

Provocations

A Start Up Guide



Provocations: A Start-Up Guide

Sally Haughey and Nicole Hill

© 2017 Fairy Dust Teaching

All rights reserved. Unless otherwise noted on a specific page, no portion of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or capturing on any information storage system, without permission in writing from the authors.



Contents

The Power of Provocations	4
What is an invitation?	6
What is a provocation?	7
What is the difference?	8
Provocation Examples	11
Atelier	12
Construction	17
Light & Shadow	21
Outdoors	25
Three Next Steps	29
Possible Cycle of Provocations	30
Recommended Resources	31

The Power of Provocations

For a long time I struggled with understanding the place and power of provocations. A few years ago I had a huge ah-ha moment. *I am in an inquiry. I am a researcher.* With each provocation - new understandings emerge. I love that it is a process of learning for both myself and the children. We are in it together.

Provocations are experiences I set-up in response to children's interests and ideas. When I set up a provocation I am providing hands-on exploration for children to practice, test, construct and deconstruct their ideas and theories.

I set up a provocation and listen. I engage in the children's thinking. It is my thread to lead us onward.

A provocation will PROVOKE thinking! I have witnessed if children are not engaging in the provocation as a support to their ideas and concepts - I have to check with my own agenda or perspectives. Am I really honing in on their thinking or mine?



One of the most interesting things to me as a researcher-teacher is *understanding* the learning process. We have all heard - - and know - - the importance of the child's emotional connection and safety in the classroom as the foundation of the learning environment. I would be so bold to say a quality education equals quality relationships in the classroom.

It is inside *this* value system I have found the *sleeping giant*. If safety, trust, and respect provide the foundation - then the next level of support is being *invested* in children's interests and curiosities.

When we pay attention to the interests of children, children get serious about learning. When I listen keenly to a child or group of children negotiating an idea - something magical happens.



Think about it.

Children come into the world wired to make sense of life. When we pay attention to the things that children are interested in, learning becomes *incredibly* important.

Deep inside the thinking of children – lies the fairy dust of education – – *meaningful engagement!*

Clearly– a curious mind is one that is primed for learning.

Provocations support the unfoldment of ideas and theories of the children. Not my ideas. Not my interests. The children's.

And when I really invest myself in this process – new and expanded possibilities for children's exploration and inquiry arise. And this . . . is teaching fairy dust!

Provocations, then, can be support systems in response to children's interests through meaningfully curated loose parts and materials.

The magic lies in the fact these parts and materials curate new languages or ways of interacting with children's ideas or wonderings.

I listen keenly to children to uncover the unique perspectives of what they see and think. A well-crafted provocation *engineers* play that is, in actuality, provoked by the children!

There has been much talk about the differences between invitations and provocations. Let's define both and break it down.

What is an invitation?

“The materials we choose to bring into our classrooms reveal the choices we have made about knowledge and what we think is important to know. How children are invited to use the materials indicates the role they shall have in their learning. Materials are the text of early childhood classrooms. Unlike books filled with facts and printed with words, materials are more like outlines. They offer openings and pathways by and through which children may enter the world of knowledge. Materials become the tools with which children give form to and express their understanding of the world and the meanings they have constructed”

(Cuffaro, *Experimenting with the World*, 1995).

An invitation is something that gives an idea, urge or cause to do something. It is built to invite children into a specific exploration or experience. It is based on teacher wonderings and ponderings. An invitation is a verb. It sparks children's interest. It provides children with *new* interests to pursue and engage in.

*An invitation **breathes** new interests into the classroom.*



What is a provocation?

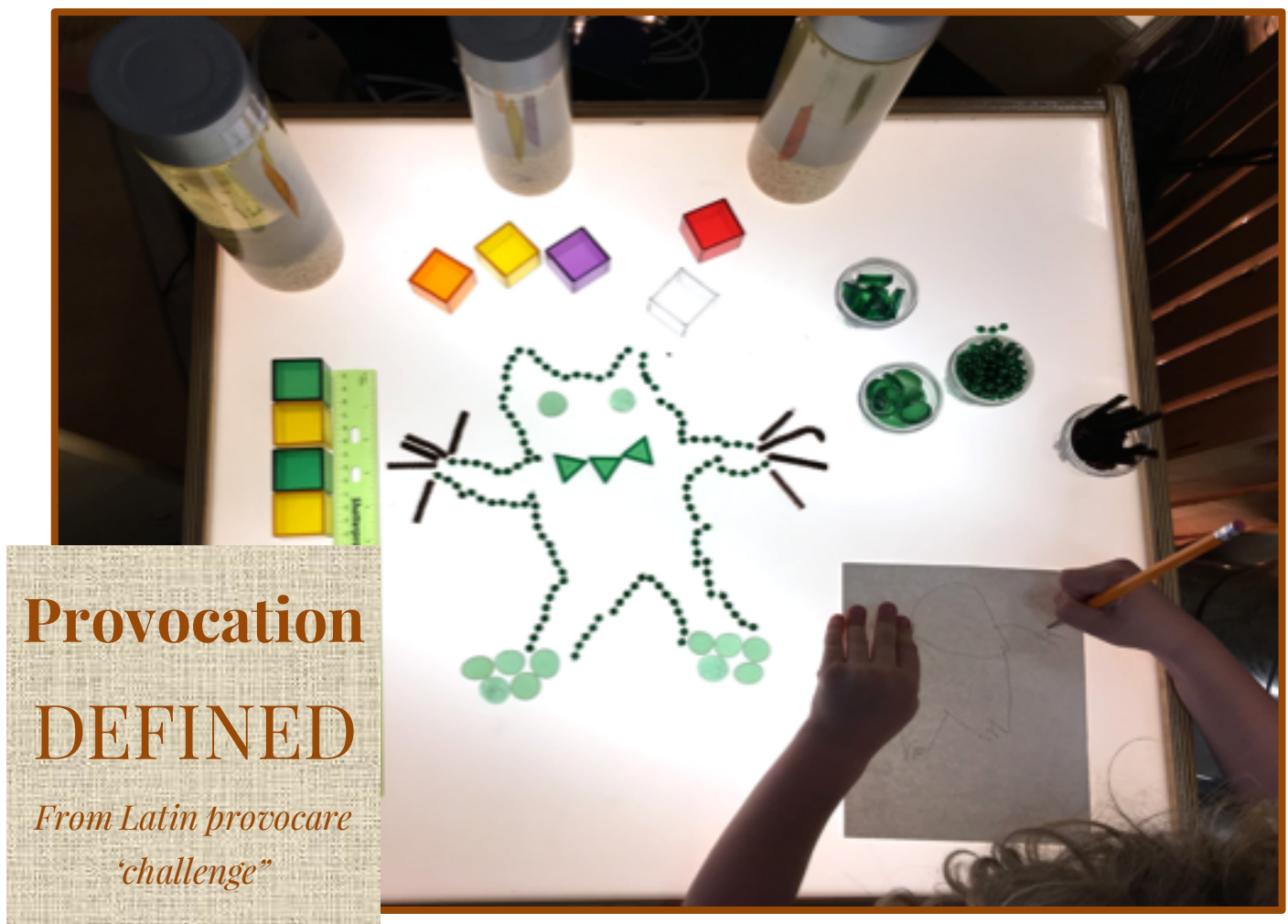
“Teachers endeavour to continually provoke children’s natural propensities to search for meanings, to pose questions of themselves and others, and to interpret the phenomena of their own lives.”

Cooper

The Hundred Languages of Children, 2012

A provocation is something that calls forth, stirs up or stimulates a response or action. It is built to expand or extend children’s own unique ideas, interests, and theories. It is constructed from the deliberate and meaningful observation of children’s pursuits. It is based on children’s wonderings and ponderings. A provocation is a verb. It engages and activates children’s thinking. It provides children with new experiences and connections in their pursuits of ideas, interests, and theories.

*A provocation **challenges** the next level of thinking in the child.*



What is the difference between an invitation and provocation?

Invitation	Provocation
<p>~based on <i>teacher</i> wonderings and ponderings.</p> <p>~gives an idea, urge or cause to do something</p> <p>~sparks children's interest.</p> <p>~provides children with new interests</p>	<p>~based on <i>children's unique</i> wonderings and ponderings.</p> <p>~expands or extends children's own ideas, interests, and theories</p> <p>~deepens and nourishes children's unique thinking.</p> <p>~provides children with new experiences and connections inside <i>their own unique</i> ideas and theories</p>
<p>trigger, ignite, kindle, flicker, bud, tempt, suggest, lure, suggest</p>	<p>ablaze, bloom, burn, blossom, sustain, fire up, activate, inflame, intentional response</p>
<p><u>Definition of Invite (a verb):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to give someone an idea about what to do or create to cause something to happen or be created to fill someone with the urge to do something 	<p><u>Definition of Provoke (a verb):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to <i>arouse</i> a response or action to <i>call forth</i> (as a response or action) to <i>stir up</i> purposely to <i>stimulate</i> an action



AN INVITATION

The teacher set up an invitation for children to explore glass gems and rocks on mirrors.



A PROVOCATION

The teacher observed that several children responded to the invitation by creating faces and people. This continued for most of the week.

The teacher added wood cookies, drawing materials and some frames to facilitate and extend the interest in creating faces and families.



Provocations
challenge
children to
expand and
extend their
theories and
ideas.

It is important to support the direction children take a provocation.

- It is not a teacher directed activity.
- There is no pre-determined outcome.
- There is no "right" response or answer.

If a provocation has "specific measureable outcomes" it is NOT a true provocation.

Provocations support children in diving deeper into their own unique ideas, concepts, and thought pathways.

- It is child guided and directed.
- It is open-ended and creative.
- It is fluid and changeable.

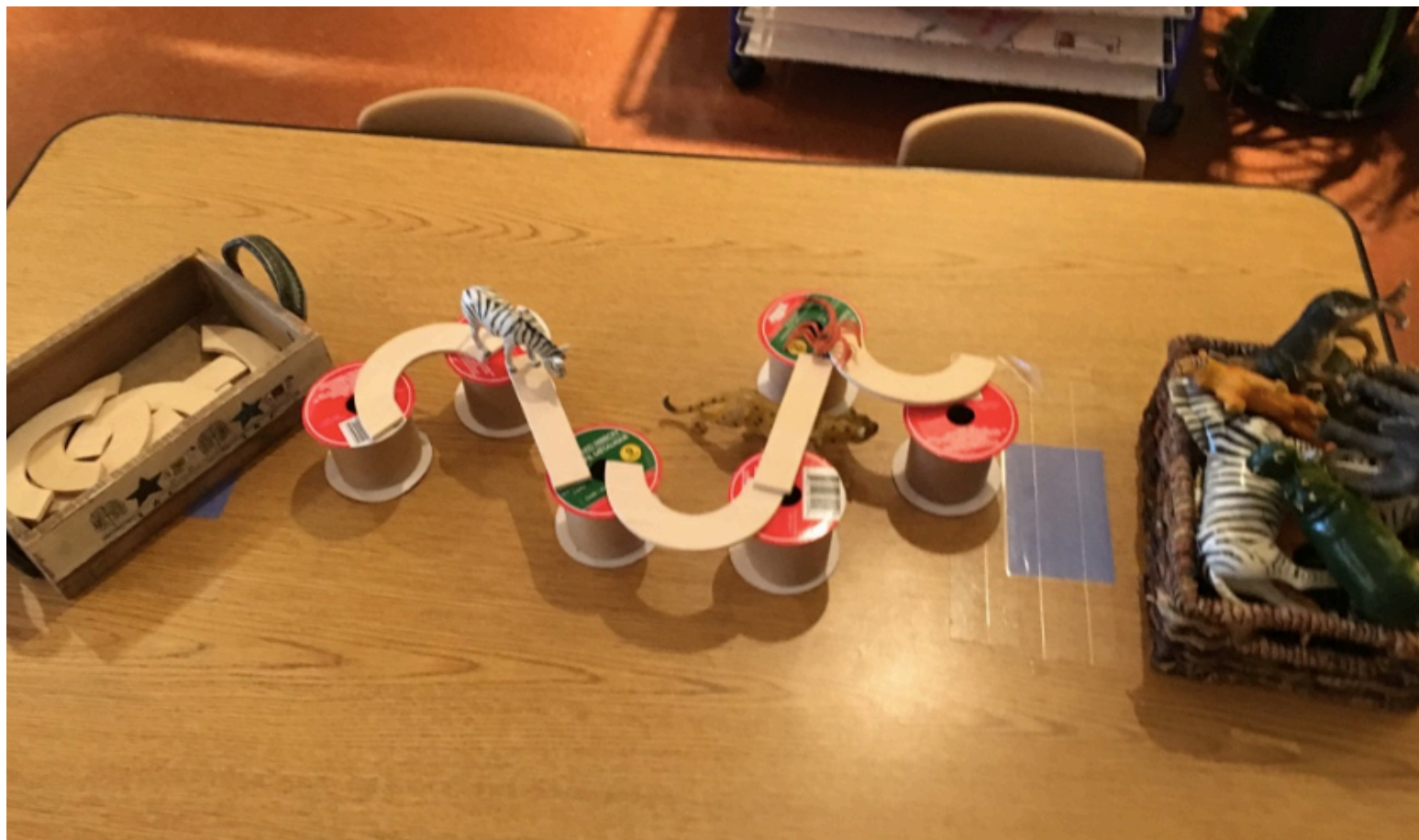
Provocation Examples

The art of setting up provocations is, for me, a lifelong journey. It requires self-reflection and the ability to step into the child's world.

It is a profound and deep process.

What follows is a humble sharing from my team. We too, are in process. Our understandings of what constitutes a provocation is ever evolving.

The point is to start. Begin. Let the exquisite pursuit of provocation unfold. It is our hope that this ebook provide you the support and inspiration to begin the journey.



The Atelier





Result of Student Interests: Princess and the Pea and the Concept of Beds

Area of Concentration: Language and Literacy

Teacher Wonderings:

There has been lots of bed “making” in various forms – drawing, blocks and dollhouse. I wonder how I can call forth the children’s ideas of constructing beds in a new medium? Could this further connect them to the book’s plot and characters? What ideas do the children have about beds?

Materials: Clay, clay tools, sticks, peas, and book opened to page with princess on the bed



Result of Student Interests: Natural materials

Area of Concentration: The Arts

Teacher Wonderings:

A child found some wheat stalks and pondered if it could be a paint brush. Will these natural materials extend his or her ideas about painting and using non-standard materials?

Materials: Paint, wheat stalks, glue, variety of berries and small natural materials



Result of Student Interests: Dinosaurs

Area of Concentration: Language, Literacy and Math

Teacher Wonderings:

Since the children wanted everyone to know how to get to the dinosaurs' house, will the creation of maps stir up more theories about the dinosaurs?

Materials: Photographs the children took on their walk to the dinosaurs' house, blank white paper, pencils, map examples



Result of Student Interests: Flowers

Area of Concentration: Language and Literacy

Teacher Wonderings:

Since the children were interested in naming flowers, will the creation and naming of flowers give rise to other ideas about flowers and their qualities?

Materials: Photographs of flowers, collage materials, flower books, ABC cut outs

Construction





Result of Student Interests: Bridges

Area of Concentration: Science

Teacher Wonderings:

With the current interest in building bridges, will sketching and drawing bridges stimulate new theories for how or why to construct the structures?

Materials: Blocks of all sizes, sketching materials, big loose parts, tape measures, books of bridges



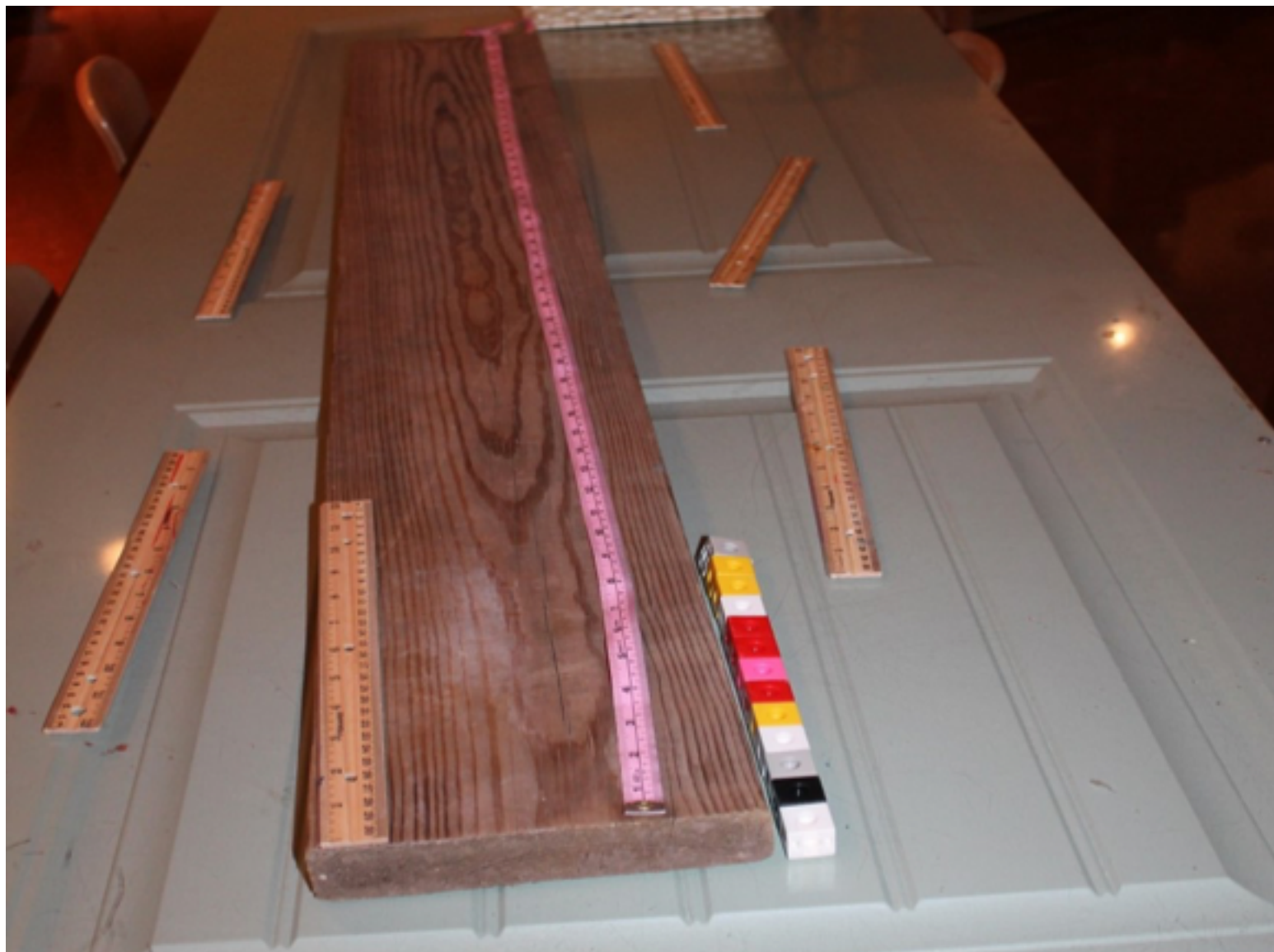
Result of Student Interests: Building Bird Houses

Area of Concentration: Science

Teacher Wonderings:

The children are fascinated by bird nests and bird houses. I wonder if the construction of homes for birds will call forth more indepth narratives about the birds?

Materials: Hollow blocks, logs, tubes, wood and pictures of bird houses



Result of Student Interests: A Swing for Baby Bear

Area of Concentration: Math

Teacher Wonderings:

The children are interested in how baby bear plays. A child suggested we build a *just right* swing for bear. Could exploring construction of a just right swing for the baby bear expand the children's theories about baby bear?

Materials: Blocks of all sizes, sketching materials, big loose parts, tape measures, books of bridges

Light & Shadow





Result of Student Interests: The Bridge

Area of Concentration: The Arts and Math

Teacher Wonderings:

Since reading *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*, the children have been talking about building bridges. I wonder if these materials extend and support their inquiry?

Materials: Transparent paper, pencils, tiles, books about bridges



Result of Student Interests: Light and Color

Area of Concentration: The Arts

Teacher Wonderings:

I wonder if exploring transparencies of pictures, color, and light will extend the emerging interest in light and color I have seen in the light and shadow center?

Materials: Watercolor pencils, water, transparencies of student photographs, and light and shadow table



Result of Student Interests: Stories

Area of Concentration: Language, Literacy and Math

Teacher Wonderings:

With the recent interest in stories, will exploring transparencies from the story with or without objects, expand the engagement?

Materials: Story transparencies, Light and Shadow Table, pictures of the book copied onto transparencies

Outdoors





Result of Student Interests: Changing of the Leaves

Area of Concentration: Social Studies, The Arts, and Science

Teacher Wonderings:

Based on the walk looking at changing colors of the leaves, I wonder how might the children utilize these leaves they collected in an unexpected way if they are placed with other natural materials and colors of paint?

Materials: Paint, paint brushes, leaves, variety of natural materials, books about the changing leaves



Result of Student Interests: Painting Flowers

Area of Concentration: Social Studies, The Arts, and Science

Teacher Wonderings:

A group of children have been deeply engaged in outdoor painting. Given the opportunity to paint real time landscapes and objects, will children's visual senses be more stimulated, thus producing more intentional sketching and painting?

Materials: Paint, easels, blanket, paper, brushes (or natural materials)



Result of Student Interests: Lines and Shapes

Area of Concentration: Math

Teacher Wonderings:

Since the children been engaged in noting if shapes had to have straight lines, will the laminated photos of shapes the children took during an outside walk and the manipulation of clay on top of shapes, deepen their interest?

Materials: Laminated pictures from outside walk, clay, clay tools

Three Next Steps:

1. Take notes and observe what interests are driving their play and exploration.

What have they been wondering about? What do they already know? This will be your opportunity to set up a provocation which will engage their interests and be intentional about potential wonderings. You should be able to answer the question: Why am I providing this for my children?

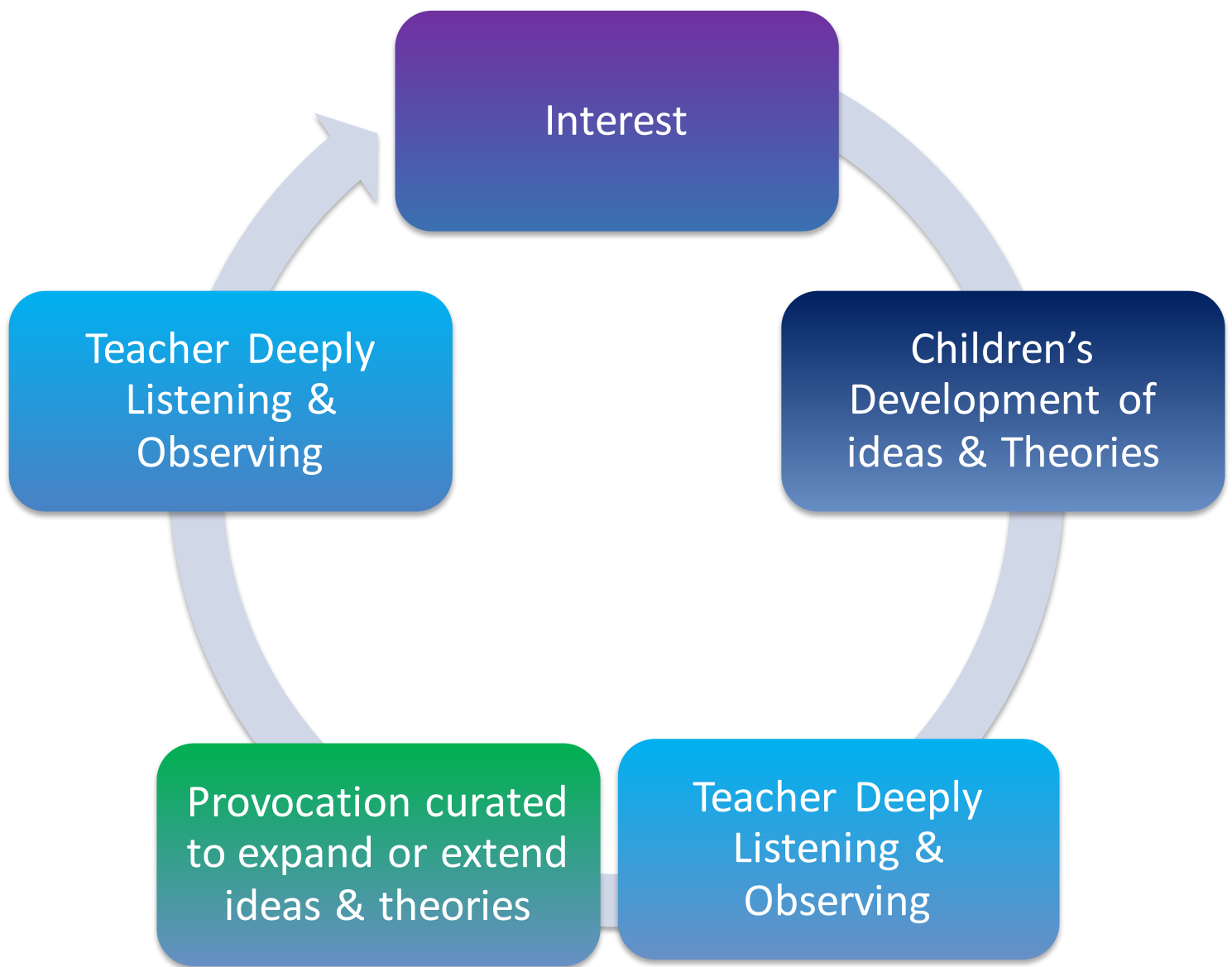
2. Decide on specific provocation.

Start in one area of the classroom (atelier, construction, dramatic play, outside, or messaging) and put out materials that will deepen their wonderings and exploration about a certain topic, material, question, or investigation. Think about accessibility of materials, defined work space, and potential objectives!

3. Create a provoking question.

This can be printed out and set on the table, next to the construction area, or wherever the provocation is being set up. The provoking question will help anchor the children's thoughts and ideas to the provocation. It will remind you as a teacher and any other people (especially parents) what the intent was for deepening their explorations.

A Possible Cycle of Provocations:





Recommended Resources:

In Dialogue with Reggio Emilia: Listening, Researching and Learning

By Carlina Rinaldi

We are all Explorers: Learning and Teaching with Reggio Principles in Urban Settings

By Daniel R. Scheinfeld and Karen M. Haigh

The Hundred Languages of Children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation

By Carolyn Edwards and Lella Gandini



Thank you Rosa Parks Early Childhood Education Staff for sharing your beautiful spaces.





For more ideas – go to
www.fairydustteaching.com