

Activity 2: Unpacking the process of “meaning making” for young children

Summary

In this 2-part activity, you will engage in an experiential and sequential preschool learning activity. Through the experience, you will connect how learning occurs in stages and becomes more complex with increase time, exposure, and exploration! In addition, you will see how children’s writing and thinking develop in similar stages. Seeing how children’s skills develop over time will help you to understand the need to capture learning in process rather than at a single start and stop point.

This activity intentionally aims to unpack the process of “meaning making” for children when they are constructing, playing, writing, and thinking.

Block play is a valuable part of preschool learning. Despite the opportunities it provides children to develop social, emotional, language, cognitive, and physical skills, it is often misunderstood. Since blocks were too bulky to bring to training, pipe cleaners will be used to mimic block play so you will still be able to explore, construct, and connect stages of block play to the process of “meaning making” for children.

Part 1: In this part of the activity, pipe cleaners are substituted for blocks. You will participate in a “meaning making” pipe cleaner building activity that mirrors block play. You will experience “meaning making” through the lens of the child and move through all stages of “block” play: exploration, knowledge, connect, and create.

Part 2: In this second part of the activity, you will connect the four stages of “block” play to writing and cognitive development which become more detailed and complex in meaning over time. You will have the opportunity to sort examples of student writing to show how writing, like a child’s play, becomes more complex and detailed in meaning over time.

Folder Pocket Labels:

Meaning Making through Play and Inquiry

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Part 1: In this part of the activity, you will participate in a “meaning making” pipe cleaner building activity. You will experience “meaning making” through the lens of the child and move through all stages of “block” play: exploration, knowledge, connecting parts to form basic designs, and combining pieces to create more elaborate constructions.

- Even though playing with pipe cleaners may not be your forte, I’m asking you to indulge in this exercise for a few minutes. This experience will help you better understand, analyze, and support student learning through play and inquiry.
- The facilitator will orally prompt you through the stages of learning. Keep in mind, as adults we are moving much more quickly through the stages than children would. It may take months or most of the year for the children to progress through the same stages.

Meaning Making through Writing Stages

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Throughout this activity, keep in mind characteristics of the four stages of block play:

1. **exploration** which involves carrying blocks from place to place,
2. **knowledge** of block’s textures and shapes moves a child into the next stage in which she stacks blocks and/or lays them flat on the floor in a line in a less structures manner;
3. **Connect**: children have increased familiarity and now connect blocks to create structures that begin to resemble things, and
4. **Create**: children make elaborate constructions, often with additional props and a cross-curricular focus.

Additional Activity Material Cards for:

Part 1: Block Stage Description Cards (Copy, Cut, and Mount to individual cards)

Exploration: involves carrying blocks from place to place.

Pick up the pieces and feel them—notice shape, texture, color, size, and sound characteristics. The facilitator will use the following guided questions or prompts to deepen the level of exploration and learning:

1. Explore how it feels to hold a few or many as you can in one hand or two hands—are they heavy or light?
2. Are they hard, soft, stiff, strong, or flexible?
3. What happens if they are piled up? Do they topple over?
4. Do certain pieces stack better than others?
5. How many can be stack before it falls?
6. Are there different ways (strategies) to stack them?

Exploration leads to Discovery:

Seeing A Collection and members of the set as a whole:

Pick up the pieces and randomly place them flat on the floor or table surface.

Consider these guided questions:

1. What do the pieces look like when laid flat on the floor?
2. You likely did not put thought into the placement of the pieces and are just pleased that you were able to put all the pieces out in front of you.

Now that you see all the pieces laid out, you might see how they could be arranged differently.

Knowledge: knowledge of blocks' textures and shapes moves the child into next stage in which she stacks blocks and/or lays them flat on the floor in a line in a less structures manner.

Applying & Analyzing Knowledge: Suppose we have been learning about sorting objects in class by color and size. How are the pieces similar and different? At this stage of block your team will consider:

1. How are the pieces similar?
2. How are the pieces different?
3. How might you sort and arrange the pieces now?
4. Are there other ways to sort these pieces?

Connect: children have increased familiarity and now connect blocks to create structures that begin to resemble things.

Connect pieces to form a basic design or shape: Shortly after learning to sort and arrange the pieces, basic designs will emerge as pieces are combined to mimic familiar shapes and objects. Using any combination of the pieces, what familiar, basic shapes can you create using just 2 to 4 pieces?

At the end of 3-5 minutes, think through the activity as discuss the experience using these guided questions:

1. What happens when you add pieces?
2. How do you feel about what you created?
3. Did you discover something new you could do with the pieces?

Create Part 1: Children begin this stage eager to create more detailed designs. With increased time to explore, build knowledge, and connect ideas through play, children will advance to creating more complex, detailed, and elaborate designs.

1. More Detailed Design: After exploring ways to create basic shapes, you are now ready to combine pieces to create more detailed configurations.

- Using as many pieces as you would like, create a detailed scene that might be familiar to a child (such as a house, dog, boat, tree, person, rainbow, etc...).
- At the end of 5 to 7 minutes, think through the activity by responding to these guided questions:

Can you tell me about what you created?

How would you describe what you created?

How do you feel about what you created?

What part do you especially like? Why?

Definition of Third Grade Reading Proficiency:

“The way we define reading affects the way we teach”.

“Reading tends to be understood as the act of looking at a string of letters in a written text and translating or decoding these letters into sound. If a child can turn the letters *c-a-t* into cat, he or she knows how to read. This narrow view of reading misses the extent to which an individual’s ability to interact with the words on a page demands engagement with a text’s meaning as well as its individual words” (Setting the Foundation: A Report on Elementary Grades Reading in Tennessee, February 2015, p. 10).

“Following the lead of literacy experts across the country, we define reading in this report as a broader process that, even for the youngest of students, includes not only decoding but also comprehending and thinking critically about text” (Setting the Foundation: A Report on Elementary Grades Reading in Tennessee, February 2015, p. 10).