

ASI Children's Center - Room 2/3

When Beans Become Birthday Cake



Spring 2011

The Kitchen Dramatic Play Area

Since the beginning of the children's room 2/3 experience, we have observed their growing interest and use of the kitchen dramatic play area in the classroom. Over time, we have introduced plastic play food, pictures of familiar food, ceramic plates, bowls, cups, and familiar food containers from home. While the children used the different materials, we noticed that their interest would taper off once they had explored them for a short time. We began to wonder if introducing open-ended materials such as dry beans and peas would affect how the children used the space. Although we had some concerns about using such small items, our trust in the children's capabilities coupled with our knowledge of the children's preference for small objects, led us to jump into the exploration. We wondered and deliberated over what materials might extend the children's time spent in this area, and what materials might stretch their interactions. With these questions in the back of our mind, we decided to move forward to see what introducing the beans and peas would tell us about the children's development and their understanding or interpretation of their world.

The Children's Experience:



Through some small group opportunities in the kitchen area, we introduced the dried beans and peas. We presented a small group of children with ceramic bowls filled with dried green peas, large white beans and spoons in each bowl. Without hesitation, the children began using the new materials. The following is what we observed and heard from the children.

Day 1: 04/04/2011

Lori: What are you making?

Anisa: I'm making vegetables.

Jessa: I'm making vegetables.

Maddi: Soup.

Finley: Rice.

(Maddi used a spoon to stir some of the peas in a bowl)

Anisa: Soup is all gone.

Jessa: Juice (put some of the peas in a cup)

(Anisa talked about making a cake and then brought the cake and vegetables to her birthday party on some pillows in the kitchen dramatic play area. Maddi, Ari, and Jessa also brought their plates with peas to the "birthday party".

Maddi, Anisa, and Jessa sang happy birthday.)

Day 2: 04/05/2011



Lori: What are you making?

Katelyn: Soup.

Lori: What does it taste like?

Kate: Beans.

Katelyn: Rocks.

(The children began scooping and pouring the peas onto plates, cups, and bowl)

Teacher: Where are you taking that plate?

Kate: The oven.

(Kate then put a plate with the green peas into the pretend oven)



(Some of the other children watched Kate and then began placing plates of dried peas in the oven too)





Brendan: Eat it.
(Brendan handed Lori a cup)
Lori: What is it?
Brendan: A muffin.

Anisa: It's time for the party!

(Ari picked up his plate and sat on the pillows where Anisa had a party the day before during a small group)



Teacher Reflection

We were so excited to see that the children became immediately involved in the kitchen dramatic play area with the introduction of the dried beans and peas. We had the pleasure of watching the children take the lead in discovering and using the new materials with very little verbal prompts or facilitation by the adults. Seeing how this young group of children used these small, open-ended materials in such an enthusiastic and purposeful way was rewarding as teachers. It showed us that our interpretation of the children's need for a more challenging dramatic play experience was accurate and our response was the appropriate choice for their development.

Through our own reflection of this dramatic play experience we recognized the children's cognitive development and growth. We observed the children are not only using more language in their play, but they are also beginning to use symbolic play and assimilate their current knowledge into their play. Theorist Jean Piaget describes symbolic play and assimilation in his preoperational stage of development. According to Piaget, "The young child is not able to express himself adequately through language, so expression of his/her meanings through symbolic play is essential." We saw this occurring in the dramatic play area when the dried beans (concrete object) were used as a birthday cake (symbolic object). This leap in cognitive thinking is significant as the children move into a deeper understanding of their world, their role, and the social aspects that are involved.

We have continued to see the children use the kitchen dramatic play area in the classroom with more purpose, more language, and with more frequency than in the past. As teachers we have learned the benefits of taking a risk, "reading" the children's behavior, and then acting on their cues. We truly consider this a process of discovery with the children and know the challenge ahead lies in figuring out where we go next with the children in this dramatic play adventure.

Areas for expansion and questions about where we might go next:

- Real cooking activities
- How will further social interactions (including play with peers, language development, and social roles) change and grow?
- Will we continue to see the children's play become more complex? In what ways?
- What can we do to help foster that development?

