



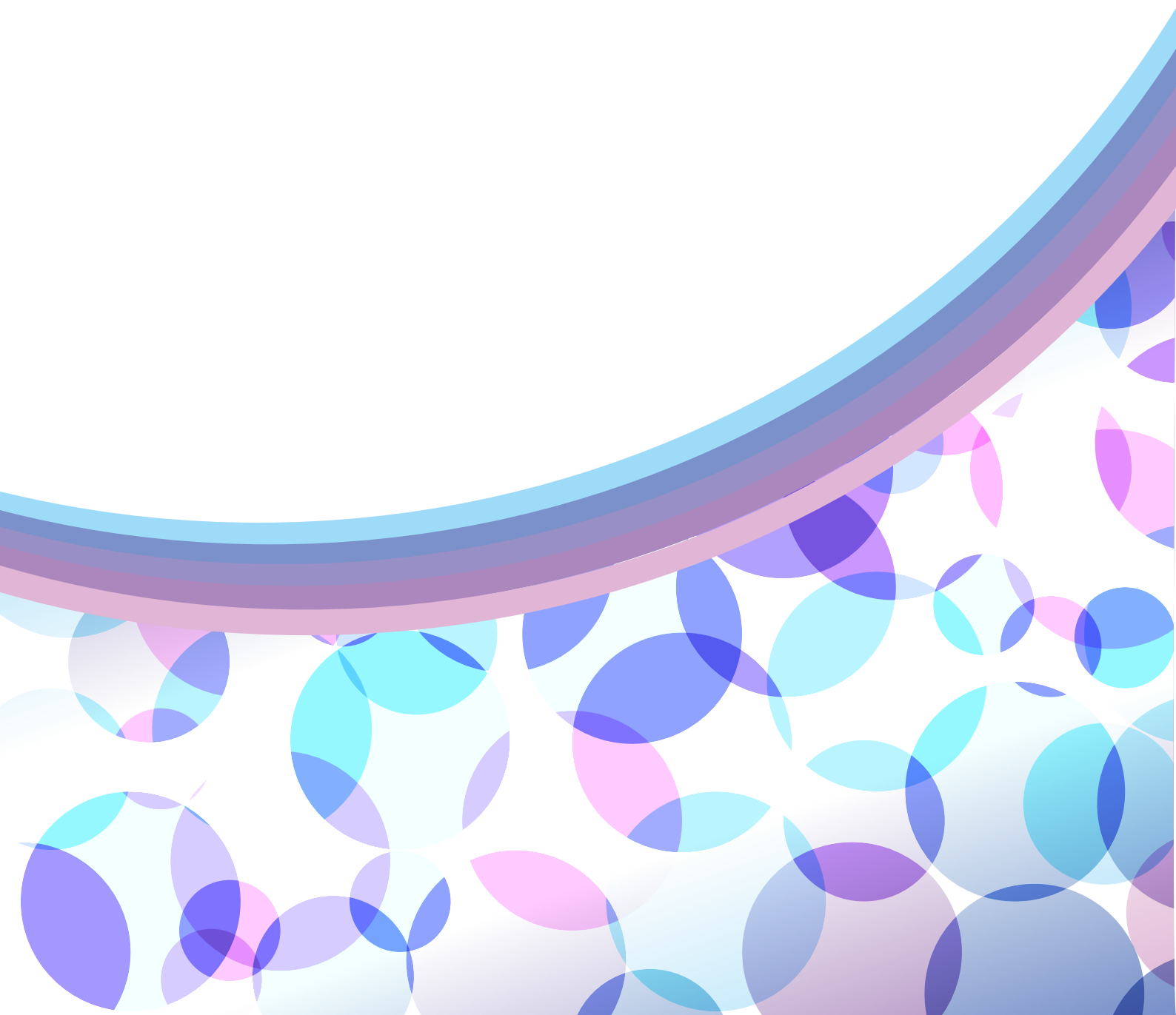
# Planning for play-based and inquiry learning in the classroom



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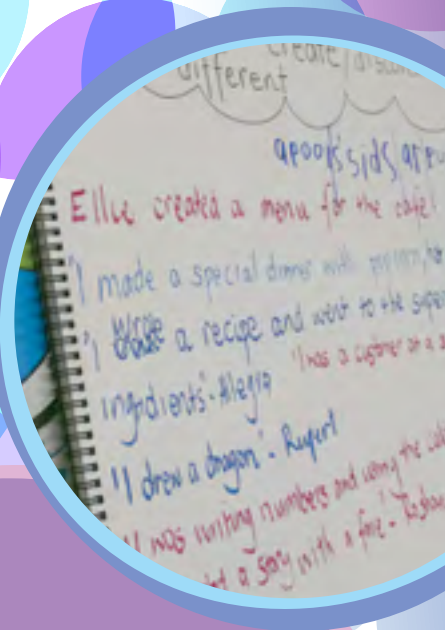




Open-ended resources are needed to encourage imaginative processes in play. Open-ended resources include things such as: blocks; natural materials like sticks, leaves, seedpods; lengths of material; and boxes. Compare these with realistic props, such as plastic toy fruit, toy cars and plastic money, which may limit the opportunities for students to use their imagination to symbolically and creatively transform materials, objects and spaces in their play.







Provide an environment where students are enabled to manipulate and transform materials and resources and re-organise their play spaces.



Set-up play areas that encourage use by small groups, pairs and individuals. This can be signposted to your students by providing just one or two chairs at a table for individual or pair play or making a large space with plentiful resources for a larger group. This supports social interactions and the development of relationships with peers. Allowing spaces for individual play can support student's concentration, creativity and special interests.



Enable connections between different playspaces, allowing students to move resources to different areas to extend their play. For example, having blocks near a sociodramatic play area may inspire children to incorporate the blocks into their dramatic play, or alternatively bring home corner props into their block play. This supports creativity, flexible thinking and organisational skills.



Research has shown that plentiful open-ended materials and resources, along with carefully selected realistic props and objects, encourage more complex and engaging play. For example, a sociodramatic playspace based on a supermarket scenario that contains some empty boxes (e.g. cereal, biscuits, etc) and a pretend cashier station made by the teacher or students, along with money/credit cards from paper, cardboard, bottle tops, etc. To have a supply of open-ended materials challenges the student to imaginatively transform them, while the realistic props provide a 'stepping off' point for students' play. This supports imagination, symbolic thinking, creativity, communication of ideas, planning and metacognition.





In construction and block play, much of the value is the manipulation and imaginative use of abstract materials, with selective use of realistic props such as vehicles and figures so that these enhance the play, not 'drive' it. For example, consider bringing in toy vehicles only after children have worked on a construction, to ensure that it is not limited to the building of simple 'roads' for driving cars or trucks. Complex constructive play supports understanding of mathematical and scientific concepts, a sense of aesthetics, symbolic thinking, collaboration, creative expression, planning, metacognition, language, communication, and more.





As students' progress in their play, think about providing resources for a play area but ask them to organise it. For example, you could provide resources and furniture (chairs, tables, home corner furniture) for a play area, and ask your students to arrange them for their own play themselves. This provides challenge, supports a sense of agency, ownership and belonging and encourages planning and organisational skills, metacognition, communication and collaboration. Challenge students to create or decide on their own props for play, such as hats and costumes, pretend money, credit cards, tickets, menus, newspapers, books, etc. Ask them to think about what they could use to create their props. This helps with creative thinking and planning. Provides challenge, encourages creativity, flexibility, planning, communication and listening.



Provide a wide range of art materials that students can access and choose from for themselves, rather than always having materials, templates and resources chosen or made for them by adults. For example, in highly regarded Reggio Emilia schools, students can work within art studio spaces, with a wide range of materials and resources to select for their creative use.

**Reggio Emilia principles and practices** are showcased in the art studios of Reggio Emilia-inspired schools where student artwork is valued and celebrated for its creativity, not restricted by stereotypical expectations for realistic reproduction. Open-ended and recycled art materials can be sourced, for example, from the **Reverse Garbage Truck** warehouses, where multiple off-cuts and materials from factories are available for recycled artwork, such as cotton spools, lengths of material, plastic containers, and timber shapes. This supports a sense of agency and heightened creative expression.



Provide props and resources for play that recognisably relate to current lesson content, such as books that have been read, scientific or mathematical concepts discussed and fundamental elements of an integrated curriculum across learning areas. This encourages students to make connections and links between ideas, and establishes concepts and extends students thinking through their play. For example, students' socio-dramatic play can be enriched by providing links to stories, with relevant props and materials for costumes. Tape measures and scales, architect planning documents and rulers can be added to block construction to further extend students' mathematical concepts in their play.

