

Boxed Red Cups
Out of the Box



Art Representation





Last week on Thursday, I had a bunch of things on the back counter in the classroom. There was a family meeting planned for that evening and we always made it a potluck together. So I had paper plates, forks, napkins and a bag of those plastic red cups lying on the counter.

In the morning during jobs time, one of the children walked over and saw the cups. They are bright red so it didn't surprise me. Alex asked me if he could use the cups on the rug. At that moment, I thought about having to run out to the store right after school ended and run back to prepare for the families...I wanted to say no, those cups are for a meeting later on. But instead, I said, okay. But the cups need to stay on the rug to explore. To

be honest, I was really curious about what Alex would do with them.

I had only a few photos so put them into a photo slide show. Sewing the photos inspired me so I also used the red cups as materials for a multimedia art piece. I also used photos as well as photo printouts, scissors and glue. I took photos of my piece from different angles and put the photos into a slideshow.

Here are questions that I want to explore:

- Why I hesitate about letting the cups go on the rug?
- Does Alex like to build? Why have I never seen him building before?
- How can I look at my materials in new ways?

Know Yourself – I know I like to plan and I can get anxious when the plans I've made don't go the way I thought. I had planned ahead of time getting all the stuff for the family meeting so I wouldn't have to rush after school and rush back. I don't like being flustered before greeting the families. But if I'd said no and stuck to my original plan, then look what I would have missed out on! How can I explore my own needs for a peaceful classroom without having the children miss out on learning experiences?

Consider the Child's Perspective – From Alex's perspective, those red cups attracted him. Maybe it's the color? Maybe it's something he does at home with his family? It was a clever use of the cups. What made him think of doing this?

Examine the Environments - I'd never seen Alex in the block area before so I assumed he didn't enjoy building, but look at today. I wonder if it's the space that feels crowded in the block area – should I move it to a larger space in the room? I do know that Alex tends to like to do things on his own or with adults. Is it that he needs space to feel safe to build? Did he like building all along

but doesn't like blocks for building? I'm going to have to observe him some more.

Seek Multiple Perspectives – I know I want to talk with Alex's family about whether they do this at home. If not, then he really did me a favor because his use of the cups made me rethink how I look at my materials and my environment as a whole. I think I'll talk with the other teachers at lunch about this and see what they think.

Pause for Inspiration – Well, watching Alex inspired me and reconnected me to the joy and surprise that comes from working with young children – that's why I entered this field in the first place. Kids are amazing and find wonder everywhere. Today made me realize that I need to connect to that sense of wonder more. I've been getting too bogged down on the never ending list of tasks...freeing myself will free the curriculum.

Turn Questions into Actions – Well, here are a few actions that I'll take from this reflection:

1. Observe Alex's preferences more closely.
2. Offer Alex and the other children ways to build using materials other than the blocks or Legos. Observe what happens and document this.
3. Let myself have at least one morning next week and let go of my "planning." See what emerges to free up my teaching style a bit – try it out.
4. Do some more reading and finding resources on building.
5. Reference the Competencies Document relating to this experience.

CA ECE Competencies Document

1. Competency - Learning Environments and Curriculum
 - a. Performance Area – Curriculum and Curriculum Planning

- i. Observation
 - ii. Documentation
 - iii. Reflection and interpretation
 - iv. Planning
 - v. Implementation
 - b. Environments, Schedules and Routines
 - i. Materials and equipment
 - c. Strategies to Support Learning and Development
 - i. Multiple strategies to address developmental domains and content areas
 - ii. Intentional teaching
- 2. Competency – Relationships, Interactions and Guidance
 - a. Performance Area – Social-Emotional Climate
 - i. Reflective practice to provide guidance to children
 - b. Performance Area – Socialization and Guidance
 - i. Appropriate expectations for behavior
 - ii. Encouraging children’s efforts

Resources:

Building Structures with Young Children by Ingrid Chalufour and Karen Worth, Redleaf Press, 2004.