Rock & Roll

DAYCARE

Tuesday Tools: Preparing Environments for Creative Risks

Hello Rock and Roll Community! Welcome back to another Tuesday Training Tools. We've spent the last month discussing the prepared environment – what materials go into it and how they can help or hinder a child's classroom experience.

For our last installment on this topic, we're going to discuss an environmental aspect that you can't order online: the ability to take risks.

Creating anything is an inherently risky venture: the outcome is unknown and it's possible you've never made it before (especially if you're three years old). You wonder how others might react to it, whether people like it, and whether people will like you for making it. Creating something is a vulnerable act.

Fortunately, children are resilient, creative engines. A child's natural state is creativity. As we grow up, however, that natural state begins to shift. As the adults in the room, our responsibility to our children is to foster an environment where children can develop good artistic habits, establish positive self-esteem, and feel secure when taking creative risks that will lay a behavioral foundation for life.

Imagine that you're in a music class and the specialist asks, "what do you like to do at the beach?" They get a range of answers including 'swimming,' 'play with a ball,' 'play with trucks,' 'eat snacks,' 'fly in the sky,' 'be a t-rex.' To our adult brains, some of those answers sound more plausible, more 'correct,' than others. There's no way a four-year-old was a T-Rex at the beach. But what good does it do the child to understand that? It doesn't harm the child, their peers, or the environment. It doesn't take away from the specialist's activity. For all we know, maybe the child was indeed pretending to be a T-Rex at the beach. By accepting the child's response, we validate their creative process and output and encourage them to take more risks in the future.

Now let's imagine the opposite happens. "Julie, you know there are no dinosaurs at the beach. Give a real answer." We watch Julie start to fidget. She pulls away from the teacher and spirals into herself. Maybe she turns her back on the group or pulls away from the activity. The message she's received is 'your creative risk was rejected, and your input is wrong.' What if this happens once, twice, five times in a short period of time? Odds are that Julie's gotten the message that her creativity isn't welcome in class, or subject to someone else's approval.

As creative educators, it's our responsibility to reflect a child's ideas back to them without judgement so they can assess their own creations on their own terms. That's why if a child shows you a piece of artwork, you should describe and reflect what you notice about the creation rather than an evaluative statement like "good job," or "nice picture."

Of course, we want children to understand facts, reality, and the truth. But it's also important to understand the context of those conversations and where it's more or less important to make those distinctions. The golden rule of improvisational acting is to say "yes, and…" to anything your scene partner says. This way, instead of bickering over the details, you can build something together that takes off with a life of its own.

Imagine the creative journey you can take with your students in an environment like that.