# THE CHILD'S WAY IS ENOUGH

## Workshop Workbook

**Reflections, worksheets, and planning tools for all three parts of the workshop**



Name _____

Program _____

# THE CHILD'S WAY IS ENOUGH

## Part 1: Stepping Off the Craft Conveyor Belt



WHAT CHILDREN MISS WHEN WE DO IT FOR THEM

WATCH NOW

# THE CHILD'S WAY IS ENOUGH

## Part 2: Making Room for the Child's Way



HOLIDAY PROCESS EXPERIENCES FROM INFANTS TO KINDERGARTEN

WATCH NOW

# THE CHILD'S WAY IS ENOUGH

## Part 3:bringing everyone along and next steps



SCRIPTS TO USE FOR FAMILIES AND CO-WORKERS

WATCH NOW

WELCOME

# Before you begin

This workbook goes with all three parts of *The Child's Way Is Enough*. The slides give you the ideas. This workbook is where the real shift happens: in your own honest reflection, your own classroom, and your own words.

Nobody sees these pages but you. There are no right answers here, and no judgment. You don't need to have it all figured out. Your open mind and flexible thinking are exactly what you need to grow and evolve in your practice.

## How to use this workbook

### Pause when the slides pause

Every orange **Pause & Reflect** slide has a matching page here, with the same title and the same questions. Stop the video and write.

### Follow along in order

Each page follows the slides in the order you'll see them. The kicker at the top of the page tells you which part and which section of the workshop it goes with.

### Use it in your classroom

The invitation planner, the age-by-age "what to look for" pages, and the observation records are meant to be printed again and again.

### Come back to it

Revisit Part 3 right before a tricky conversation with a family or a coworker, and the Part 2 idea pages whenever you need a fresh invitation.

## A note on the season

The ideas here carry you from Thanksgiving through the winter holidays. Not every family celebrates every holiday, so many ideas are rooted in the season itself (light, cold, snow, nature, gathering) rather than in one celebration. Use what fits your children and families.

### My intention for this season

Before you watch, write one sentence about what you hope changes for the children in your care.

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PART 1

# STEPPING OFF THE CRAFT CONVEYOR BELT

**What children miss when we do it for them**

In this section: **whose turkey is it**, signs you're on the belt, who really did the work, what keeps the belt running, what it takes from children, and why the craft myths don't hold up.

PART 1

# The big ideas

A one-page summary of Part 1 to come back to anytime.

### The pattern, not the project

Crafts rarely happen in a vacuum. Children learn more from the pattern (the adult chooses, cuts, places, and decides when it's done) than from the project itself.

### Signs you're on the belt

Every one looks the same. There's a sample to copy. The adult preps, fixes, or finishes. Children wait in line. Success means cute for adults. Children follow steps they didn't choose.

### Who did the work?

On a belt craft, adult hands do about 80% of the work (an honest guess). In an open-ended experience, the child does 100%: choosing, deciding, changing their mind, and deciding when they're done.

### What keeps the belt running

Family expectations, admin and bulletin boards, "we've always done it," beliefs about teaching skills, Pinterest and social media, and fear of mess and chaos.

### What the belt takes

Ownership, choice, and voice. Risk-taking, imagination, movement, language, focus, and the joy of discovery. It teaches children there's a "right" way, and that it isn't theirs.

### The craft myths: false

Crafts aren't needed for fine motor skills, following directions, art and creativity, something to take home, or learning to make something. Process does all of this better.

### Belt off, hands off

The child decides how to use the materials, how long to stay, and when they're done. If an adult has to finish it, fix it, or trace it, it isn't the child's work.

### The question shifts

Exploring, mixing, tearing, and stopping halfway are all real outcomes. Instead of "What will they make?" ask "What will they get to discover?"

PART 1 · LET'S CONSIDER

# "Whose turkey is this?"

Read through everything the teacher did for one handprint turkey. Then, beside each step, note whether the child could have done or decided it instead.

| What the teacher did | Could the child have done or decided this? How? |
|---|---|
| **Chose the project (a turkey)** | |
| **Chose the paint colors (red, orange, yellow)** | |
| **Painted the child's hands, or set the paint out ready** | |
| **Decided where the handprints would go** | |
| **Cut the white paper into the feather shape** | |
| **Cut out the brown body** | |
| **Glued the body on** | |
| **Directed the googly eyes** | |
| **Cut the yellow beak** | |
| **Drew the legs** | |
| **Wrote the child's name** | |
| **Decided what "done" looked like** | |

Crafts rarely happen in a vacuum, and children learn more from the pattern than from the project.

1. **Count it up: of these twelve steps, how many did the child actually do or decide?**

2. **If a child does this kind of craft every week, what pattern are they learning about art, and about themselves?**

PART 1 · SELF-CHECK

# Signs you may be stuck on the belt

Be honest and gentle with yourself. This isn't a test; it's a starting point. Check the column that fits your holiday art last season.

| Sign | What it looks like | Often | Some-times | Rarely |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Every one looks the same** | There's a sample to copy and a right way to do it | | | |
| **The adult did the prep, and the parts** | Pre-cut, pre-traced, pre-glued, pre-decided | | | |
| **The adult fixes or finishes it** | Straightening, adding eyes, "just helping" it look right | | | |
| **Children wait in line for a turn** | One at a time, a few minutes each, then back to play | | | |
| **Success means cute for adults** | The goal is a bulletin board, a photo, or a gift home | | | |
| **Children follow steps they didn't choose** | "Glue here. Now this. Now you're done." | | | |

**1** **Which sign surprised you most, or felt most familiar?**

**2** **Which one would you most like to change first?**

**3** **What's one sign you'd add from your own classroom?**

PART 1 · EXERCISE

# Who actually did the work?

Choose one craft you've done. Break it into every step, from choosing the idea to deciding it was finished. Then mark whose hands did each step.

**Craft: _____**

| Step | Adult | Child | Could the child do or decide this instead? How? |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Chose the idea** | | | |
| **2. Chose the materials** | | | |
| **3. Prepared or cut the pieces** | | | |
| **4.** | | | |
| **5.** | | | |
| **6.** | | | |
| **7.** | | | |
| **8.** | | | |
| **9.** | | | |
| **10. Decided it was finished** | | | |

### 80% adult hands

On a belt craft, the adult chooses the idea, cuts the shapes, directs, places, embellishes, and decides when it's finished (an honest guess).

### 100% child hands

In an open-ended experience, the child chooses the materials, decides how to use them, changes their mind, and decides when it's time to be done.

**1** **Count it up. Adult steps: ____ Child steps: ____ What do you notice about the split?**

**2** **Which two steps could you hand back to children next time?**

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

PART 1 · PAUSE 1

# Look back at your last craft

Think about the last holiday craft you did with children. Answer each question honestly. This is about noticing, not judging.

**1** **Whose idea was the craft? Where did it come from? Yours, the children's, Pinterest, social media?**

**2** **Whose hands did most of the work?**

**3** **What did the children actually get to decide?**

**4** **If you lined them up, could you tell whose was whose without their names?**

**5** **How did the process feel for you and the children?**

PART 1 · EXERCISE

# What tends to keep the belt running

Rate how strong each pressure feels for you right now, from 1 (barely) to 5 (very strong).

| Pressure | 1–5 | Where does it really come from for me? | One thing within my control |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Family expectations**<br>Parents love keepsakes and may ask for them | | | |
| **Admin and bulletin boards**<br>Hallways that "look nice" for tours and families | | | |
| **"We've always done it"**<br>Tradition passed down from teacher to teacher, or what most teachers are doing | | | |
| **How to teach certain skills**<br>The assumption that children need crafts for fine motor and following directions | | | |
| **Pinterest and social media**<br>Cute, uniform crafts get likes and shares | | | |
| **Fear of mess and chaos**<br>Open-ended feels harder to manage with many children | | | |

**1** **Which pressure is strongest for you? What would happen if you let it go, just a little?**

**2** **Which pressure is mostly in your own head, rather than something anyone has actually said to you?**

Remember: none of these pressures are about what children need. Naming them is how they start to lose their power.

PART 1 · REFLECTION

# What the conveyor belt takes from children

Check any you've seen in your own classroom, in a child's face, a child's words, or a child's behavior.

- [ ] Takes away their ownership, choice, and voice
- [ ] Teaches conformity over individuality
- [ ] Makes them feel "I can't do art"
- [ ] Builds perfectionism and performance
- [ ] Teaches outcome matters more than effort
- [ ] Limits their imagination and creativity
- [ ] Teaches them to follow instead of lead
- [ ] Skips sensory, hands-on exploration
- [ ] Reduces chances to use and build language
- [ ] Shortens their focus and engagement
- [ ] Lowers their confidence
- [ ] Teaches them there's a "right" way
- [ ] Doesn't honor their diverse needs and abilities
- [ ] Makes them depend on adult approval
- [ ] Makes them afraid of mistakes
- [ ] Takes away chances to problem-solve
- [ ] Discourages risk-taking and experimenting
- [ ] Limits their movement, both big and small
- [ ] Can distress infants and toddlers
- [ ] Pulls them away from play
- [ ] Teaches them to compare their work to others'
- [ ] Takes away the joy of discovery

**1** **Which two or three did you check? Describe a moment when you saw it happen.**

**2** **Choose one. What do you want children to learn or feel instead?**

**3** **What do you want children to believe about themselves when they leave the art table?**

# But aren't crafts good for...?

Each myth from the slides, side by side. Check the ones you've believed, no judgment.

| "Crafts are needed for..." | Product-driven, teacher-directed | Process-driven, child-directed | I've believed this |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Fine motor skills** | Child could only paint the plate and glue about 5 parts | Child chooses to paint, glue, cut, rip, sprinkle, crumble, poke, pull, pile, layer, sort... | |
| **Following directions** | Adults supply every step and correct each mistake, so they do the planning and remembering | Children hold ideas in mind, plan, manage impulses, and adjust: the executive function behind following directions | |
| **Art and creativity** | Children practice matching someone else's decisions about color, shape, and composition | Children generate ideas, test techniques, and discover their own ways to express them | |
| **Something for families to take home** | A craft goes home, but doesn't show what the child learned, especially when adults did the work | Some experiences produce something; the richest learning is shared through photos, observations, and conversations | |
| **Learning how to make something** | Expecting a finished object rushes infants and toddlers; prescribing it replaces preschoolers' ideas | Little ones discover what their actions can do; preschoolers create with intention when ready | |

All five: FALSE. And process doesn't always mean there's no product. As preschoolers' ideas, experience, and skills come together, they can and will create things with intention.

**1** **Which myth have you heard most often, from yourself or others?**

**2** **Which one would you feel most confident explaining to a family or coworker now? Try it in one sentence.**

PART 1 · OBSERVATION

# Skill spotting

Put the myths to the test in your own room.

A plate turkey with five pre-cut pieces builds a brief pincer grasp and following one adult's steps. The next time children explore an open-ended invitation, look for all of these. Note who, when, and with what material.

| Skill | What it might look like | Where I saw it (child, moment, material) |
|---|---|---|
| **Fine motor range** | *painting, ripping, crumbling, poking, pulling, layering* | |
| **Working memory** | *holding an idea in mind while they work* | |
| **Inhibitory control** | *managing impulses, waiting, choosing what not to do* | |
| **Cognitive flexibility** | *adjusting when something doesn't work* | |
| **Generating ideas** | *deciding what they want to try or express* | |
| **Experimenting** | *testing techniques and possibilities* | |
| **Sensory exploration** | *texture, temperature, weight, smell* | |
| **Problem-solving** | *figuring out how to make it stick, stand, or stay* | |
| **Language** | *naming, describing, telling you about it* | |
| **Focus and engagement** | *how long they stay, and coming back* | |

**1** **Which skill surprised you most once you started looking for it?**

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

PART 1 · PAUSE 2

# What makes “no product” uncomfortable?

Discomfort isn't a sign you're wrong. Usually it's a sign you're growing. Sit with these instead of skipping them.

1. **What feels uncomfortable about children going home with nothing "cute"?**

2. **Whose judgment are you most worried about? Families, admin, coworkers?**

3. **Where did your picture of "good holiday art" come from? Your childhood, your first classroom, Pinterest?**

## Reframe it

| When I feel... | It might really mean... | What I'll tell myself instead |
|---|---|---|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

*Example: When I feel nervous a parent will be disappointed, it might mean I'm worried they'll think I'm not working hard. I'll tell myself: setting up a rich invitation and documenting it is real, skilled work.*

PART 1 · OBSERVATION

# Belt off, hands off

Child-led art means the child decides how to use the materials, how long to stay, and when they're done. This week, watch one child during art or sensory time without stepping in. Just notice.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Child (initials) and age** | |
| **Materials available** | |
| **What did they decide about how to use the materials?** | |
| **Did they change their mind? How?** | |
| **What did they say?** | |
| **How long did they stay?** | |
| **How did they show they were done?** | |
| **What did they discover?** | |

**1** **What did you see that you might have missed if you'd been directing?**

**2** **When did you feel the urge to step in, fix, or finish? What did you do instead?**

PART 1 · WRAP-UP

# What to hold onto from Part 1

**Name the belt**
Cookie-cutter crafts show what the adult planned, not what the child thought, felt, or discovered.

**Hands off**
If an adult has to finish it, fix it, or trace it, it isn't the child's work. Art can be one of the few places children lead.

**Shift the question**
Not "What will they make?" but "What will they get to discover?"

**1** **In one sentence, what's the most important thing you're taking from Part 1?**

**2** **What's one thing you'll do differently this week, before you even watch Part 2?**

**3** **What questions are you still holding?**

Coming up in Part 2: holiday process experiences for infants through kindergarten, and new ways to think about what goes home.

2

PART 2

# MAKING ROOM FOR THE CHILD'S WAY

**Holiday process experiences from infants to kindergarten**

In this section: **a five-question filter**, transient and ephemeral art, seasonal experiences by age, turning photos into keepsakes, gifts that truly come from the child, and community gatherings.

PART 2

# The big ideas

A one-page summary of Part 2 to come back to anytime.

### The child's way

The child's idea and stage of development, not the adult's preferences. Every result is different. The experience and the thinking go home through an adult who noticed and documented.

### Five questions first

Whose idea is it? Could two children get completely different results? Is there real choice? Does it fit what this age can actually do? What will I notice and document?

### The product shifts

It doesn't disappear. What families take home changes from a craft into something truer and more meaningful: ephemeral art, seasonal experiences, personalized gifts, or community.

### Transient and ephemeral art

Loose materials are arranged, admired, photographed, and returned to the shelf. Nothing is glued down, so nothing is "wrong." The photo becomes the keepsake.

### Live in the season

Don't turn the season into a craft. Bring the season into the room: light and shadow, cold, snow and ice, winter playscapes, and seasonal centers.

### From photograph to keepsake

Print it, make a book, make a panel, or make a card. One to three photos, the child's own words, and a note on their learning.

### Honest gifts

Infants and toddlers explore with no intent to make a product. Preschoolers and kindergartners can plan and make gifts. No model to copy, no adult fixing, and the child can say "no."

### The gift can be a gathering

A gallery, a cocoa morning, a collaborative reveal, or a family studio. Children prepare and host; families bring their time and their traditions.

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

PART 2 · PAUSE 1

# Ask yourself these five questions first

We turned off the conveyor belt. Now what? Start with the questions.

| The conveyor belt | The child's way |
|---|---|
| The adult's idea and preferences | **The child's idea and stage of development** |
| The same result for every child | **Every result is different** |
| A finished product goes home that the adult fixed and finished | **The experiences and thinking go home from an adult who noticed and documented** |

Run up to three activities you have planned this season through the five questions. Write a quick answer in each box.

| Ask yourself | Activity 1: _____ | Activity 2: _____ | Activity 3: _____ |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1. Whose idea is this: mine or the child's?** | | | |
| **2. Could two children end up with completely different results?** | | | |
| **3. Is there real choice: materials, how, how long, whether at all?** | | | |
| **4. Does it fit what this age can actually do, not what looks cute?** | | | |
| **5. What will I notice and document: the finished thing, or the thinking?** | | | |

**1** **Which activity struggled most with the five questions? What's one change that would help it pass?**

# The product doesn't disappear. It shifts.

What families take home changes from a craft to something truer and more meaningful. For each option, jot what it could look like in your room.

### Ephemeral and transient art

Open-ended play with loose parts (non-permanent)

### Seasonal experiences

Bring the season into everyday invitations and play

### Personalized gifts

Honest by age, chosen and led by the child

### Community

Families and loved ones together in the classroom

**1** **What do families in my program currently take home this season? What would they take home instead?**

**2** **Which of the four feels most natural for my age group? Which feels like a stretch?**

# Arrange it, admire it, photograph it, return it

### What it is

- Loose materials are arranged, admired, photographed, then returned to the shelf
- Nothing is glued down, so nothing is necessarily "finished" or "wrong"
- Children build, change, and rebuild as often as they like
- The adult offers beautiful materials, steps back, and picks up the camera when the child decides to be done

### Why it works for the holidays

Pinecones, cinnamon sticks, gourds, bells, pine needles, and winter colors bring the season in, with no template. The photo (and the moment in time) becomes the keepsake.

## Gather once and use all season long

| Category | Ideas from the slides | Have it | Need it |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Natural** | Pinecones, acorns*, bark, small gourds, leaves, star anise*, cinnamon sticks, rocks, evergreen sprigs, dried orange slices | | |
| **Found and recycled** | Wooden spools and rings, corks, bottle caps*, lids, fabric scraps, ribbon, buttons* (for older children) | | |
| **Sparkle and light** | Glass gems*, acrylic "ice" cubes, mirror tiles, battery tea lights, clear objects | | |
| **Bases and frames** | Wooden or metal trays, mirrors, felt or fabric squares, empty picture frames, light table, tree rounds | | |

** Small items are choking hazards. Offer them only to children who no longer mouth objects, with close supervision.*

**1** **What do I already have, on my shelves or outside, that could become an invitation instead of a template?**

# Ephemeral art, infants to kindergarten

The ideas from the slides, all in one place, plus room to plan your own.

| Age | Try this | Photograph | Display |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Infants** | Large, mouth-safe items on a mirror or soft fabric square; a treasure basket of seasonal textures; translucent blocks on a light panel during tummy time | The reach, the grasp, the gaze | A "Discovering winter textures" photo series |
| **Toddlers** | Chunky loose parts beside or on an empty tray or acrylic mirror; line-and-fill with muffin tins, gourds, and spools; a contact-paper sticky wall at toddler height | Before, during, and after | A three-photo strip with any language they used: "sticky!" "more!" |
| **Preschoolers** | Smaller loose parts on trays, mirrors, or empty frames. A provocation, not instructions: "What can you create with these things from the forest?" | From above, then the child beside it | A print with their title: "The Winter Castle, by Leo (4)" |
| **Kindergartners** | A collaborative floor mural or mandala that grows all week; a cardboard winter village; a shared "winter forest" table that changes with their stories | Children take and choose their own photos | A gallery wall with their work and their statements |

## My ephemeral art plan

| | |
|---|---|
| **Age group** | |
| **Base or frame** | |
| **Materials I'll offer** | |
| **Provocation (a question, object, or photo)** | |
| **How I'll photograph it** | |
| **How I'll display or share it** | |

# Let children live in the season

**Don't turn the season into a craft. Bring the season into the room.**

Fall and winter offer real experiences, concepts, and feelings to explore. Children's play can be the evidence, while photos tell the story. For each area, note what you'll bring into your room.

| Area | What I'll offer | Where (in or out) | Materials I need |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Light and shadow** | *Shorter days and communal decor make light meaningful* | | |
| **Cold, snow, and ice** | *Ideally outside as much as possible, but also bring those elements in* | | |
| **Winter playscapes** | *Small worlds to build stories in* | | |
| **Seasonal centers** | *A few thoughtful additions to each area* | | |

**1** **Which of these could I offer outdoors this season? What would I need to make that happen?**

**2** **Which center in my room could use one or two seasonal additions this week?**

# Infant ideas

Check the ideas you'll try. Then use the bottom half as an observation record while you watch.

| Idea | What it builds | Try it |
|---|---|---|
| **Translucent blocks on a light panel or table** | *Visual tracking, color and contrast, reaching and grasping, cause and effect* | |
| **Snow exploration** | *Sensory processing of temperature and texture, body awareness, language as you name "cold" and "wet"* | |
| **Lights under a fabric** | *Visual attention, object permanence, curiosity, tummy-time strength* | |
| **A low tray of big pinecones and wooden rings** | *Fine motor grasp, texture exploration, transferring hand to hand, focused attention* | |
| **Lying under bare branches swaying in the wind** | *Visual tracking of movement, calm regulation, connection to nature* | |
| **DIY seasonal mobile** | *Visual focus and tracking, reaching and batting, cause and effect, sustained attention* | |

## What to look for (and celebrate)

| I noticed... | Child and date | What I saw or heard |
|---|---|---|
| **Gazing and tracking: eyes following light, movement, or color** | | |
| **Reaching, batting, and grasping toward what interests them** | | |
| **Mouthing and turning objects to explore them** | | |
| **Stillness and long attention, which show deep focus** | | |
| **Kicking, cooing, or smiling: excitement and engagement** | | |
| **Looking back to you to share the discovery** | | |

# Toddler ideas

Check the ideas you'll try. Then use the bottom half as an observation record while you watch.

| Idea | What it builds | Try it |
|---|---|---|
| **Flashlights or lights in a draped-table "cave"** | *Cause and effect, object permanence, crawling and climbing, language* | |
| **Leaves and pinecones on a projector or light table** | *Visual discrimination, shape awareness, fine motor placing and removing* | |
| **Painting with paint or ice** | *Cause and effect, hand and arm strength, color, texture, and temperature* | |
| **Contact-paper sticky wall with leaves and tissue** | *Pincer grasp, color exploration, standing balance, sustained attention* | |
| **Tuff tray with "snow" and big animal figures** | *Pretend play, language, hiding and finding, moving objects with purpose* | |
| **Stomping and tossing leaf piles outdoors** | *Gross motor coordination, balance, body awareness, joy and emotional release* | |
| **Jingle bell wristbands and scarf dances** | *Rhythm, body control, stop-and-go self-regulation, social play* | |

## What to look for (and celebrate)

| I noticed... | Child and date | What I saw or heard |
|---|---|---|
| **Repeating an action again and again (testing cause and effect)** | | |
| **Filling, dumping, lining up, and carrying: their own schemas** | | |
| **New words or sounds: "cold!" "more!" "uh oh!"** | | |
| **Noticing how the paint or ice moves, spreads, and changes** | | |
| **Playing side by side or copying a peer** | | |
| **Showing you what they found or holding it up to share** | | |
| **Choosing to come back to an experience on their own** | | |

# Preschooler ideas

Check the ideas you'll try. Then use the bottom half as an observation record while you watch.

| Idea | What it builds | Try it |
|---|---|---|
| **Shadow puppets with a sheet and lamp or flashlights** | *Storytelling, oral language, spatial reasoning, cooperation with peers* | |
| **Light-table arrangements with translucent loose parts** | *Pattern and symmetry, color mixing, fine motor precision, creative planning* | |
| **Ice exploration with salt, pipettes, and liquid watercolor** | *Prediction and observation, hand strength, early chemistry, scientific vocabulary* | |
| **Winter forest small world with branches, felt snow, and animals** | *Narrative play, problem-solving, role-taking, perspective-taking* | |
| **Bakery dramatic play with real tools** | *Measuring, counting, social roles, conversation, self-help skills* | |
| **Leaf houses and snow sculptures outdoors** | *Gross motor strength, collaboration, planning and building, persistence* | |
| **Observational drawing of real pinecones, acorns, and leaves** | *Attention to detail, fine motor control, patience, artistic confidence* | |

## What to look for (and celebrate)

| I noticed... | Child and date | What I saw or heard |
|---|---|---|
| **Narrating, naming, and telling stories about what they create** | | |
| **Making predictions: "It's going to melt!" "Mine will be bigger!"** | | |
| **Negotiating with a peer about materials, roles, or ideas** | | |
| **Planning before they build, or changing their plan mid-play** | | |
| **Patterns, symmetry, and sorting in their arrangements** | | |
| **Asking "why" and "how" questions** | | |

# Kindergarten ideas

Check the ideas you'll try. Then use the bottom half as an observation record while you watch.

| Idea | What it builds | Try it |
|---|---|---|
| **Chalk-tracing shadows outside at two or three times of day** | *Measurement, comparison, observing change over time, scientific reasoning* | |
| **Building shadow theaters for stories they create** | *Literacy, sequencing, collaboration, confidence in presenting* | |
| **Invitations to create polar homes and environments** | *Planning and design, problem-solving, vocabulary, spatial reasoning* | |
| **Measuring snow depth and icicles and recording findings** | *Measurement, data and graphing, recording skills, inquiry* | |
| **Prisms and rainbows on the walls** | *Curiosity about light, hypothesizing, cause and effect, scientific vocabulary* | |
| **Running a bakery with recipe cards and price tags** | *Early literacy and numeracy, money concepts, cooperation, responsibility* | |
| **Freeze-and-melt experiments: "What melts ice fastest?"** | *Hypothesis testing, comparing results, recording data, critical thinking* | |

## What to look for (and celebrate)

| I noticed... | Child and date | What I saw or heard |
|---|---|---|
| **Asking questions and designing ways to find the answer** | | |
| **Recording on their own: drawings, tallies, invented spelling, charts** | | |
| **Working toward a shared goal and solving conflicts with peers** | | |
| **Revising: trying again, changing a plan, building on yesterday** | | |
| **Explaining their thinking: "I think it melted because..."** | | |
| **Sustaining one project over several days** | | |

# Invitation planner

Copy this page as often as you need.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Invitation name** | |
| **Ages** | |
| **Type (ephemeral art, seasonal experience, gift, gathering)** | |
| **Materials** | |
| **How I'll arrange them** | |
| **Provocation (a question, photo, book, or object)** | |
| **Space and group size** | |
| **Does it pass the five questions?** | |
| **What I'll look for** | |
| **How I'll photograph and document it** | |
| **Safety notes** | |
| **After: what children did and said** | |

# From photograph to keepsake

Turn both transient art and seasonal experiences into a keepsake through photography. Check the formats you'll try this season.

| Format | What it is | Try it | For whom or when |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Print it** | 4x6 or 5x7 prints on cardstock, with a short observation | | |
| **Make a book** | The season's arrangements in a class book or a slideshow | | |
| **Make a panel** | 1–3 photos of each child, the child's words, and a note on their learning | | |
| **Make a card** | A favorite arrangement photo becomes a card the child can give | | |

## Writing the note on their learning

### Just a photo

A child at the light table. Families see pretty stones and ask, "What did they make?"

### A photo with a note

**Did:** Ava lined up glass gems along the mirror edge, then rebuilt it twice. **Said:** "It's a river for the ice." **Shows:** She's planning, revising, and telling a story with materials.

**1** **What tools do I need to capture the moment (charged device, sticky notes for quotes, photo permissions)?**

# Observation records

What they did, what they said, what it shows. Copy this page as often as you need.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Child / date** | |
| **What they did** | |
| **What they said** | |
| **What it shows** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Child / date** | |
| **What they did** | |
| **What they said** | |
| **What it shows** | |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Child / date** | |
| **What they did** | |
| **What they said** | |
| **What it shows** | |

# The honest truth about gifts

The most honest gift is one that truly comes from the child.

### Infants and toddlers

They explore with their senses, with no intent of making a product.

### Preschool and kindergarten

Preschoolers can hold an idea and may begin creating gifts. Kindergartners can plan, revise, and follow through over days. So let them have ownership over their gifts.

Teacher's role: offer materials, document the experiences, ask open-ended questions, and be a resource and a helper when needed.

## Infant and toddler gift ideas

| Idea | Try it | Materials I need |
|---|---|---|
| **Canvas or cardboard with winter or holiday-colored paints** | | |
| **Wood slices with holes, painted, to become an ornament** | | |
| **Clay with seasonal loose parts, to become a sculpture** | | |
| **Glue with seasonal loose parts or craft supplies, to become a collage** | | |

## Three principles to hold

**No model to copy**

**No adult fixing**

**The child can say "no"**

**1** **Which principle will be hardest for me, or my team, to hold? Why?**

# Start with a conversation

For children who choose to make a gift. The child leads every step. Your job is to ask, listen, and write their words.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Who is someone special you want to give something to?** | |
| **What's something you can make or do for them?** | |
| **What materials will you need for this?** | |

**Draw your plan**

**GIFT TAG: IN THE CHILD'S WORDS**

"This is a _____ for _____ because _____."

Made by: _____ Date: _____

## Stocking a gift studio

- [ ] Paper, blank cards, small canvases, boxes
- [ ] Clay, air-dry clay, salt dough
- [ ] Pinecones, sticks, orange slices
- [ ] Paint, watercolors, oil pastels, markers
- [ ] Fabric, yarn, ribbons, felt
- [ ] Tape, glue, scissors, wrapping supplies

# Plan a gathering

The holiday gift can be a gathering instead of an object. Choose one way to gather, then sketch your first plan.

| Way to gather | What it is | This one? |
|---|---|---|
| **Children's art gallery** | Matted prints, titles, artist statements, and panels | |
| **Tea, cocoa, or snack morning** | Children bake and serve; families stay, play, eat, and drink | |
| **Collaborative reveal** | A class mural or installation unveiled together | |
| **Family studio** | Families create alongside their children | |

### Children can...

- Bake simple recipes
- Curate and hang the gallery
- Design the invitations
- Set the space: tables, flowers, light
- Greet families, give tours, serve

### Families can bring...

- A favorite book from their traditions
- A family story, recipe, or tradition
- Their time! No performance needed.

| | |
|---|---|
| **Date and time** | |
| **Where** | |
| **What children will prepare** | |
| **What I'll ask families to bring** | |
| **Documentation to display** | |
| **Who can help** | |

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

PART 2 · PAUSE 2

# Where can the product shift in your room?

- [ ] Ephemeral art
- [ ] Seasonal experiences
- [ ] Gifts
- [ ] A gathering

**1** **Which shift feels most doable this month: ephemeral art, seasonal experiences, gifts, or a gathering?**

**2** **What do you already have, on your shelves or outside, that could become an invitation instead of a template?**

**3** **What's the first small step you'll take this week?**

PART 2 · WRAP-UP

# Making room, not making crafts

### Ephemeral art and seasonal experiences

Children arrange, explore, and rebuild with real materials. Nothing is glued down, and the photograph and the child's own words become the keepsake.

### Honest gifts

Gifts can still go home, as long as they truly come from the child. No model to copy, no adult fixing, and the child can always say "no."

### The gift can be a gathering

When children bake, curate, and host, families see their children's thinking and capability, not just a finished product.

**1** **Which invitation from Part 2 are you most excited to try?**

**2** **Which age-by-age idea surprised you, or felt most doable?**

**3** **What questions are you still holding?**

Coming up in Part 3: why process matters for the developing brain, scripts for families and coworkers, and a simple plan for the season.

3

PART 3

# BRINGING EVERYONE ALONG

**Bringing everyone along, and next steps**

In this section: **the research behind process**, how each age learns, why families want the craft, scripts for families and coworkers, and your plan for the season.

PART 3

# The big ideas

A one-page summary of Part 3 to come back to anytime.

### Learning needs real uncertainty

Children learn when what they expect and what happens don't match. A sample craft has the answer built in. There's nothing left to figure out.

### Learning needs intrinsic motivation

Autonomy, competence, and relatedness sustain motivation. When the point becomes the product, motivation moves outside the child.

### Learning needs self-directed goals

In a step-by-step craft, the adult does the thinking and the child just follows. Open-ended materials build executive function and divergent thinking.

### Learning needs the body and the mess

Young children learn concepts through their senses first. When we restrict mess, we restrict the input the brain needs.

### Lead with the child, not the craft

Families want the craft out of love, for a keepsake, as proof of learning, and from tradition. Validate the wish, then lead with something specific their child did.

### Curiosity, not judgment

Most of us learned crafts this way. No one is the villain. Invite, don't impose. Start small and let the results speak.

### Before December starts

Gather materials, plan your documentation, decide on your gift approach, send a family note, talk with your team, and give yourself grace.

### The child's way is enough

Stop, start, and protect. One invitation is a real start.

# Before we advocate, we have to understand

Process-driven, child-led art isn't a preference. It's how the developing brain builds knowledge. For each idea, write how you'd explain it to a family member or coworker in one sentence, in your own words.

| Learning needs... | What the research says | How I'd explain it in one sentence |
|---|---|---|
| **Real uncertainty** | *Cognitive disequilibrium (Piaget) and error correction. Direct instruction narrows exploration (Bonawitz et al., 2011). Curiosity boosts memory (Gruber et al., 2014).* | |
| **Intrinsic motivation** | *Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan). Overjustification effect (Lepper et al., 1973). Process focus builds a mastery mindset.* | |
| **Self-directed goals** | *Executive function predicts later achievement and wellbeing (Diamond, 2013). Open-ended materials build divergent thinking.* | |
| **The body and the mess** | *Embodied cognition and experience-dependent plasticity. Toddlers who touched and smeared more learned names better (Perry et al., 2014).* | |

**1** **Which research finding would most help the families or coworkers in your program understand this work? Why?**

# How each age learns

The age slides, side by side. Add what you see in your own children in the last column.

| Age | What it looks like | The why | The how | What I see in my group |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Infants (0–12 months)** | *Mouthing, grasping, squeezing, banging; watching light, color, and movement* | *Sensorimotor stage (Piaget); cause-and-effect learning; grasp develops from palmar toward pincer* | *Taste-safe, safe-sized materials; follow their gaze and narrate; let them repeat; no hand-over-hand prints* | |
| **Toddlers (1–3 years)** | *Scribbling, smearing, tearing, dumping; transporting materials; the same action again and again* | *Scribble stage (Lowenfeld); schemas (Athey); autonomy vs. shame, "me do it" (Erikson)* | *Big surfaces and chunky tools; describe actions instead of asking "What is it?"; plan for mess* | |
| **Preschool and K (3–6 years)** | *Naming drawings, planning, building; representing ideas, stories, and people; products emerge, and that's welcome* | *Pre-schematic stage (Lowenfeld); initiative vs. guilt (Erikson); zone of proximal development (Vygotsky)* | *Invite their ideas; offer techniques as tools for their plans; make time to revisit, revise, and document* | |

**1** **Which "how" do you already do well? Which one will you practice this week?**

# Why families want the craft

Lead with the child, not the craft. Every reason below comes from love, and tiny handprints really are precious.

| Reason | What it might sound like | What I can offer instead |
|---|---|---|
| **Love** | *"They're only little once."* | |
| **Keepsake** | *"I keep every handprint."* | |
| **Proof of learning** | *"What did they do today?"* | |
| **Tradition** | *"I made these when I was little." "That's what preschool does."* | |

**1** **Which families in my program care most about crafts? What do I know about why?**

**2** **What does each family most want to know about their child? How can I show them that?**

**3** **When do families tend to bring this up (pickup, conferences, holiday parties)? How can I get ahead of it?**

# Copy, paste, and make it yours

The two family pieces from the slides, ready to personalize.

## A note for your family newsletter

This holiday season, you may notice that our art looks a little different. Instead of identical crafts, your child will be exploring paint, clay, natural materials, and light in their own way, and creating when they choose to. Why? When children lead their own exploring and creating, they build fine and gross motor skills, creativity, problem-solving, and real pride in their work. Some days they'll bring something home, and some days the learning will stay in the experience. Either way, it's truly theirs. We'll share photos and your child's own words about their work. We can't wait to show you what they come up with.

**Make it yours: what will you add, change, or say in your own voice?**

## An at-home keepsake card

Handprint keepsake: made at home together. Handprints are a beautiful keepsake, and they're even more special when they're made at home, slowly, together. Try this: pick a calm moment. Let your child choose the color and squish the paint. Press, laugh, and try again if you want. Write the date and your child's age on the back. This can be an annual tradition you and your child enjoy together. The best part isn't the print. It's the memory of making it with you.

**I'll send it with:**

- ☐ Holiday newsletter
- ☐ Drop-off
- ☐ Family communication app
- ☐ A studio night I host

**Date I'll send both: _____**

# Family scripts in your own voice

Look back at the slide script for each one. Then write your own version, using a real child and a real moment. Specific beats general every time.

**WHEN YOU HEAR**

***"Why isn't my child bringing home crafts?"***

*Always lead with something specific their child did. That's what families remember.*

**MY VERSION, IN MY OWN WORDS**

**WHEN YOU HEAR**

***"But I really wanted a handprint keepsake this year. They're only little once."***

*Validate the wish first. You're redirecting where it happens, not dismissing it.*

**MY VERSION, IN MY OWN WORDS**

**WHEN YOU HEAR**

***"The other classroom sent home such cute crafts. Why isn't yours?"***

*Bring the focus to the child, here and now.*

**MY VERSION, IN MY OWN WORDS**

# Coworker scripts in your own voice

**Lead with curiosity, not judgment**
Most of us learned crafts this way. No one is the villain.

**Invite, don't impose**
"Want to try an invitation with me?" goes further than a lecture.

**Start small and show results**
One invitation, a few photos, a child's quote. Let it speak.

WHEN YOU HEAR

***"We do the reindeer every year. The families love it."***

*Acknowledge it, share what you're trying, and invite them to try one invitation alongside you.*

MY VERSION, IN MY OWN WORDS

WHEN YOU HEAR

***"The little ones can't do it on their own. They need us to help."***

*If it needs our hands to look right, it probably isn't designed for them.*

MY VERSION, IN MY OWN WORDS

WHEN YOU HEAR

***"They're just making a mess. We can't let them do whatever they want."***

*Agree on boundaries. Protect surfaces, offer manageable amounts, and set clear limits without shutting down the experience.*

MY VERSION, IN MY OWN WORDS

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

PART 3 · PAUSE 1

# Which conversation feels hardest?

Words you've practiced come much more easily when you're nervous.

1. **Which conversation are you most dreading? With whom?**

2. **Write your own version of that script, in your own voice.**

3. **Practice it out loud once. Really. How did it feel? What would you change?**

PART 3 · LOG

# Conversation practice log

Track your conversations with families and coworkers through the season. Notice what works, so you can do more of it.

| Date | With whom | What they said | What I said | How it went / next time |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

# Before December starts

Small and doable. Write your plan for each step and a date to have it done.

| Step | My plan | By when | Done |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Gather materials** | *Start collecting natural and recycled materials now* | | |
| **Plan your documentation** | *Charged device, sticky notes for quotes, photo permissions* | | |
| **Decide on your gift approach** | *Child-designed, photo, or a classroom/communal celebration* | | |
| **Send a family note** | *Before the holidays, so nothing is a surprise* | | |
| **Talk with your team** | *Invite one coworker to try an invitation with you* | | |
| **Give yourself grace** | *Change takes time. One invitation is a real start* | | |

## PAUSE AND REFLECT

PART 3 · PAUSE 2

# Your final reflection

Write it down. Put it somewhere you'll see it all season.

**1** **What will you stop doing this holiday season?**

**2** **What will you start?**

**3** **What will you protect for children, even when it's hard?**

# My commitment for the season

This season, I will step off the craft conveyor belt by _____

_____.

I will make room for the child's way by _____

_____.

I will bring others along by _____

_____.

When it gets hard, I will remember _____.

Signed _____ Date _____

## The child's way is enough.

**Turn off the craft conveyor belt.**

### Look back at your intention

Turn back to the first page. How has your thinking changed since you wrote it?

# Notes

# Certificate



CLICK ON THE LINK TO RECEIVE YOUR CERTIFICATE

CLICK HERE