

5x5x5=creativity, Freedom to find and follow fascinations

Research Project 2014

**Setting: Jack and Jill Pre-School, Westbury-on-Trym**

**Practitioners:**

Valerie Paisey

Lucy Jack

We work in the 2-3 room of an independent pre-school based in Westbury-on-Trym. At the moment we both feel that there is a lot of close ended toys in the room that do not allow children to make connections and develop their fascinations and creativity without being limited. Open ended resources allow children the opportunity to experiment and explore their own fascinations and thoughts. Over the past year we have both had more training on the importance of being two including a conference called Being Two: The Age of Enchantment and the Five to Thrive at Two project.

We have chosen to research the effect of children accessing open ended heuristic resources and how it impacts their play, creativity, concentration and communication. We are going to start by having a small group of children and see how they interact with resources and document our findings. We are looking to slowly introduce more natural and open ended resources into our room and the rest of the setting. Our initial question was;

“What is the effect of regular heuristic play sessions on a child’s creativity?”

Our hypothesis about the children’s thinking and actions is that their creativity will be encouraged as they will be presented with new materials that can be used in an infinite amount of ways and present many possibilities for fascinations. This is supported by our own research and understanding of Heuristic Play and how it develops their curiosity, imagination, and allows them to make connections between seemingly unrelated items. This play is free from mistakes and has no outcome allowing the children to experiment and use the various objects in different ways.

We wanted to conduct our research using 2 year olds but as we are nearing the end of the academic year most of the children have turned 3. We therefore chose four of our youngest children whose birthdays range from June to August. Three of the children we selected have also been suspected as having speech delay and one child has a hearing impairment and we thought they would benefit most from these sessions. Our hope was that it would provide these children with a calm and intimate environment that would give them confidence and encouragement to communicate using verbal or non-verbal communication. We then changed our question to include the effects on a child’s communication:

“What is the effect of regular heuristic play sessions on a child’s creativity and communication?”

Friday 30<sup>th</sup> May

Today Lucy visited the Early Years Resource Library at Sheridan Road and borrowed a sensory basket with lots of good ideas on what to collect for our own collection. We are planning to take photos and ask staff if they have any of the objects that they can bring in for us.

Friday 6<sup>th</sup> June

We had our mentor visit today and from this we have decided to use the same group of children each week so that we can track their progress and gain more in depth observations that show progression. It has also been suggested that we allow staff to play with the resources and ask them questions about what they are drawn to and what fascinates them. This has been planned for our staff induction day in September.

Monday 9<sup>th</sup> June

We have decided on our focus group and have drafted a letter asking permission from parents to use them in our project.

Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> June

We had our first small group today with four children. I laid out all the resources onto the floor on top of a blanket and added a basket of pebbles and some of our own heuristic play. We put on a quiet music CD with relaxing music and then sat back and let the children explore. At first they just looked and seemed unsure, and then Child T picked up a resource and put it in the basket. She then continued to fill the basket, and then passed an object to child S and said "OK?", Child S then put it in the basket. When they had finished the basket was emptied and they started again. Child S tried stirring the basket of objects with a wooden spoon before emptying it again. We observed a lot of containing, filling, emptying and transporting; all actions we expected from our own observations. Filling containers such as bags and tins with pebbles was very popular and child T used a bag to transport pebbles from one side of the room to the other and created a pile. Valerie has written a Learning Story about Child N (see attached)

After this session we planned in an activity in the Little Ark specifically for Child N that involved different materials and instruments in order to follow his fascination. However, he was uninterested in this activity and we believe it may be because of the shape of the shakers as he was specifically interested in the heart shape and these were maracas. He did however, independently select a few toys, place them on the floor, find a small blanket and attempt to cover them up as he had done in the heuristic session.

I have created a display that informs parents on the practice of Heuristic Play and its importance. To date at least four parents have commented on it and asked questions

about it. By doing this we are recognising the parent as the child's first educator and giving them information on different ways children can learn and explore.

Thursday 19<sup>th</sup> June

During this session we had to use a different room to our first session and on reflection this definitely had an impact on the children's actions. The first room used only had a few accessible resources for children and therefore they concentrated on the heuristic play. On this session we had to use the Forest school room which has lots of child accessible toys and the children were distracted by these. We observed that the children's actions and gestures were less focused, reflective and repetitive.

From our observations we reflected on what we had seen and heard from the children and taken note of any reoccurring schemas or fascinations in order to create our own basket of heuristic resources.

- Containing: Boxes, bags, bowls
- Shaking: Small Shakers
- Collecting: Small stones, shells
- Covering: Small cloths, doylies

These reoccurring themes are in line with our initial hypothesis as we were already aware of children's interest in containing and collecting.

Drawing on our own professional understanding of play we made sure not to influence children's play too much unless required, for example when a conflict emerged over a small bag I pointed out another one so that they could have one each. Our small group work is generally adult led and this is what the children would have expected and so we reassured them that they were free to interact with resources as they wished.

Thursday 3<sup>rd</sup> July

This session we introduced our own resources. We had to hold the session in the Forest School room but in order to reduce distraction we covered up as much of the other activities as possible using blankets. This had a positive effect and meant the children concentrated for longer.

Findings

The main focus at the start of this project was the creativity that we hoped would be apparent from exploring all the new objects. Open ended play encourages imagination and allows children freedom to follow their fascinations and discover new possibilities. We found that the children each had their own interests in the objects and would always return to these, which suggests that they saw lots of possibilities in playing with these objects. Child T continuously returned to the pebble basket and moved them from one location to another using bags and pots. Without verbalising her actions we will not know why she did this, whether she pretended the stones represented something else but the simplicity of the stones means that they

could have represented something new each time she played with them. The same can be said for objects such as shells, sand, or cloths and therefore we hope to add more of these objects into our classroom environment.

There was lots of verbal and non-verbal communication displayed in our findings. Children who would not normally interact with others in the classroom seemed reassured by the environment we created and could interact with more confidence. Children handed objects to each other and helped their peers collect and fill pots and bags. Children talked through their processes and explorations making their learning visible e.g. “that makes a sound”, “this feels soft”. The clarity of their speech was also effected, a detail that may have been due to the lack of background noise and more attentive listening from ourselves. In our future practice we hope to provide more time for this kind of relaxed play with our two year olds that allows them space and time and for us to tune into the different sounds they use when they speak as well as their subtle non-verbal communication.

Time is also important as children are not always used to this kind of play and may need time to learn how to play with non-prescript toys. Child’s N curiosity with wrapping and covering toys was interesting behaviour that displayed a lot of perseverance and concentration as he spent a lot of time trying to flatten the cloth on the floor and the table. Child N was able to flatten to the cloth with more ease each time he repeated the pattern of play. Children become so engrossed in their play and need time to repeat actions and put their discoveries into practice. This means it can be frustrating and difficult for a child to stop and tidy up on command. During our daily free play we always give children a three minute warning so they have time to complete their play before they tidy up. This should be a technique used in our heuristic play sessions in the future.

This research has strengthened our ambitions to evolve our two – three room into a more suitable environment for two year olds. We have reflected on the importance of being two and looked at the environment and resources we provide and helped us think about the role of the adult. We will be delivering training to staff that will high light the importance of following a child’s fascination by observing and making the child’s thinking visible through observations and follow up planning. We will also be passing on our knowledge on the complex behaviour of two year olds that we have learned and how we will be adopting this into our practice. We have already begun conversations with other member of the pre-school about how we could develop our environment of incorporate more open ended resources and how this can be achieved. We will continue this action research into the next academic year.