

Walker Learning Approach Fact Sheet

Creating Engaging Centres in play and personalised learning

“Open” and “Closed” Experiences

Some of the key goals for children’s learning is to promote in them the ability to think laterally and creatively. To be able to self initiate, to explore the properties and elements of things, to problem solve, to take risks, to think deeply, to construct ideas and meaning, to utilise their own understandings and discover new ones, to become interested in endless possibilities and opportunities and to become increasingly intrinsically motivated to learn, to find out, to try, to have a go and to develop resiliency.

An important aspect of the learning environment is to ensure that children have the opportunity on a regular basis to construct, to create, to explore and investigate in ways that are purposeful, planned, intentional and robust by the teacher and specifically, carefully and strategically set up in ways that foster and develop skills such as problem solving, self initiation, deep level thinking, taking risks, constructing meaning and developing a range of additional skills.

Through play based curriculum, the nature of how and what resources are established, set up, displayed and provided for the children is extremely important.

There are two general terms that can be used to define how technically an authentic play based curriculum learning environment and centres can be set up (or not set up) to promote the above skills.

These terms are known as either “open” or “closed” experiences. Explanations of open / closed experiences for the purposes of this fact sheet are related to the investigations sessions and the children’s own discoveries and use of resources.

Rich print around the room, children’s own writing, texts, posters, labels, the richness of literacy and numeracy, oral language, conversation, children’s own planning and thoughts and ideas will fill the learning spaces every day.

Your own learning intentions that are displayed each morning and on the parent information board along with the focus children and reporter and photographers tasks all provide many opportunities for intentional and purposeful links back to literacy and numeracy.

Creative and open-ended learning centres are an integral and essential element of authentic play based curriculum. Where and how we scaffold, make the links to curriculum areas, skills, literacy and numeracy is through our planning, our tuning in and reflection and our work with the children during investigations. Not through setting up closed activities, which inhibit their own creativity, imagination and thinking.

OPEN ENDED EXPERIENCES

Open-ended experiences are related to the

- **Process not the end product.**
- **Skill not the content that is important through the investigation.**
- **Understandings, not the cloned artefact.**
- **Child leading and constructing and imagining and engaging rather than the teaching directing the outcome during investigations.**

An “open” ended learning centre, display, resource or expectation provides a range of materials, resources, equipment and tools whereby the children are able to utilise these in ways that they can use their own imaginations, skills, ideas, creativity, prior experience, thoughts.

Example 1:

A collage learning centre would have perhaps a range of paper, boxes, masking tape, icy pole sticks, gum nuts, feathers, pine cones, wool, material, straws, cotton wool, leaves. No instructions or orders, or suggestions or a cut out stencil or book or expectation from the teacher on how or what the children would have to make. In other words it is completely up to the children.

The teacher may change some of the materials at times, the teacher may add in a tape measure or other provocations may place a clipboard and pen as some additional equipment, but no written instructions would be provided.

Example 2:

A science of nature table may perhaps have a range of magnets, microscopes, magnifying glasses, texts and posters. It would not have instructions on exactly what the children would be expected to do, how to do it and what the predetermined outcome would have to be. Rather, the materials would invite the children to explore, to experiment with, to make their own discoveries. The teacher would use the language of discovery, the children might add to that but there would not be a preconceived expectation.

Example 3:

At the drawing area or painting area there would be range of mediums to draw and experiment with. But children would not be given a pre drawn or stencilled or stamp that already has shapes. There would never be colouring in sheets or stencils. Children are encouraged to create their own drawings and paintings.

CLOSED EXPERIENCES

Closed Experiences.....

- **Pre determine how and what the child must make or create.**
- **Stifle and inhibit thinking, imagination and motivation.**
- **Perpetuate a belief in learning that everyone is the same, thinks the same and has to be the same.** Example” The cloned daffodil, the cloned Easter basket, the cloned Humpty Dumpty
- **Do not reflect diversity or personalised learning**

Example 1:

At the collage learning centre has pre cut out or pre drawn shapes of a particular object (perhaps a horse or dinosaur). All the children have to colour it in – in a worst-case scenario there are instructions on what colours to colour in specific parts of the objects body.

Some teachers claim this teaches following procedure!! There are many other more open ended and creative ways to teach procedure than that!!

Example 2:

A science or nature table states that the child has to use the magnifying glass to identify specific objects in a particular order, then categorise them, then list them, then

Example 3:

At the drawing or painting table instructions are given such as, “think about something that has 4 wheels and takes things to shops. Draw something that you think this might be.” Or, “See what you might be able to paint using 3 colours only and then label all parts of your painting”. Or, “ in painting today, draw something related to our discussions about autumn and use only autumn colours”.

It is unlikely you will engage a learner through play based curriculum or encourage them ever to explore the richness and wonders of painting if you limit them to 3 colours and make it have to match something about Autumn or have to label everything they do!!!

Examples of Open vs Closed Experiences		
	OPEN	CLOSED
In general	Materials and experiences that are used in a range of ways	Tables with games or experiences with only one rule and one outcome or one expectation or adult directed or only one way of doing things
A numeracy resource table	A full range of tools for numeracy where children can use these in any area for any purpose	"Find the patterns in these teddy bears"
A literacy resource or writers workshop areas	Lots of print, postcards, sticky notes, note pads, pencils and pens, dictionaries and clip boards, ipad, for the children to use as tools	A table with match the word, or write this sentence, during investigations
Open and Closed Questions		
<p>Not having closed experiences and provocations doesn't mean that the teacher is not guiding, scaffolding, extending or teaching. The teacher will always be making the learning and skills that the child is demonstrating through their open-ended investigations explicit. At times, there may be some open ended comments, sentences or instructions or questions written around the learning space by the teacher but these would be "open ended", not prescriptive and not closed"</p>		
Sensory or collage area	<p>What do the materials feel like?</p> <p>What words are you using to describe these things?</p> <p><i>This is just an additional provocation for the teacher or parent helper to use in their language and conversation with the children.</i></p> <p><i>It does not become a compulsory aspect of being at the collage or sensory area.</i></p>	
Tinkering table	<p>There may be a list of all the items in the tinkering areas and the order they go away in.</p> <p>The instructions might say something like:</p> <p><i>"When you have finished check like a real construction worker that you have....."</i></p>	