

HomeMy PageBlogForumCalendarRosterMenusGroupsWork FormPhotos

Blog

All Posts Photo Stories 2013-2014

1

Teddy Bear Factory

Posted by [Bethica Quinn](#) on February 18, 2015 at 9:41am

Hola todos! For the last couple of weeks, we have been working on making stuffed animals in the taller. Some of you have seen these coming home with your child, so I wanted to share the story behind them... It started when I asked the children what they wanted to make next in our 'fabrica.' Many of them were interested in making toys, and as we talked the group started to focus on the idea of making stuffed animals. I brought a teddy bear to the meeting so we could look at how it was made, and the children said the animals should be made out of cloth and should have google eyes and button noses.



We brought out cloth in the taller, and the children began by drawing the animals they wanted to make directly on the fabric. Here, Oliver adds details to his spider while Maya watches.



The next step was to cut out the animals they had drawn. This is difficult to do, since the felt tends to bunch up in the scissors. We held another meeting to strategize, and the children found that it was easier to cut if you ask a friend to stretch the fabric for you. Here, Sonny helps Lenna cut out her dog.



After some practice with the fabric and scissors, many children were able to cut the felt independently. Here, Mateo cuts out his bear.

Once the children had decorated their animals with google eyes and buttons, we brought their works in progress back to the meeting to compare with the teddy bear we had looked at before. The children quickly noticed that the teddy bear could sit up, while their two-dimensional animals could not. (We had some fun trying this out, as the children laughed to see their animals flop over into a heap no matter how we tried to stand them up.) The children said that their animals needed to be "gordos" in order to sit up, but they were not sure how to make this happen. Sonny said we needed to put something inside, and suggested rocks from the patio. Marlise said that we needed to sew the animals. I brought in a book, *How Teddy Bears are Made*, that has photographs of each step of the teddy bear manufacturing process and clearly shows the bears being stuffed and sewn. After examining the photos, we were ready to try the next step.



The children traced and cut out back pieces for their animals. As they cut, we noticed the scraps of fabric piling up on the table and the question of what we would use to stuff our animals was answered! We then layered the two pieces on top of each other and the children began to sew. Once they sewed most of the way around, they could put in the stuffing and then sew the rest of the animal closed.

The sewing process itself is an opportunity for a LOT of learning. For example:

1. Sequencing: In order to sew successfully, you need to repeat a sequence of steps in the correct order. If you change the order, your sewing will not be successful. For the first two days of sewing, I invited student teachers to join me in the taller so that we could have plenty of adults available to talk children through the sequence. After that, children have been able to follow the steps more independently. Learning and practicing a sequence of steps like the ones required to sew helps build connections in the brain and between the brain and the body.
2. Cause and effect: Once children master the basic sequence for sewing, they can experiment with variations and see what changes are made in the work. What happens if I make my stitches longer? Shorter? What if I don't pull the thread all the way through? What if I pull extra tight? What is the difference between putting the needle back through the fabric it just emerged from (straight stitch) and putting it through again from the other side (whip stitch)? What if I cross the thread over to the other side of my animal?

Sewing is a great laboratory for children to tinker with cause and effect, allowing them to reason about how their actions affect their environment.

3. Fine motor and eye-hand coordination: Sewing requires a lot of precision and a fair amount of strength. It requires coordination between the fingers on the hand holding the needle, between the two hands, and between the hands and the eyes. The time it takes to sew all the way around an animal provides opportunity to practice all of these skills and to see improvement from beginning to end of the task.

4. Use of real tools: Using real needles with real points gives children a chance to practice being careful. Using these adult tools also connects children to the 'real' work that is going on around them and to traditions that go back centuries. Children are proud to be trusted with these real tools and proud of the real work they are able to do with them.

5. Patience and persistence: It takes a long time to go all the way around a stuffed animal! Patience and persistence are required. It is very interesting to see how children respond to this challenge. Some of them worked for only a short time before setting the work aside. However, their desire to complete the task brought them back on another day. Other children stayed in the taller for long stretches of time, working with determination to complete their animals. So far, most of the children have completed at least one animal and several of them have made more than one.

In the photos that follow, you can see children practicing all these skills and learnings:



















And here is what the finished product looks like!

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