

February 19, 2014 3am, 3pm, 2-day

Hi Everybody,

We hope you had a chance to fish on Parent's Day. We realize with only a three minute turn [thank-you for keeping things moving] there wasn't an opportunity to observe much, so we would like to break this activity down for you and look at what kids might be thinking about.

All of our groups had been experimenting with fishing for about two or three weeks before Parent's Day. Just to review quickly; from the top of the playhouse kids can use a pole with a magnet affixed to catch paper fish with paperclips that have been distributed below. Initially, we called a meeting during playtime to give a demonstration of the activity. We knew, because it would only be available for turns one at a time that there would be a flurry of excitement, confusion and worry, so we also explained that there would be a sign-up list to help us keep track. There are always a few kids who grasp the connection between name on list and actual turn, so there are also usually a few protests. "But I don't know how to write my name!" Teachers reassure that they will help kids to tackle it.

Following the demo, a long line of eager participants formed to put their name on the list, while others disregarded it all together and ran to be first up the stairs and on top. First come, first served! This is a typical behavior for kids this age. Most of them are only egocentrically thinking of their turn, oblivious that others may be interested. Furthermore the concept of the list introduces a lot of alien territory, letter, sequence, self-regulation. It takes a long time for most kids to intellectually grasp it, and waiting to try something new can be torture for some. In the two day group a number of kids just kept insisting it was their turn. Even though they were watching someone manipulating the pole and even as teachers continued to show them the list, they remained steadfastly in denial.

We did offer fish making for those waiting their turn. This was a welcome distraction for some and a table busy with kids using markers and scissors soon became full.

When actual turns for the activity commenced one teacher was always present to help with the physical and social negotiations that ensue. With fishing, it often takes kids a long time through trial and error to realize the focused control required to actually catch a fish. Even though teachers had demonstrated manipulating the pole, most kids remain mystified. Many think that the pole and string will operate by themselves, so they hold the pole and watch and after a while they say with some irritation something like, "It's not coming up." Others just like to swing the rods in sweeping gestures and these big abandoned moves are carefree and occasionally unintentionally successful. Sooner or later however, whether through an independent process of inquiry or with the suggestions and questions a teacher may pose, most kids think to raise the pole, but when it comes in contact with the loft ceiling and comes to an abrupt halt, they are confronted literally and figuratively with a new obstacle. What do they do now? A very few think to lift the string with their other hand, but now it too will only raise so far. There is that tempting fish dangling down below and by this time some kids have really been struggling for a long time, but rather than drop their pole and run off to one of the other enticing distractions in the room, they stay and ponder. First of all they know they don't want to put down that pole, it took them a long time to get a turn with that pole. So now some kids walk backwards pulling the string and they pull their fish right off. This is like REAL fishing! Other kids finally but reluctantly look around for a place to set their rod down and use the other

hand. Some kids observing above and below may be encouraging with cries of “Pull it! Pull it!” Now the fish comes up a little further, but when that hand is as far as it will go, what now? Even at this stage it will be a while before most kids co-ordinate a hand over hand technique, but the few that do often become facile and fluid at this activity, landing many fish and even mastering the ability to position the string as it ascends, away from the various bumps and depression on the outside of the house that often pull fish off.

Meanwhile, downstairs by the “pond” there are always lots of kids gathered taking fish out or trying to attach them. These disturbances and interruptions can lead to a number of negotiations between the person above and those below. Loud protests can be heard from those who are determined to proceed independently, but lots of kids decide to form a partnership with one of the intruders. This in turn can stimulate communication between kids particularly if the person with the pole has their eye on a favored fish. “I want that one!” “This one?” “No, over there!” “Here?” “No the red one!” “This one?” “No the other one.” So it goes as they work towards a common goal. Those who have not been invited to assist are encouraged to watch and teachers are present to help with all these exchanges when needed.

Fishing is an example of the kind of activity we try to choose at school because of all the interesting and stimulating challenges it presents to kids. At first glance many adults may comment “What fun!” and sometimes it is. But it also addresses all of the developmental learning domains. Just to list a few examples;

**Physical:** Large and Fine Motor

Manipulating the rod and the string [also cognitive, physical knowledge, how do the child’s actions influence the rod?]

Ascend and descend ladder or stairs to have a turn. [also cognitive, watch how some kids hesitate as they consider their next move.]

Use of Marker and scissors to sign up and make fish. [also cognitive, techniques attempted to operate tools, literacy, use of letter, color choices for fish, introduction of sign-up list procedure.]

**Social:** Kids working in pairs, conflict resolution [also cognitive, kids are encouraged to consider other point of view, occasionally compromise. Encourages use of language and growth in vocabulary. ]

**Emotional:** Builds self confidence and ability to problem solve. [Also cognitive, hypotheses formed from trial and error experimentation.]

**Cognitive:** All of the above and more. For example fishing often encourages prolonged focus.

Notice how connected the domains are. In fact all of the domains are present throughout this activity. It’s chosen for that reason, because it stimulates intellectual growth. It tantalizes kids to become engaged, invested, intrigued, and excited by the opportunity to investigate and their growing ability to problem solve.

Melinda, Anita & Sarah