Welcome to the Early Learning Webcast

"Project-based learning... How does it work and where do I begin?"

Presented by:

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Section 1: What is project-based learning?

Overview of Presentation

- What is project-based learning?
- Steps to project-based learning
- Documenting projects
- Connecting projects to learning outcomes

"It is not a single plan for a unit to be followed by a pathway, but a sense of multiple possibilities and multiple routes to knowing, and many ways that teachers and children might together choose." (Wein)

"Learning and Teaching should not stand on opposite banks and just watch the water flow by: instead they should embark together on a journey down the river." (Seidel)

Reggio Emilia principles of project-based learning

- Respect for each other
- Relationship as the basis for collaboration
- Reciprocity to co-construct understandings
- Representation with many symbol systems (e.g. one hundred languages of children)
- Transparency through documentation

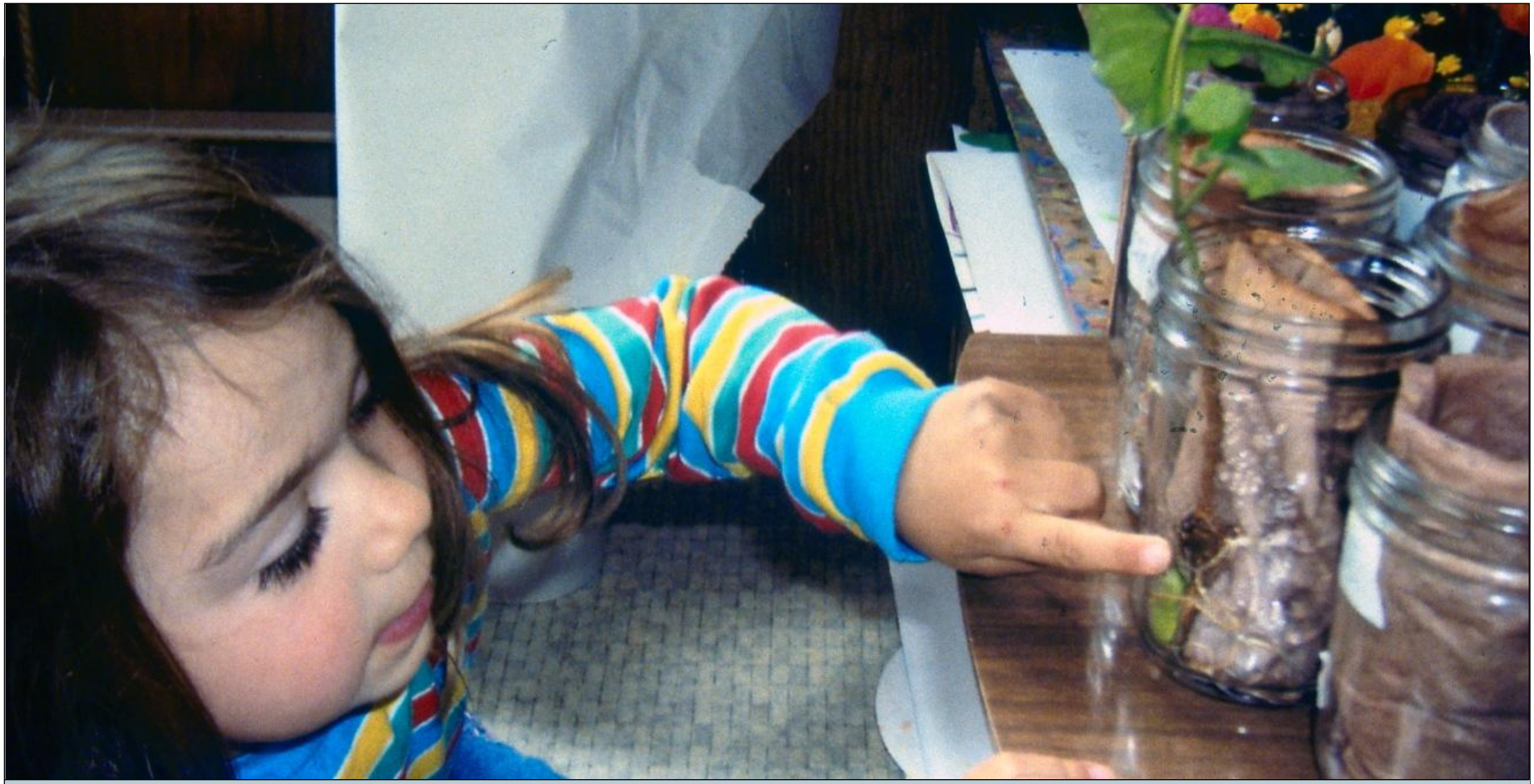
Section 2: Image of the child

Image of the Child

- Deep reflection on the image we hold of children
- Consideration of the values we hold about working with children
- Awareness of what children bring with them when they step through the door of the classroom

Considering the values you believe are important in working with children

- Provide space and time to listen to children's thoughts and ideas
- Ensure the environment you create for children's learning clearly reflects these values
- Ensure materials you offer children support the values you have identified as important
- Consider whether or not the schedule in your classroom reflects the values



Children who live in the country: The Bean Project

Caring for the beans…

Bean harvesting

Children who live in the city: The Bridge Project

Working together to build bridges…

Section 3: Questions from webcast participants

Questions from webcast participants

- “I’m currently an Early Childhood Educator and my passion is the Reggio Emilia philosophy. How do I get my staff motivated and interested in this philosophy?”
- “How do we support teachers to trust that children will be motivated and that children will progress?”
- “How do we apply Reggio concepts in the BC context?”

Section 4: Steps to project-based learning

The project ready environment

Space for projects

Before beginning a project...

- Create spaces where children are encouraged to work in groups
- Encourage involvement and ensure that families feel welcome in the classroom
- Ensure that relationship is at the heart of all that happens in the classroom

- Encourage a sense of partnership between children and teachers in the classroom

- Ensure that there are many opportunities for the exchange of ideas among the group

Ideas for Projects

Discover what might engage children that has the potential to turn into a project:

- observe children's play and involvement in the classroom
- listen closely to children's conversations
- ask the children questions

Test your ideas by setting up one or more provocations or challenges that may include:

- suggestions by the teacher to draw or paint what the children appear to be showing an interest in
- carefully selected materials that encourage children to make their thinking visible
- a planned activity based on the teacher's hunches about what could be engaging to the children

After testing ideas for potential projects with children

- Assess children's level of interest or enthusiasm for the topic in question
- Co-create an idea web to determine potential sub-topics

Project: A Rainbow Came to Play

Bringing the rainbow inside

A successful project has the following characteristics

- Big overarching ideas
- Ideas that generate passion in both the children and the teacher
- Topics that will sustain the children's interests over a period of time ("lots of surface area")
- Topics that offer many different paths for the children to follow

- *Giovanni Piazza, 2001*

Once a topic has tentatively been decided on educators can reflect on the following:

- Does the project provide opportunities for the children to collect lots of information that will further their interest in the topic?
- Does the project give the children opportunities to use a wide variety of materials to create representational work?
- Will the topic provide lots of opportunity for collaboration?
- How can I weave learning outcomes into the children's topic of interest?

Section 5: Questions from webcast participants

Questions from webcast participants

- “So many of our preschools/daycares limit the types of projects they do because they feel that children with challenging behaviours either do not respond or do not respect the work of others. Do you find that the Reggio environment and the way that children’s learning is viewed helps to decrease the behaviour that adults find challenging?”

- “Is it the Reggio belief that challenging behaviours are a clue to change the child, or is it the view that challenging behaviours are a challenge for the adults to look at the environment and make changes that support children?”

Section 6: Selecting materials and involving families in projects

The selection of materials

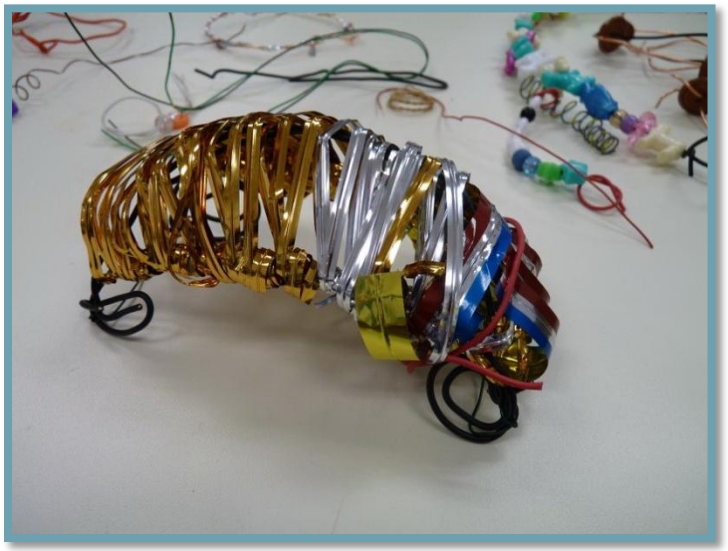
- Consider the aesthetics inherent in the topic
- Research suitable materials and artifacts that will engage the children
- Include natural and found materials

Working with natural materials

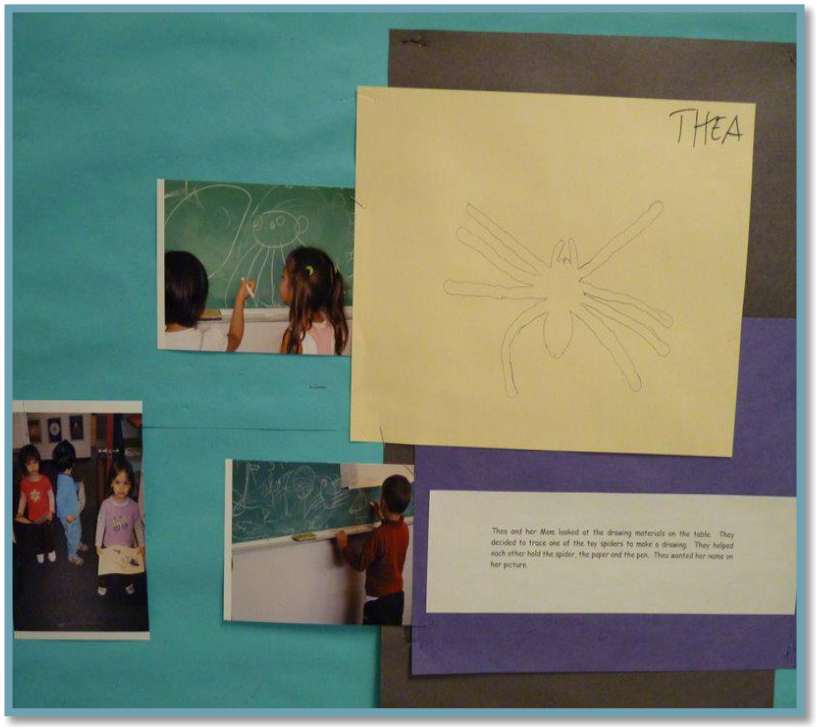

BIRD


Thanks

Working with found materials



Making opportunities for families to participate



- Invite families to contribute relevant materials
- Ask for help from families who have special skills related to the project
- Set out written messages on cards in conjunction with activities in the classroom to invite family participation

Supporting the group

- Encourage the group of children to take ownership of the project within the envelope of safety established by the teacher

- Allow the children to establish their own code of behavior within acceptable limits set by the teacher

Supporting the project

- The teacher accepts the lulls and bursts of activity as part of the progression of the project
- At times, however, the teacher will need to use creativity to think of ways to keep the children interested in the project (e.g. sub-projects)

Bringing the project to a close

Some signals the project is near closure

- When the major task of the project is complete, the children do not come up with any new ideas related to the project to explore
- The children no longer select books on the topic and their conversation or art work no longer reflects the topic
- The documentation tells the teachers it is time to end the project as there is a sense of beginning, middle and end to the documentation material

Bringing the project to a close

- To test assumptions that the project is complete, a provocation/challenge related to the project can be offered
- Based on the amount of interest demonstrated in the children's response, the teacher will know if it is time to end the project
- Often planning a celebration will bring the project to a satisfying end

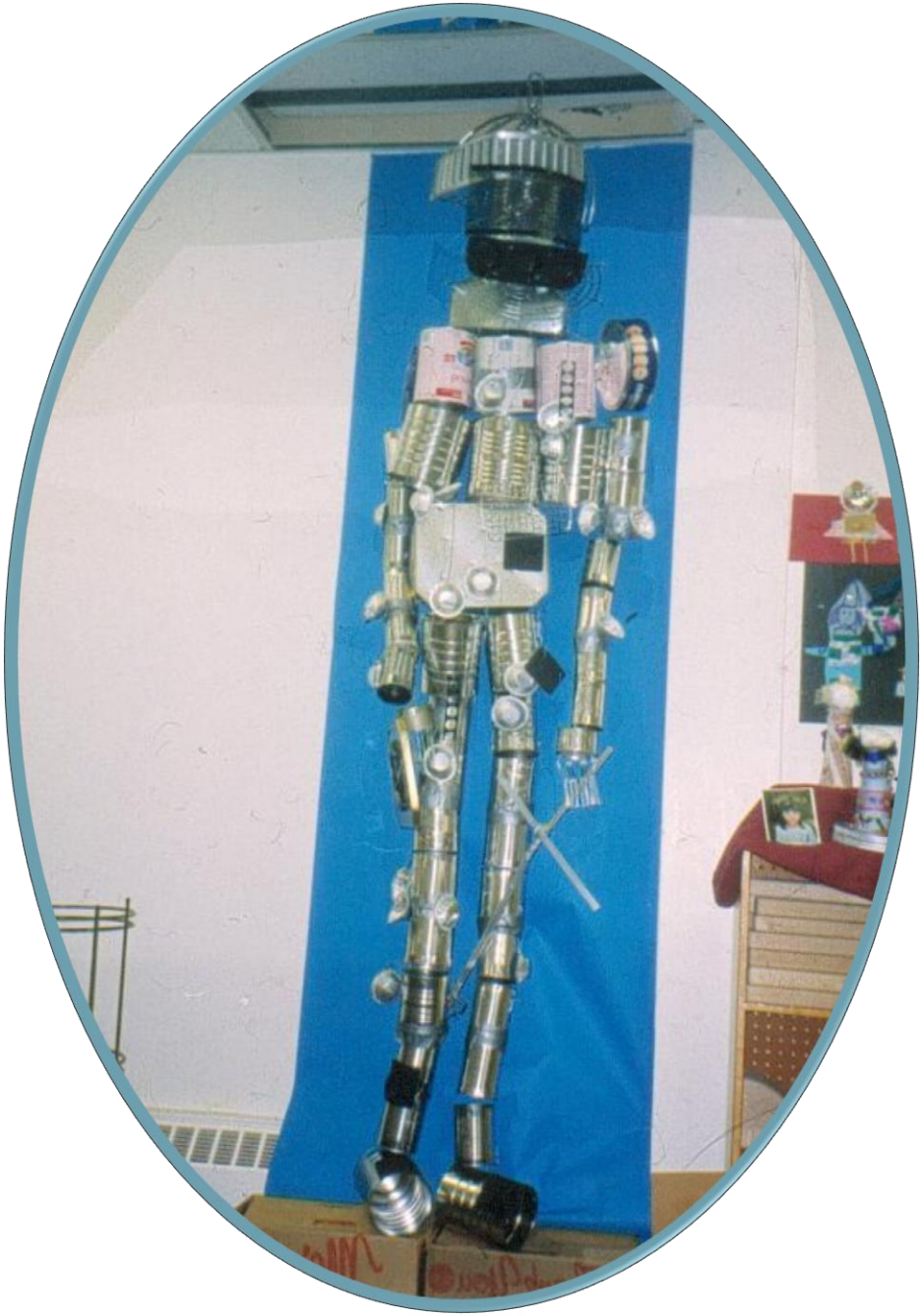
The Castle and Knight Project

Using a variety of materials

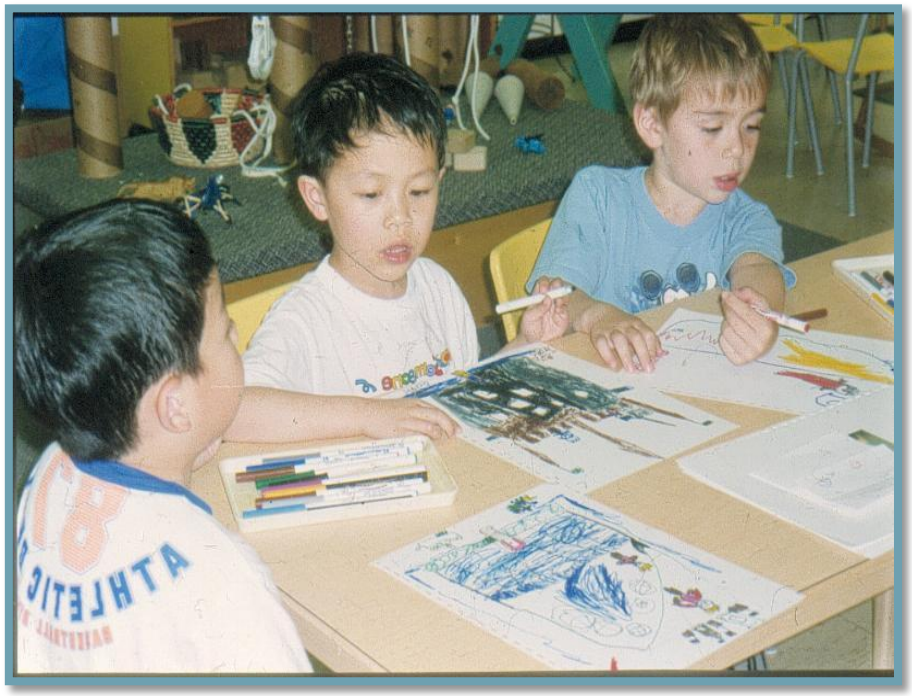
Co-creating

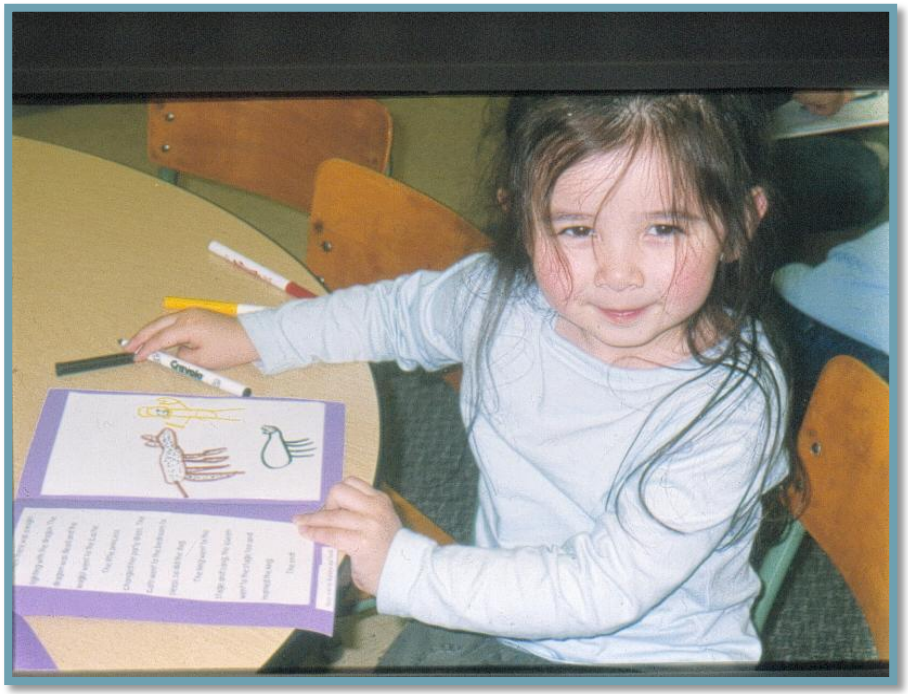
Multiple ways to explore the project

Co-constructing a knight



Reflecting





The close of the project

Section 7: Documenting projects & key concepts

Question from webcast participants

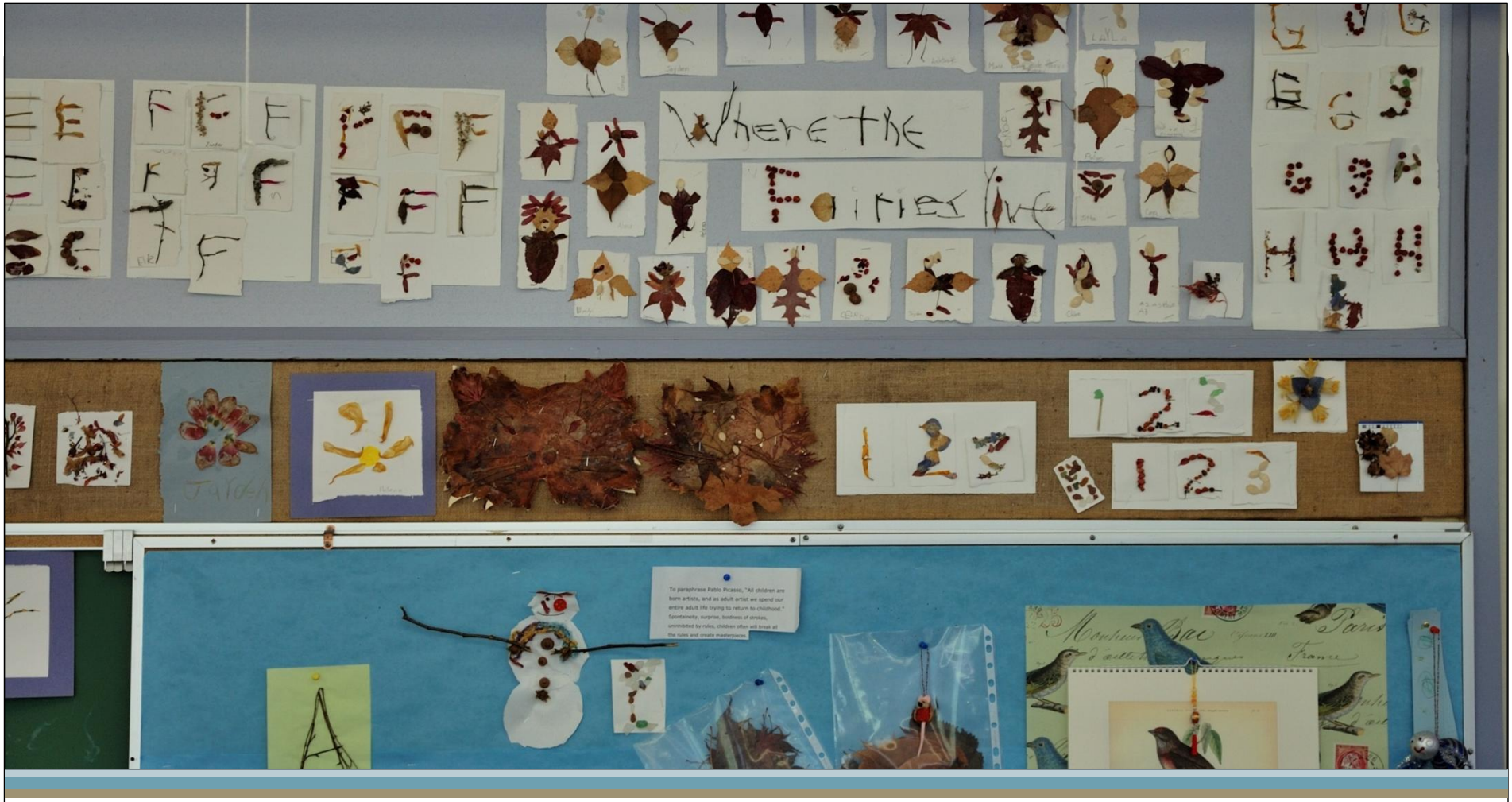
- “How can we reassure parents and other community members that project-based learning has the kind of rigor (e.g. assessment, standards) that they expect for their child?”

Documenting Projects

"Documentation is not about the reorganization and arranging of material with the aim of assembling a descriptive linear story. Rather documentation is a narrative pathway with arguments that seek to make sense of the events and processes"

Turner& Wilson, 2010

- Documentation provides a record of the learning experiences in the classroom
- It provides children, parents, and teachers with an opportunity to reflect, review and plan future experiences
- Documentation reveals connections between events, experiences and learning goals/outcomes
- It provides an opportunity to reflect and think critically about a project as it unfolds



Where the Fairies Live Project

The Making of a Beautiful Fairy

Apple seeds, linden leaves, hydrangea petals. 1 red Japanese maple leaf, one cotoneaster berry and one pumpkin seed were all Maru needed to change these natural materials into something magical. This fairy with the apple seed hair is becoming a mother because "inside her tummy is a baby," says Maru quite emphatically. "It is magic."

Maru spent 90 minutes working on this fairy. She was totally engaged and lost in another word quite apart from this one. She worked meticulously on placing each seed individually in place. She was quiet and very self-contained. Never looking up from her work at hand. When she was finished her face shined with pride and she said to me, "She is very beautiful?" "Yes, Maru," I said, "She is very beautiful."

The other children worked on their fairies but spent far less time. I was amazed at the variety of compositions. Some of the fairies sport wings others do not have wings. Some of the fairies have legs and arms – most have faces with features.

I believe using this natural material suits the subject of fairies; it needed something soft, ephemeral in nature – transitory in nature. Gossamer wings made with linden leaves that are almost skeletons. Seeds that hint at what they might become – like a wish. Necks made with stems from leaves – delicate and fragile – almost too small to hold up the pumpkin seed heads of the fairies (so many of the children chose the pumpkin seed for the head).

The Enchanted Forest

Connecting Projects to Learning Outcomes: The Fairy Project

Example BC Early Learning Framework

Learning Goals

- Build, create and design using different materials and techniques
- Be creative and expressive in a variety of ways
- Express their own points of view and reflect on others' views
- Understand how their actions may affect nature and the planet

Connecting Projects to Learning Outcomes: The Fairy Project

Example Kindergarten Learning Outcomes

- Use imagination, observation, and stories to create images
- Experiment with a variety of materials, technologies, and processes to make images
- Build and describe 3-D objects
- Describe features of local plants and animals

Connecting Projects to Learning Outcomes: The Fairy Project

Example Grade 1 Learning Outcomes

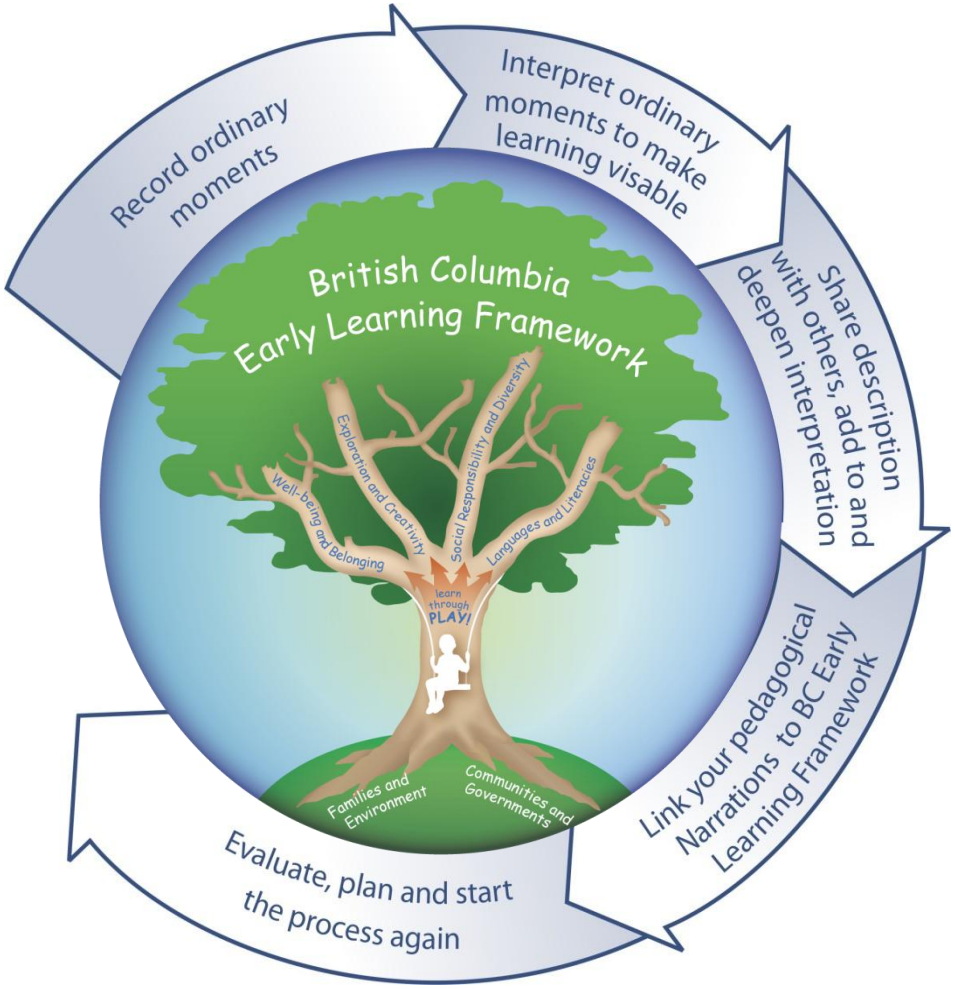
- create images that feature colour, line, shape, texture, and/or pattern
- experiment with a variety of materials, technologies, and processes to make images
- create 2-D and 3-D images in response to objects and other images they have experienced
- compare 2-D shapes to parts of 3-D objects in the environment
- communicate their observations, experiences, and thinking in a variety of ways (e.g., verbally, pictorially, graphically)
- classify living and non-living things

Connecting Projects to Learning Outcomes: The Fairy Project

Example Grade 3 Learning Outcomes

- use a variety of image sources to create images, including feelings, imagination, memory, observation, and sensory experience
- create images using the image development strategies of superimposition
- create images that show the use of the following visual elements and principles of design, alone and in combination, to produce a variety of effects: colour, shape, line, texture, pattern and/or radial balance
- experiment with materials, technologies, and processes to create particular effects
- ask questions that foster investigations and explorations relevant to the content
- compare familiar plants according to similarities and differences in appearance and life cycles
- describe how plants are harvested and used throughout the seasons

Making the learning visible



www.bced.gov.bc.ca/early_learning/early_learning_framework.htm

The Olympic Project

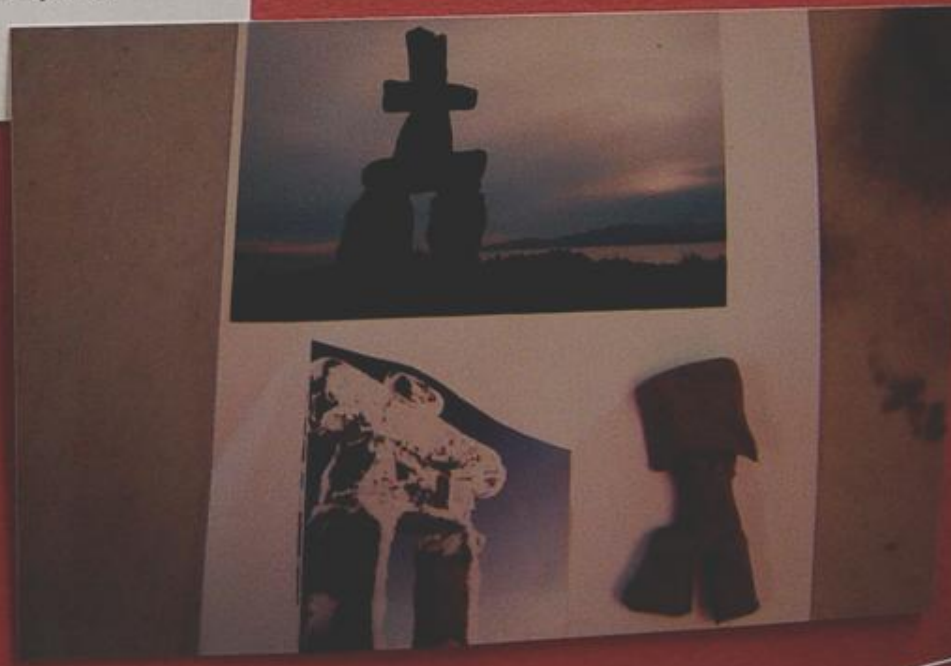
Inukshuk

Evan was the first to mention the Olympics in our classroom. One day He built a small structure out of blocks and with a big smile announced, *"Inukshuk, Olympics"* For a few more days he continued to build, draw, paint and construct with cut out papers his representation of an Inukshuk. He proudly made a small clay sculpture as well. The other children started to notice what he was doing and so we provided some real rocks for them to attempt to build with. They seem to have the understanding that this figure is only connected to the Olympics and have not heard any discussion about the historical aspect of the Inukshuk. I can't help thinking how easy it is for people, especially children, to be influenced by the media. I am reminded that we need to be mindful of helping children understand the original meanings behind contemporary symbols.

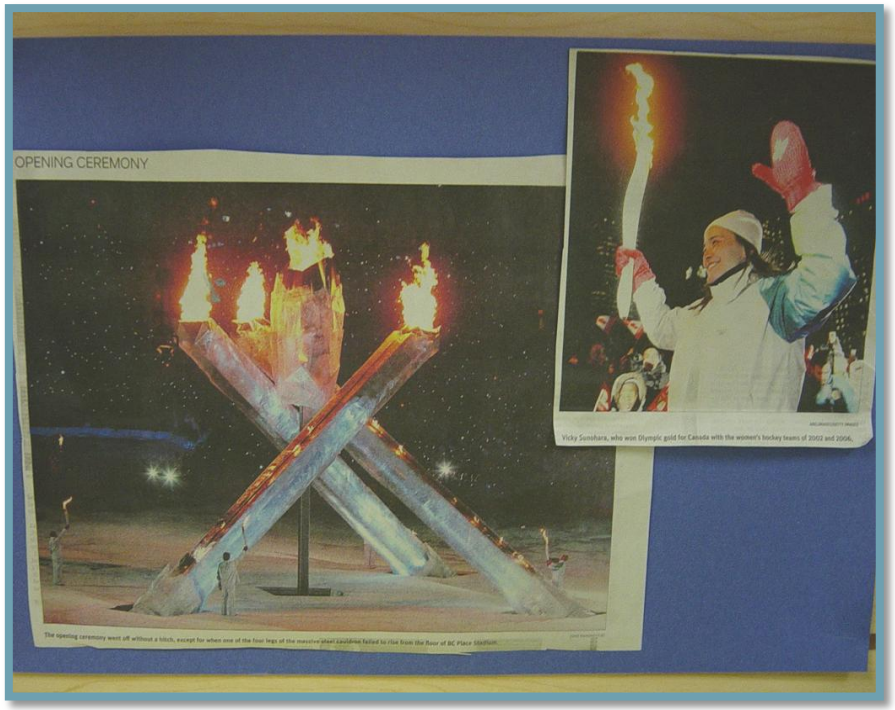
"The Inukshuk is to make it look "Olympicy."

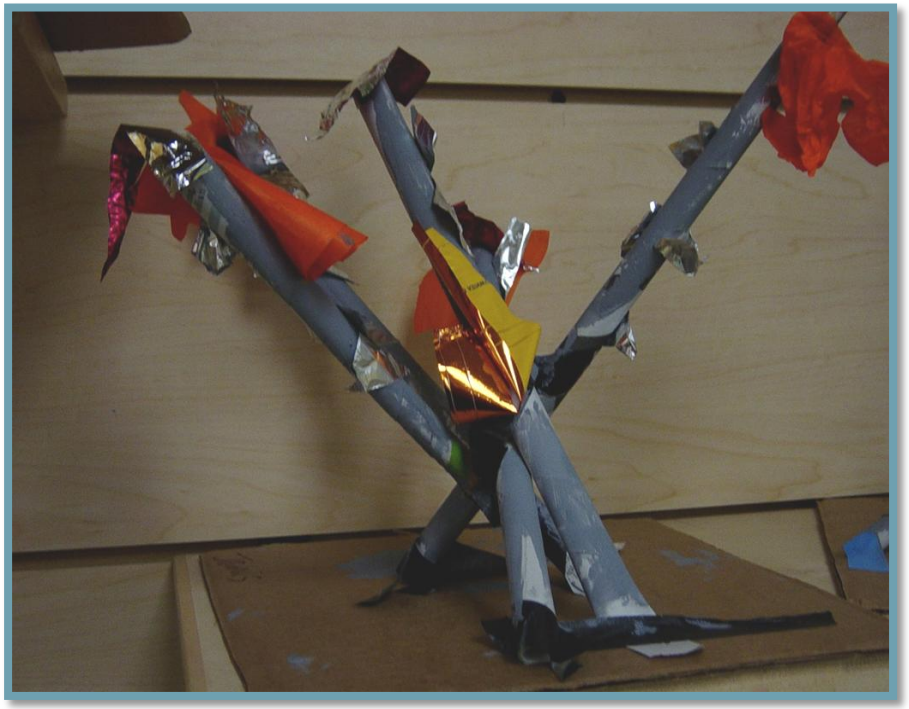
"Inukshuk is a pretend man. He doesn't walk. He is made of clay and rocks. We have them for everybody to look at."

Documentation of how the project began



The Olympic Flame





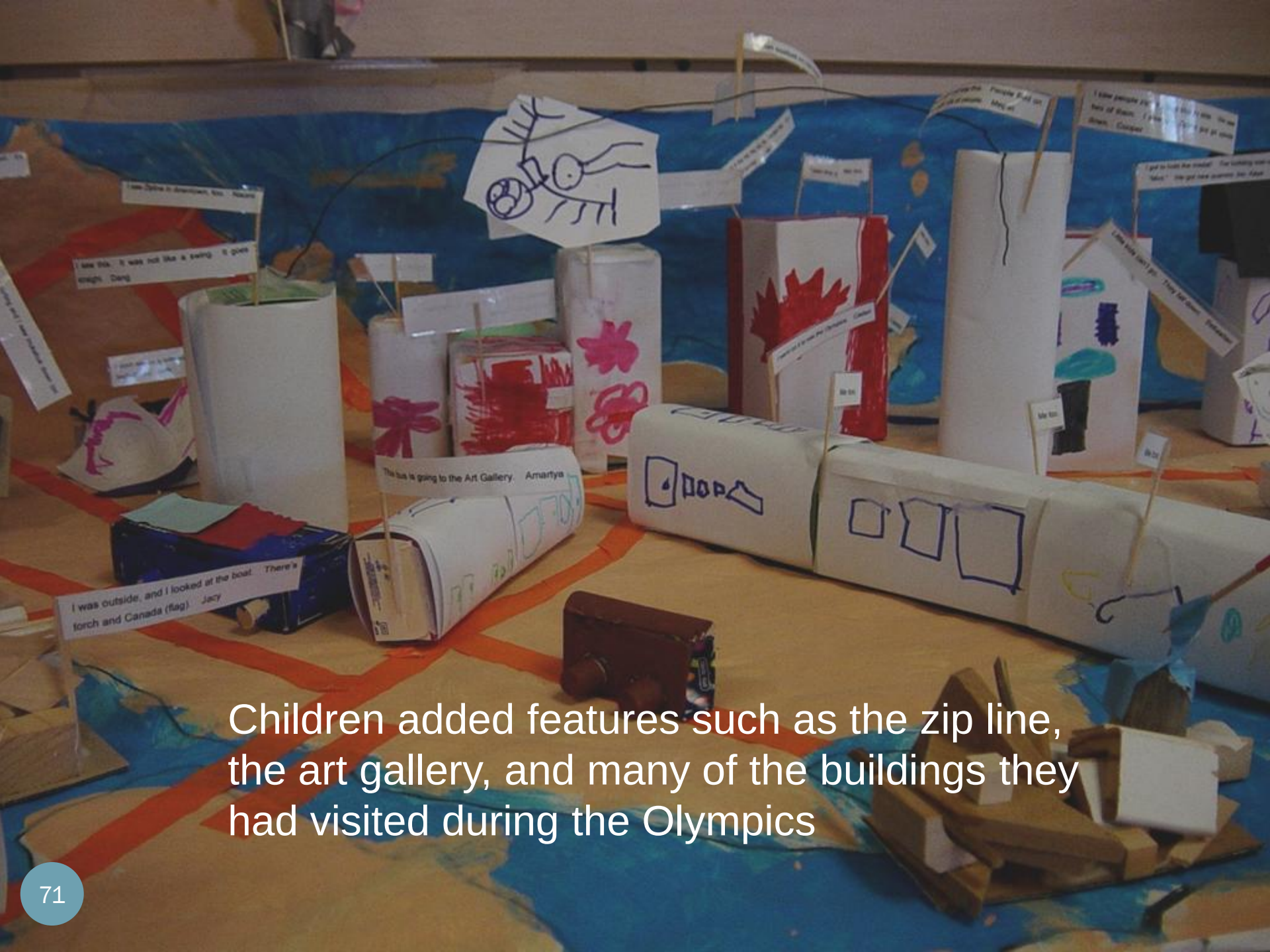
Supporting the interest

Children find an Olympic map in their classroom

Children start making a 3-D map of the Olympic sites

They work together to transfer the map onto a large cardboard sheet

Children research the things they did during the Olympics to add to the map

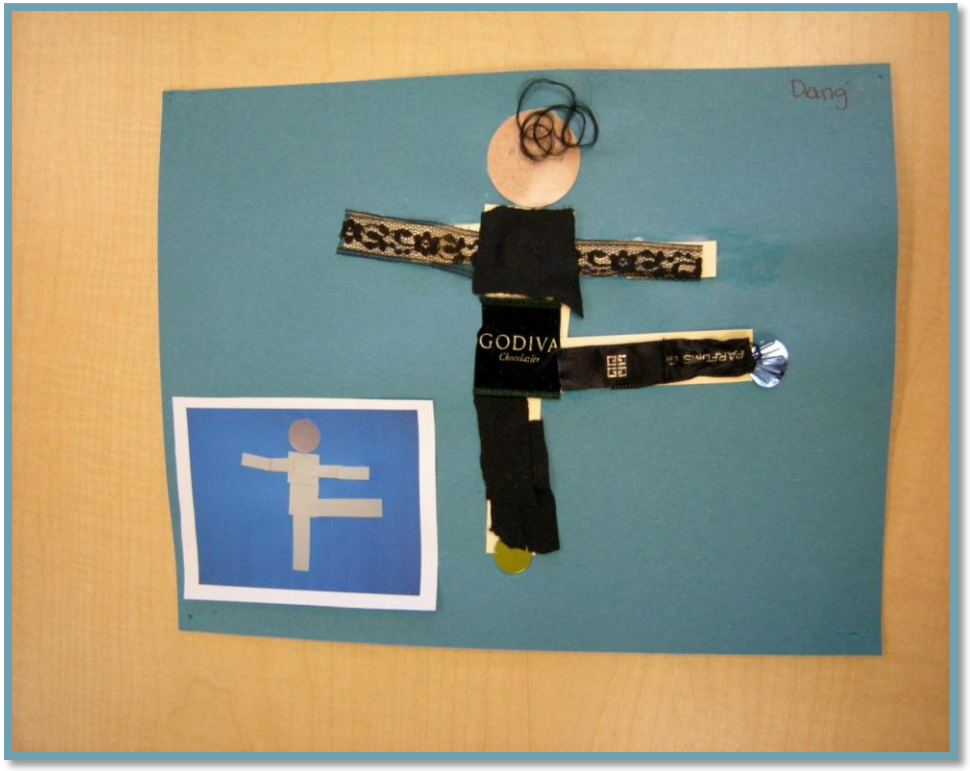


Children added features such as the zip line, the art gallery, and many of the buildings they had visited during the Olympics

Other ways the Olympic Project unfolded

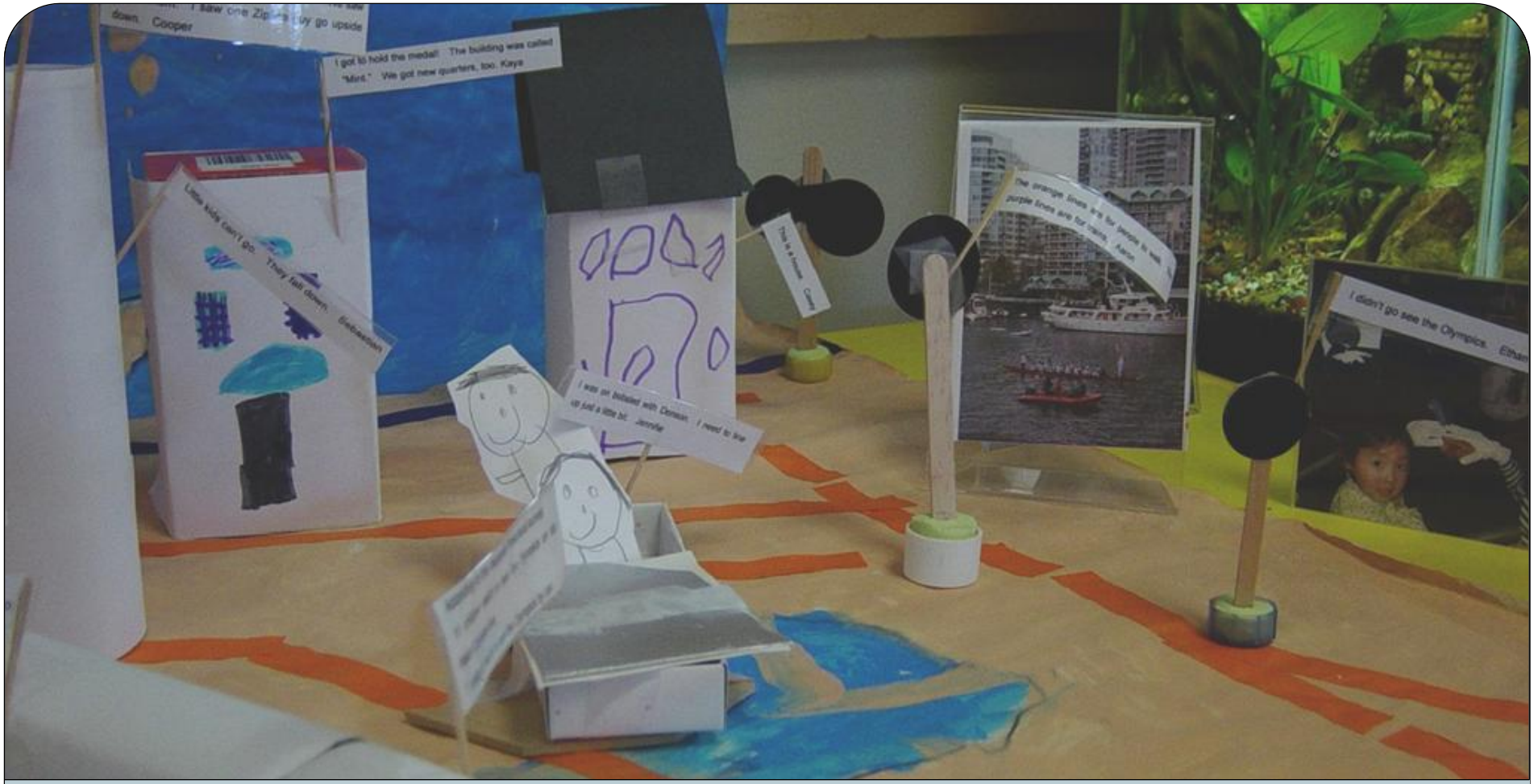
Children dramatising skating and hockey

Children making representations of the figure skater's movements



More representations...

Documenting the Olympic Project



The completed 3-D map of the Olympic site

The child has
A hundred languages
(and a hundred hundred more)
And they steal ninety nine.
(No way. The hundred is
there.)

Loris Malaguzzi

Key Concepts to Take Away

- Project-based learning is a powerful learning tool
- It engages learners based on personalized interests
- Project-based learning enables **every** learner to feel they are contributing members of the class
- It supports children in developing lifelong learning skills such as collaboration, inquiry and problem-solving

Key Concepts to Take Away

- Projects can be co-created and investigated by both small and large groups
- Projects can extend for days, weeks or months depending on student interest
- Project-based learning is a method for teaching students of all ages using an interdisciplinary approach

Suggested Further Reading

Fraser, Susan, (2011), Authentic Childhood: Experiencing Reggio Emilia in the Classroom (3rd ed) Nelson, Toronto.

Iannacci, L & Whitty, P., (2009), Early Childhood Curricula: Reconceptualist Perspectives, Detselig, Calgary Ab.

Katz, L & Chard, S, (2000) Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach, (2nd edition). Scarborough, ON, Scholastic.

MacDonald, Margaret & Sanchez, Alejandra, (2010), "Provoking Dialogue: Promote a Deeper Understanding of teaching and learning through images and documents", Canadian Children Journal, Vol 35;2, Fall, 2010, p.25-30.

Project Zero, (2001) "Making Learning Visible: Children as individual and group learners", ed Claudia Giudici, Carla Rinaldi, Mara Krechevsky, Reggio Children.

Tarr, Pat, "Curiosity, Curriculum and Collaboration Entwined: Reflections on Pedagogical Documentation", Canadian Children Journal, Vol. 35:2, Fall, 2010. P.4-8

Wien, Carol Anne, (2008) Emergent Curriculum in the Primary Classroom: Interpreting the Reggio Emilia Approach in Schools, Teachers College Press, New York.

Wien, Carol Anne, (2005), "Six Short Reasons Why Pedagogy Matters in Schools" Canadian Children Journal, Vo.30:1, Spring 2005, p 21 -26.

Section 8: Questions from webcast participants

Questions from webcast participants

- “When you have a diverse group of ages and interests, how do you chose the one to focus on?”
- “How can I develop the theme of ‘superheros’ into a project in my kindergarten classroom?”
- “How do you manage more than one project at a time?”
- “How do you offer project-based learning opportunities with a highly variable drop-in clientele? (e.g. StrongStart BC program)”