

**Report on Inclusive Practices**

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**Reflection on Centre's Inclusive Practices**

During program the environment was set up with natural materials, neutral colours and open ended materials. The centre had a universal design for learning and all materials and spaces were set up with a barrier free design. The spaces were set up with large obstacle free spaces, there was ample free floor space for children to move around. The play materials were easily accessed by the children and large indoor play equipment was accessible with both stairs and ramps. All of the room sinks were outfitted with removable stairs to accommodate the children in the independent task of hand washing and snack clean up. One child received ABA therapy and it happened, in program, in a very natural and inclusive way. The therapist moved with the child through the program's daily flow and provided the therapy during natural and child guided activities. The therapist was both indoor and outdoor with the child as they went through the flow of the day. The educators engaged in authentic conversations with children during indoor and outdoor play.

During a sunscreen application, the educator was receptive to the children's conversation and engaged with natural questions about the children's home experiences. The interaction was positive and the educator was respectful and honoured the child's sharing. During this same sunscreen application a child noticed that there was a band aid on another child's body. The child asked if they had a "Boo boo"? And said "Awww, you got a boo boo? You okay?". The other child showed her "boo boo" and the educator used this opportunity to engage in a conversation with the children about sensitivity to "owies" and made natural and accepting language and conversations with the children around this.

The educators made great attempts to greet each child, upon entrance to the program. The children were free to explore the room and engage with any of the materials that were available. The children and educators moved from indoor to outdoor environments in a free flow way, with the educators calling children who wanted to go out, in a small group fashion. The three educators, I observed, took turns with small groups, having access to the indoor environment separately for a small group activity that provided calm and engaging interactions between the child/child and adult/child.

During one of these interactions the educator was observed supporting the children in a creative play dough experience. The educator was sitting with the children at the table and exploring the play dough and tools alongside the children. The educator was sharing observations and experiences during the play with the children and allowing the children to share their own observations and experiences with the play. The educator was both responsive and receptive, engaging with the children as another learner and not as a teacher. The educator allowed the children to explore the play dough in an authentic and organic way and did not model or create a prescribed way of playing with the playdough. The educator shared their own discoveries and play experience with the children in a natural way that supported the children's own personal exploration of the play dough. This was a great experience to see and a very supportive play that was mindful of meeting children where they are at and encouraging engagement in a natural and child centred way.

During an outdoor experience the children noticed a small sapling on the playground. Three children had a conversation about the "baby tree" and discussed how it was important to find a way to protect the tree so it was not hurt. The children had been discovering and experiencing plants and the life cycle of plants through many documented gardening experiences and the installment of raised plant beds in the outdoor space. While one child

was looking for something to put over the tree and keep it safe, another child plucked out the sapling and tried to re plant it into the raised garden. The three children surrounded this space and discussed the different ideas around keeping the baby tree safe. The children shared their knowledge and it was connected to the emotional literacy and the need to care for others in the protection of the tree.

### **Enhancements**

The centre had great use of documentation, each room had their own photo diaries available on a shelf outside the entrance to the rooms. Each child had their own photo journal available in a basket for parents to see. Using some of these photo journals for the children to explore and connect with could help them to see their learning and engage and share with past experiences, connecting them to current experiences. The educators could use this documentation to begin conversations with the children about how they can use their own knowledge and experiences to support the learning and growth of their peers in the classroom.

There was no real language displayed in the rooms besides the photo documentation that was at adult level. There was a family board in each room and one room used the word “Ohana” instead of the english word “family”, although this is a use of language to support inclusive language practices it was the only visual clue to support this idea. The educators all spoke in english and there was very little engagement to support inclusive practice around family differences, cultures, language or traditions. The inclusive practice of these family differences seemed to be exempt from the classroom learning environment. The use of documentation at child level and pictures with simple words in other languages, customs and cultures could be

used to support this. There was little to support cultural and language differences and similarities with music and movement, but the use of songs with actions was used to include a child with limited verbal and oral language abilities. The songs were all familiar English children songs, but the child with limited language ability was able to happily engage in the music and movement activity in the use of the action songs. You could see the excitement and enjoyment of the child, during this activity, through their face and enthusiastic actions. The children were less engaged when the iPad was used to play the songs and the educator did the actions, when the educator turned off the iPad and sat to sing the song and present the actions the majority of the children were engaging in the active movement of the song. The use of action songs and songs and stories in different languages could also support this inclusive practice. Having tools and toys available from around the world or having a specific time of the day to share home customs will support this exploration into differences and similarities and supporting and including all persons and families.

There was one child level display of pictures of the children's faces displaying different emotions. There were dollhouse structures and cradles in the spaces, but no dolls or manipulatives to support imaginative play with these tools. It is well documented that the use of such materials in play supports a child's growth and understanding of their emotional identity, and to explore and consolidate the relationships they see in the world. The use of dolls in the cradle will help to support the development of empathy and build on children's intrinsic desire to imitate their family experiences and what they see in the world around them. If commercial dolls are not something the centre wants due to the centre philosophy, there are many natural cloth dolls and small wooden peg people that can be included in the environment to support this play. The educators and children could even explore making their own dolls and play figures. These materials also help to include children with mobility

issues by being able to engage in play with others and removing the mobility barrier by allowing for similar small world play that can be supported on a table top, giving all children a platform to play out their understanding of the world around them and notice the differences and similarities in all.

The rooms were set up with very little soft surfaces. There were small carpeted spaces and two large pillows in the classrooms. Although the rooms were all designed in a natural and neutral way, there was little to support sound absorption. This could be very difficult for a child with sensory processing issues. Moving from indoor to outdoor spaces left me with an unsettling and deafening quiet occurring in the outdoor space. This could be very challenging for children. Including different natural materials to support sound absorption would be helpful in eliminating the echoes of the sounds off the floors, walls and wooden furniture. Incorporating some cork furniture, tiles, wall coverings or neutral foam pieces could help with this issue.

### **Using the Index**

The index was a useful guide and provided a focus to support purposeful observations and questions for the centre and educators. The index and the questions provided were a little specific in the ideas and could be difficult to see or experience in a short time. It was difficult to see some of the cultural play supports during the visits, as the children don't naturally explore these differences or notice them in a centre that does not specifically speak to these differences daily. Children explore and play with little awareness of the differences between them, they notice mostly the similarities and engage in mutually enjoyable play. Unless there are difficulties with communication or very different clothing or foods, children do not notice these differences unless adults point them out or make them very specific points of interest.

This can be difficult to do in authentic child interest play. The specific examples of questioning in the “Activities to encourage the participation of all children”,(Booth & Ainscow, 2011), section of the index was helpful in forming a lens of the child and what they bring to play to observe through. This was specific to the emotional literacy questions and drawing on what the children can bring to the inclusive environment based on their own family, language, customs, traditions and understanding through play. This is something I might not have particularly paid attention to, naturally, when observing an inclusive setting. These are also subtle differences to notice in play, but are huge ideas when we look at acceptance and inclusion. I found the index to be a helpful tool in observing inclusivity in a centre in a holistic, natural and supportive way. I would use this tool again when evaluating my practice or the practice of other spaces and environments. This brought a lot of attention to the educator’s role in supporting inclusion in an authentic, teachable moment sort of way. It was less teaching to children and more supporting ideas during play with organic interactions that encourage development and understanding in young children.

## References

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