The story atelier

In preschool, Ms. Leslie’s emails discuss our curriculum and our “Story atelier” that are happening in our big atelier.

Why is story and creating fantasy so important...
If we look to all the great thinkers and inventors of our time, we see people who were able to be extremely creative and imaginative, to think and invent things that were never done before.

We even look to Einstein who stated that *creativity is actually more important than knowledge*. These great thinkers understand that **to be a great thinker one has to develop and nurture his or her creativity**. One has to be able to invent new ways to deal with problems that arise. In knowing just how important it is, we also know how important it is to **nurture and facilitate a child’s potential, not only to think creatively and critically but also cross-module, that is, thinking between media and expression**.

This year the children have had countless encounters of thinking, reflecting and expressing themselves in ways that have transcended outside-the-box thinking. They have danced on the line between fantasy and reality, yet understanding the beauty and *fantasticalness* of reality. And we want for the children to do this to be able to connect and see what is in front of them yet invent also what could be.

All have given them a strong foundation within their thinking, developing ideas, creativity, critical thinking, advocating for themselves, and developing countless relationships.

Our next steps are in the studio where we thought about ways we could help facilitate the imaginative aspect of story. Sometimes it is hard to just create story, but if one has props, sets, and characters, a story can quickly come alive.
What was also very important was this idea of learning to collaborate and co-construct, having the children work together and giving time for their relationships with each other and the stories’ relationship to blossom.

We provided a palette to the children for them to construct their own ideas and express through multiple ways, whether through building, lighting, use of characters, composition, dialogue, and sounds. We wanted for children to have multiple ways of expression to facilitate every child’s process and multiple entry points within this provocation. We also wanted this piece to be able to move around and change so that the materials could be shared by all. The materials would also support this idea of symbolic thinking that a material could represent different ideas.

We wondered — at what point would the story develop? would there be dialogue? would composition be important within making a “set”? At which pointes would the children really move into collaboration and what roles would arise? Would the children naturally think symbolically with the materials?

We are now in our beginning process of this provocation. As we look through some of the documentation, we marvel at the growing co-construction of ideas, the creativity of the stories, and the intentionality and symbolic nature of the children’s work.
TEACHERS' STRATEGIES

Strategies that are used by the teacher in this provocation:

- "Do you agree with the idea? What do you think?" (questions posed)
  so the child can add an idea or construct one with it....change it, etc.
Within this provocation the teachers will use different strategies to help the children work together
and construct together

Strategies
- Calling attention to each of the children’s work and asking “Did you see what ---- just did? That was
  an interesting idea.”
- "How can you put your ideas together?"
- "Do you agree with this idea? What do you think?"

As these types of questions are offered, the children shift from building separately to collaboratively.

At first L and K begin their work separately, side by side.

A gentle reminder is offered that they have to work together. K thinks carefully and then suggests to
L that perhaps they connect the 
paths the two had been making. L agrees. This first gesture of 
collaboration lends to their work 
being more connected.
L has an interesting idea to use the twine balls, K compliments this by helping L to add the butterflies on top. Now their ideas are being shaped together.

These ideas later become the idea for their story — what if butterflies had a Christmas? the girls wonder. A testament of how materials can help shape ideas.
Both children want to use the sparkly trees. T-How can you put your ideas of using the tree together? E-"Maybe we can use these together." I-"It’s like Christmas in the park.” E-"Maybe we could add lots of lights!” I-"Yes, come on E! Let’s add them.”

As E begins to set up the lights, I takes the role of creating the characters and begins a dialogue between them. These roles compliment each other as one child takes on creating a more complex set while the other child helps to define the story within it.
As their story unfolds, the girls work together to place even more lights because they feel that a Christmas park would be even brighter, trying to make their story even more readable.

E creates a symbol for snow, these lighted glass beads.

I adds characters
K and Y both want to use different materials to fill the boats they have laid out. We ask, “Is there a way that their ideas could work together?” They come up with the smaller piece on top of the larger tile.

Laying the pieces down together.
Constructing a story and making their physical work more readable

After the children construct their work, they are offered a chance to create a story. This is a way for the teachers to make sure the story and the space are more readable by nudging their ideas in order for them to develop more readable and plausible ideas. We also offer specific questions that help them think about the details of their stories.

Strategies used by the teacher;
Reading the space of what they created and asking where their story might begin.
-If their idea isn’t readable, i.e., it’s in their story but not on what they constructed, or saying “I’m confused. I don’t see that idea on the table.” Having the child think and add to what they had constructed.
-Another strategy: while the children were writing their story, if it jumped around in content we had them think — does it make sense?
-As the children were co-constructers of the story, we could also offer questions,”What did you think of that idea? Should we change it, add to it? etc. Helping the children to craft their stories as a team rather than taking turns.

Above: Calling attention to a detail in the story and asking the children to explain their thinking.
**CONSTRUCTING THE STORIES**

In this particular story the children begin to read the space to create their story. They suggest that the people in the story take photos of the rainbow (at right). The teacher uses the strategy to have the children try to think about “why” people would be taking the photo. “Why would the people take a photo?” K thinks very carefully and says,”You know because it is smaller you know.” K is trying to explain that the photo is smaller than the actual thing. She is verbalizing her thinking behind the idea. Y also offers that they take the photo because it is beautiful. Below again the teacher notices that Y is trying to further his idea around the people jumping into the ocean within the story. The teachers ask him to demonstrate and as he does he adds a detail, the person making a sound “glub glub glub.” The teachers have him demonstrate so he can think more carefully about when the sound is actually made, then this detail can be added to the story and his idea can be expressed more clearly.

Very clever symbol for a rainbow

At left BELOW: drawing and labels of the children’s work by the teacher. At right below: Y demonstrates the person jumping into the ocean and at what point the person makes a sound.