

Role of the Educator in Expanding the Repertoire of Children's Play Skills

Provision an area or provide an invitation at a table offering a combination of materials that provide many different opportunities for exploration, including:

- A sensory base or loose parts such as sand, play dough, fabric pieces, blocks, tiles, etc. as a foundation. The idea here is to provide an abundance of an open-ended material that can be used and reused in many ways.
- Materials that encourage construction, design, classifying, sorting, such as small containers, bowls and boxes, trays with sections, materials to create enclosures.
- Materials that encourage dramatic play such as small people and animals, vehicles, miniature houses, dishes, etc.
- An extra collection of different materials to set aside to add as the children engage in play.
- As you set up an area, describe to the children what you are providing and your ideas about the possibilities for their engagement.

Stay with the children during the play experience providing the following support:

- Observe and document children's ideas as they engage in play.
- Avoid questions, directions or praise.
- Encourage children to join in and stay but do not require this.
- Describe the details of the children's ideas and actions as they play and help them see the ideas and actions of the other children around them.
- Reorder the space and materials to ensure the children have room to revisit and expand their ideas.
- Offer additional materials based on the details of what you see children doing to extend or support their ideas. You can do this by placing the new material near for them to discover or by describing what you see and how what you are offering might help.
- If you see children's interest coming to a close, offer additional materials related to what they were doing to reengage and extend their interest.
- Show children back the work they are doing in the moment using photos as they work or later through printed photos of what they have done.
- Encourage children to join you in clean up when the play is finished.

Roles for Educators
Adapted from *Reflecting Children's Lives*
A Handbook for Planning Child-Centered Curriculum
By Deb Curtis and Margie Carter

Educator as Architect

- Planning for and adapting the space for the children's active minds and big hearts.
- Provisioning the environment with complex materials for many possibilities exploration and learning.
- Creating opportunities to explore magic and wonder, light and shadows, sound, color and texture
- Integrating outdoor and natural elements into the indoor environment
- Rearranging the environment to create new interest and investigations.

Educator as Observer and Researcher

- Noticing the details of the children's play in the environment.
- Making note of a child's likes, dislikes, accomplishments, and frustrations
- Observing before intervening or reacting
- Using observations to plan curriculum and interactions based on children's ideas and interests.

Educator as Prop Manager

- Suggesting play possibilities through collections and arrangements of materials
- Encouraging open-ended use and transformation of materials
- Creating order behind the play with casual picking up and putting away (refocusing)
- Providing additional materials to extend play without interrupting the play flow

Educator as Coach

- Recognizing skills and strengths and providing opportunities to practice them
- Encouraging risk-taking with a supportive presence
- Teaching skills to support independence and deeper use of materials.

Educator as Mediator

- Creating a climate of safety for children to speak their needs and feelings
- Seeing conflicts as opportunities to learn social skills and see other perspectives.

- Providing support and language for children to solve their own problems
- Focusing on the content of the play rather than on a violation of rules

Educator as Collaborator

- Seeking multiple perspectives from coworkers, children and families for making decisions.
- Sharing decision making on directions to take with children and curriculum.
- Joining with others in the work to be done.

Educator as Broadcaster and Storyteller

- Describing children's ideas and work to them and others.
 - Showing children their ideas through photo and homemade books.
 - Making written and pictorial representation of children's play.
 - Creating stories for children about their own play activities.
 - Taking dictation or transcribing children's language.
 - Supporting children's efforts to tell stories or write about their play creations.
- Sharing the stories of children's play and learning with families and the larger community.

