

ASI Children's Center - Room 6

Piers



Winter 2011

The Construction of a Pier

The introduction of pier pilings in one of our stories, *Bonnie Barnacle*, sparked the sharing of experiences with piers. As many children continued to ask about piers, we began to ask ourselves what interests them about piers. It later became apparent the construction of piers may be one of their interests as we observed children building piers on their own. To explore the children's interest we provided them with various opportunities and a variety of materials to construct with (both indoors and outdoors). After having to continuously dismantle their piers, due to time and space, we talked to the children about constructing two piers that we could leave standing. Some suggested that we build a pier out of wood scraps from our outdoor atelier. During a small group plans were drawn by the children based on actual photos that had been collected. Construction began after a short meeting with the children.

The Children's Experience:

February 18, 2011

With the plan of constructing a pier out of wood scraps Ashley took a small group of children outside to move pieces around and explore ways to build their pier. With their sketches and pictures of piers the small group immediately separated themselves into two groups. One group's pier would be built on top of the plywood and resemble a carnival and the other group's pier would use the plywood as the boardwalk for people to walk on. Below are excerpts from this experience.



Noleena: This should go here.

XC: I know these should go right here Ashley.

Teacher: On the side?

XC: Uh-huh so you could walk on the side.

Teacher: Have you ever walked on the side of a pier before?

XC: No way! I've walked under a pier at Avila.

While this group continued to work on balancing the plywood Elliott left to build his own pier.

Teacher: So here is what I'm noticing on this side. I'm holding this to help balance it but, when I let go will it stay up?

XC: Yeah.

Teacher: Should I let go? *No response from children.

XC: We need some over there (some more wood pieces to use as pilings).



Noleena: We can put the blue part like that (placing the end of the wood scrap that is painted blue facing up).

XC: So we can jump.

Teacher: So instead of being all the way under you're thinking it should be part way under?

Noleena: Like that. And then we can put blue ones here and then we put this right here.

XC: There that's better.

Diego continues to work around Noleena and XC trying to balance the end of the pier by wedging a small wood piece between the plywood and a taller piece of wood.

Teacher: Diego has it up on this end and there is still a little space there.

*Diego continues trying to balance the piling. It is the only piling on his end as the other side has two.

T: It looks like it is missing something on this side Noleena, because if I let go, will it stand up?

*Noleena looks around then continues conversation.

*Diego continues to work on balancing pieces, gets a piece to finally balance on his end of the pier and joins the conversation.

*Diego notices Elliott's pier and crawls over to examine how he has gotten it to stand. Diego crawls back over to the other pier and watches XC and Noleena.

Teacher: Hey, XC come over to this side. Come get low so you can look underneath the pier right here. Look down underneath what's holding it up?

XC: This (points to one side of the pier).

Teacher: If I let go is it going to stay up? (XC shakes head no as Diego lifts the unbalanced side as I let go of the side I'm holding) So here it's balanced, I'm not holding it any more.

XC: Hey, it's balanced.

Teacher Reflection

Observing the children's social interactions, during the construction, lent me the opportunity to examine the way they were talking to each other to share a bigger goal. After being a part of this experience and then revisiting it (as it was videotaped) many things became apparent. For the first few minutes everyone worked furiously to get the pier standing and you can hear them discussing wood placement. Slowly as it became obvious the pier was not standing or looking the way they wanted, the children individually worked to stabilize the pier.

What this looked like was:

- One child balancing one end of the pier while another tries to balance the other (initially knocking the others off balance).
- One child leaving to create their own pier in a way they knew would work.
- A pause in responding to myself and others.
- The children forgetting that I am holding an end of the pier.

Vygotsky speaks to the importance of social interactions and his belief that a more skillful tutor (adult or more knowledgeable peer) is an important part of learning. He felt that social interactions could play a key role in development. In this experience, even though he leaves, Elliott could have been the more skillful tutor as they watch him work. Furthermore, we have noticed that when the children are creating individual work they are more comfortable sharing ideas with each other. After watching the video several times we reassessed our own intervention, responsibility, and role within these small groups. As the adults we must now ask ourselves how we can help facilitate, support, and encourage social interactions leading to collaboration.

Epstein (2007) states, "To become a participating member of the group, children must be able to give up some individuality for the greater good, transitioning from the 'me' of toddlerhood to the 'us' of preschool" (Epstein,2007,p.69).

As we continue this exploration we are asking ourselves:

- Is it realistic for us to expect that children of this age will communicate about a plan?
- How can we help them collaborate with each other?