loved art based activities, thus these were always offered throughout the day. There was also an art center in the corner with paper and markers always available.

Children benefit from art activities in a variety of ways. For example, art aids children to “heighten their awareness and responsiveness to the physical environment; extend and develop visual and sensory capacities; learn more about shapes, colors, and physical dimensions; to be an independent thinker; and build self-confidence, when their art work and ideas are given acceptance”

(UNOW Childcare Center).

ART ACTIVITY ONE: MIXING WHITE GLUE WITH WATERCOLOR PAINT ONTO A WHITE PAPER

“Children are more involved in the act or process of creating than they are in the product” (Harris). This is clearly seen in the children’s exploration with the glue-and-paint mix and their popsicle sticks.





DURING THE PROJECT, ONE CHILD SANG "MIXY MIXY MIXY" AS HE MIXED HIS PAINT AND GLUE IN THE CUP. ANOTHER CHILD SAID "I'M MAKING A MASTERPIECE!" AS THEY WORKED. ONE OTHER CHILD SAID "DRIP, DRIP, DRIP" AS THE PAINT FELL FROM THE POPSICLE STICK TO THE PAPER. THE EXCITEMENT OF THE PROJECT OFFERED THE TODDLERS A CHANCE TO EXPLORE THE MATERIALS AND ENJOY THE PROCESS OF CREATING (COPPLE AND BREDEKAMP 99).

ART ACTIVITY TWO: PUMPKIN ART

On Halloween, this activity was laid out for the children to engage in. They had white, liquid glue in their cups with paint brushes along with cut out shapes and sequins to decorate their pumpkins. One student said “I want a triangle for the eyes” as they were referencing jack-o-lanterns discussed throughout October. Another child said “I put a lot of sequins on it because I want it to be sparkly.” The children were able to express themselves in their art, as “art and “self” go hand in hand” (Harris).



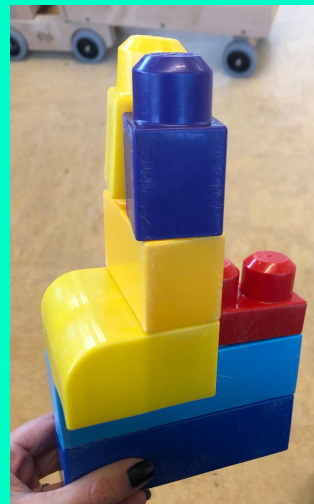


DURING THIS ACTIVITY, IT WAS APPARENT STUDENTS WOULD NEED TO USE THEIR FINE MOTOR SKILLS TO MOVE AND PLACE THE PIECES ONTO THEIR PUMPKINS. ART ACTIVITIES HELP "DEVELOP AND STRENGTHEN FINE MOTOR COORDINATION AND SKILLS" (UNOW CHILDCARE CENTER). THUS, BY PINCHING TO PICK UP PIECES AND PRESSING THEM DOWN WITH THEIR FINGERTIPS, THE CHILDREN ENGAGED THEIR FINE MOTOR SKILLS.



FREE AND GUIDED PLAY

“Free and guided
play-together known as
playful learning-are
pedagogical tools through
which children can learn in
joyful and and conceptually
rich ways”
(Materson and Bohart 12)



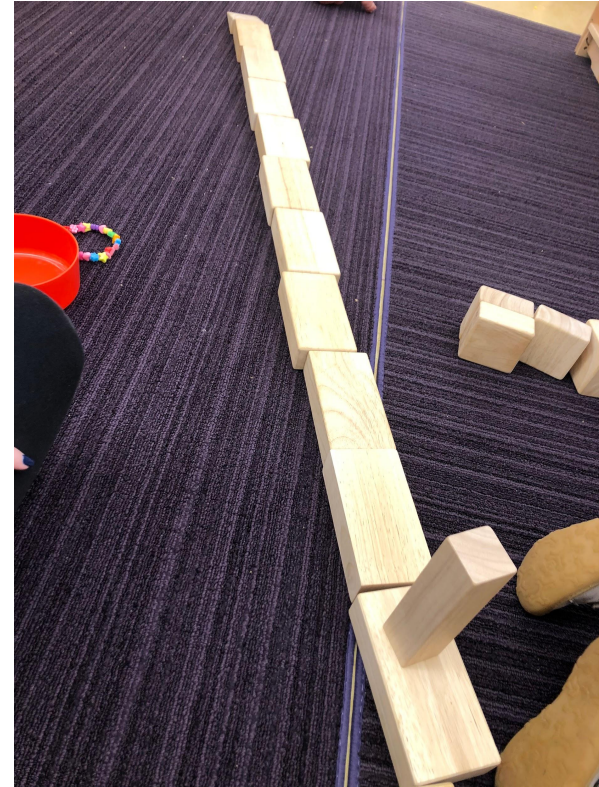
BLOCKS

In the block area, two children collaborated to make a large tower that ended up collapsing under its weight. They then giggled and began again. As they worked on the tower, they were able to improve their motor skills by moving the blocks. They also practiced social skills by interacting with their play partner.

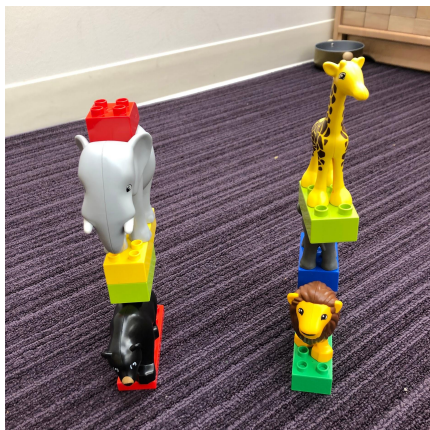


BUILDING A SLIDE

One child then found other block shapes in the basket and decided to make a slide. Toddlers are “developing increasingly sophisticated mental representations of the real world and mastering them through using them in play” (Copple and Bredekamp 67). By recognizing a slide-like shape, the child created their form out of the blocks.



ANIMALS



During free play time, one child began playing with animals and Lego pieces. He began to explore how to attach these pieces so that the animals would stand and remain attached. A few times he asked me for help in attaching or holding, as he problem solved and gathered pieces. I asked questions guided toward choosing bricks and animals based on size. He used his imagination to pretend that the animals standing on the Lego bricks could then fly. “To deepen children’s learning, teachers skillfully support children as they pursue activities of their own choosing and also introduce specific learning goals in the context of playful, enjoyable activities” (Masterson and Bohart 3).

A STUDENT WITH THE COUNTING BEARS



Communication and thinking skills combine to support toddlers' "ability to use objects, to put together a series of actions in play, and to remember events for later reenactment" (Copple and Bredekamp 67). One child was playing with counting bears and she began to label and play with bears as Mommy, Daddy and herself. At first, she placed her bear on the table and had Mommy bear travel to the edge of the table. The child said, "No Mommy, don't go far" and had the Mommy bear come back to her own bear. She then had Mommy bear respond, "Mommy has to go to work" and put the bear a little further away but not as far as the first time. Next, her bear then walked up to my bear and said, "Hi Juliana" where I responded, "Hi [child's name]!" The bears took a nap, played outside, and then her bear's Mommy and Daddy bears came to pick her up from school. All of these behaviors all match the classroom's daily afternoon schedule and showed her reenactment of the school day. The advances in play demonstrate more thinking and connections occurring in the child's developing brain.



In the Owls classroom, students became interested in firefighters and their job. Thus, the teachers asked the fire department for hats, bought “fire extinguishers,” had the children make their own fire, went for a walk in the building to find fire extinguishers, brought in fire truck toys provided books on firefighters and more!

It is important to note that “Using children’s interests and creations to introduce new vocabulary and complex language enables teachers to provide students with a more meaningful and engaging learning experience” (Masterson and Bohart 103).

FIREFIGHTERS



PLANTING A TREE

A tree was given to the class from a nearby tree farm at playground the children went to for a group playdate. At the group playdate, the families and teachers came together to connect and learn more about one another.

Back at school, one teacher led a small group activity of children interested in helping plant the tree. By “recognizing that 2-year-olds are beginning to develop ideas about how things work, their teachers provide lots of opportunities to explore interesting phenomena, make predictions, and talk about what happened” (Copple and Bredekamp 70). With this understanding, the teacher discussed how to plant the tree, and had the children help with digging the hole and filling it with potting soil for the plant. She also pointed out the roots and other parts of the tree to explain how a tree functions.



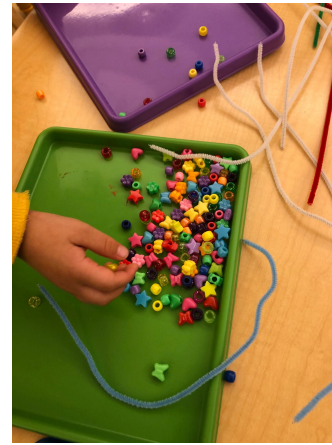
SENSORY LEARNING

In a developmentally appropriate classroom setting, “toddlers are surrounded by sensory objects for their play activities”

(Copple and Bredekamp 96).



BEADS, PIPE CLEANERS AND BRACELETS



The toddlers experienced the feeling of the beads and placed them onto pipe cleaners. As they did this, they began to round the pipe cleaners with beads and considered them bracelets. Teachers then connected the ends of finished pipe cleaners to make individual bracelets. “Research shows that play is a key way [children] discover, build, and reinforce knowledge about their world” (Masterson and Bohart 2). By manipulating the materials, the toddlers reinforced their knowledge about bracelets and how they can be formed.

SLIME

While playing with slime, the toddlers were actively engaged with their hands and in their thinking. As “toddlers are fascinated with words...and repeat words and phrases” (Copple and Bredekamp 66), the children built off each others ideas. At one table, a child began wrapping their finger and the table started to use the slime as band aids for their hands. At another table, making pancakes and pizza became the focus. The slime led to increased communication and socialization amongst the children.



PLAYDOH AND PLASTIC SHAPES



The children were provided playdoh and plastic shapes to experiment with. The plastic shapes had different outlines and holes in the middle to make indents in the playdoh. As they experimented, they talked about the shapes, pretended to hide and find the shapes, and flattened the playdoh to make more impressions. As “toddlers learn about the world through exploration, which adults should encourage” (Copple and Bredekamp 96), the introduction of playdoh with different materials allowed children to discuss topics familiar to them and practice social skills.

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