

Creating Invitations for Learning

Supporting Kindergarten

Creating Invitations for Learning supports educators as they prepare to create a learning environment that inspires creativity, wonder, curiosity, and excitement in children.

November 2010

An invitation to learn is a display of materials, carefully selected and arranged, that draws children's attention and engages them in a world of wonder, exploration, and discovery. The invitation to learn is purposefully and intentionally designed with curriculum outcomes in mind. As the children interact with the invitation, the educator observes and documents the children's interests, thinking, and learning. The children's questions and interests can become the focus for an inquiry.

As you plan an invitation for learning, reflect on the following:

- On which outcomes will this invitation be based?
- What do I know about the children's interests through my observations and interpretations of the documentation?
- How can I encourage the children's holistic development through the invitations?



As you display the invitations:

Create orderly, beautiful arrangements

Arrange materials with order and in a visually appealing manner to highlight the magic, wonder, and possibilities of the materials. Calming colours and orderly arrangements capture the children's attention, inspire their exploration and creativity, and provide a focus. Children's "aesthetic sense needs to be nurtured in the early years" (Fraser, 2006, p. 103). Arrangements should be displayed in an organized

manner so children can see what materials are available to plan their creations and representations accordingly.

Provide a background for the materials

A background is a space defined in some way. It might be a placemat, a tablecloth, or a bulletin board with a table in front of it. Arrangements of interesting materials with this background provides an invitation and a focus for exploring. A background frames what is available and creates a container for the exploration process.

Creating Invitations for Learning

Creating Invitations for Learning is a publication of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education.

2220 College Ave
REGINA SK CANADA S4P 4V9

Store diverse items in matching containers or baskets

When diverse materials are offered in matching containers or baskets children can clearly see the individual items and their unique attributes. The orderly, attractive appearance and arrangement of diverse materials allows the children to see what is available for their use and communicates a respect for the materials used in the room.

Group similar materials with different attributes together

Grouping materials that have common elements such as colour or texture but that have distinct differences such as shape or size allows children to see more clearly how the materials are the same and different. Such grouping of materials encourages oral language among children.

Arrange invitations with attention to size, shape, scale, and levels

Offering children the same materials over a period of time, but changing the size, shape, scale, or the height at which to work with them, encourages children to draw on their previous experiences and take their exploration to a more complex level.



Arrange materials to suggest how they might be used

The beginning of a construction or creation beside a basket of the materials attracts children's attention. These small suggestions stimulate the children's thinking and communicate that it is okay to dive in and start.

Reposition materials to spark new interest

Moving materials to different locations in the environment can stimulate new interests. By placing materials in a variety of locations, children are invited to explore and find different uses for the materials. Various locations around the classroom, school, or school yard can entice children to spend more time with the materials.

Display books and other visual representations with materials

Books and children's literature can be used when creating an invitation. Books can be fiction or nonfiction and entice children into questioning, wondering, and learning about a topic. It is important to display the books related to the outcomes intended by the invitation. Adding visual and symbolic representations to an invitation gives children another reason for investigation and learning as they make connections between the real objects and the photos, drawings, or stories about them.

Offer collections of materials that highlight a particular outcome

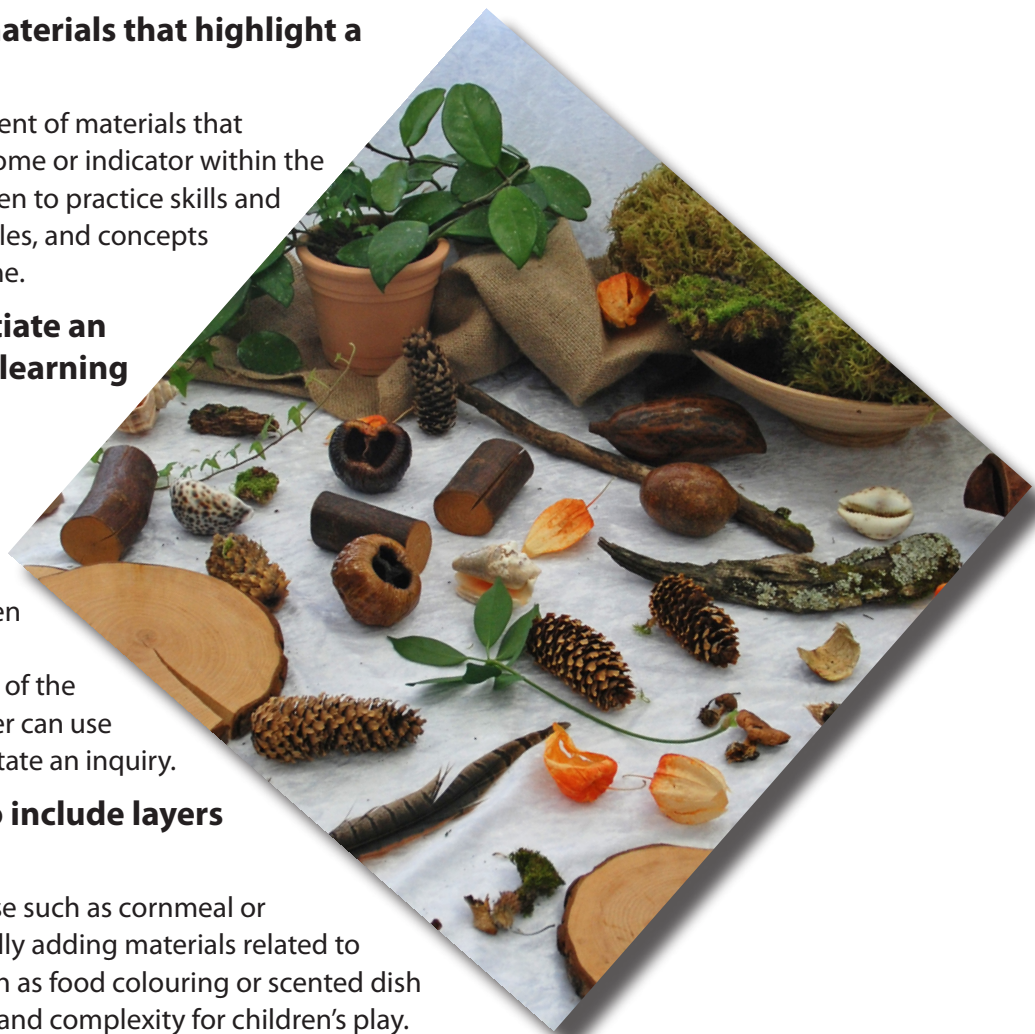
A collection and arrangement of materials that highlight a particular outcome or indicator within the outcome encourage children to practice skills and discover attributes, principles, and concepts that are part of the outcome.

Offer materials to initiate an inquiry based on the learning outcomes

Offering a collection of materials to achieve particular curriculum outcomes allows teachers to observe what the children do and say about the topic through their investigation of the initial invitation. The teacher can use these observations to facilitate an inquiry.

Combine materials to include layers of possibilities

Starting with a sensory base such as cornmeal or shaving cream and gradually adding materials related to different kinds of play (such as food colouring or scented dish soap) extends the interest and complexity for children's play.



Adapted from Curtis and Carter, 2003.

Teachers create an arrangement of materials, such as photos, books, music, and objects, based upon learning outcomes. Invitations can be created at the beginning and throughout a topic of study. Observations of the children interacting with the invitations offer teachers insights into children's knowledge, interests, and questions. Teachers are then able to use these observations to guide future planning.

References

- Curtis, D. & Carter, M. (2003). *Designs for living and learning: Transforming early childhood environments*. St. Paul, MN: Redleaf Press.
- Fraser, S. (2006). *Authentic childhood: Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the classroom* (2nd ed.). Toronto, ON: Nelson, Thomson Canada.