

The Wemagination Curriculum

Got Play?

“From a biological evolutionary perspective, play is nature’s means of ensuring that young mammals, including young human beings, acquire the skills that they need to acquire to develop successfully into adulthood.” – Peter Grey

Otherwise known as the original PlayO (play experience), this session is comprised of four parts – returning to the memories of your own play as a child, experiencing solo play, participating in group play, and deep reflection.

This is an important introductory course for those who have not trained at Wemagination previously. It will also include preliminary exposure to open ended materials and how they interface with the Theory of Loose Parts. In addition, this is a welcome reprieve from your normal workspaces and can bridge connections between oneself and others.

Think Magnificent

“Play’s intrinsic qualities include spontaneity of the spirit, thinking deeply, feeling intensely and building a trust in one’s intuitive self.” – Walter Drew

In a rush for academic success, mastery of technology, making money and getting ahead, we sometimes forget the magic of being alive. A sadness in our culture is that we have lost sight of the enormous, creative, transformative power of play. We have trivialized it as something we outgrow as we transition from childhood into adulthood. If play is just for fun and serves no useful purpose, why is it so widespread in nature? If it is a non-productive activity (a waste of energy), why has it not been eliminated by the evolutionary process that only rewards characteristics that give an organism a competitive advantage?

This session is a deeper exploration of the anatomy and assets of an intentional play practice. Far from an arbitrary waste of time, play releases endorphins, reduces stress, improves brain functionality and memory, stimulates growth of the cerebral cortex, keeps us feeling young and energetic and even builds our resistance to disease. You can change some of the circuitry in your brain, including some of the functions in your limbic (emotional) systems, and this can help a great deal in terms of your decreasing negative perceptions. Witnessing the progression of your thoughts and feelings as you play can widen your understanding of your emotional responses and learning processes and will deepen your understanding and communication with young learners.

Red Wool Gives You Wings

“In any environment, both the degree of inventiveness and creativity and the possibility of discovery, are directly proportional to the number and kind of variables in it.” –Simon Nicholson

This session is a deep dive into loose parts, and the possibilities therein to grow, realize problem-solving potential, and foster self-scaffolding. We will discuss what is beautiful to you and why. By using open ended questions that pertain to the objects we love, we can invigorate learning. It’s proven that being surrounded by inspiring things has a positive effect on our mood and therefore on our attitude to life. The beauty of the things we have around us every day can determine the way we perceive the quality of our lives.

We will also look at anthropomorphism, which is the designation of human traits, emotions, or intentions to non-human entities. Anthropomorphism has ancient roots. From the beginning of human existence, people used anthropomorphism in storytelling.

Betcha You Can’t Play With Just One

“Our surroundings have a profound effect on cognition and emotion, but social science has largely overlooked those factors.” -Gary W. Evans

High-quality instructional materials drive student learning outcomes. In addition, when there is ‘enough’ to play with, disruptive behavior can be greatly reduced. During this session, we will look at the path to successful implementation of environmental strategies (including environmental psychology research findings) which will aid in effectively mitigating behavioral challenges. The idea is that the environment is a vital part of the curriculum, and that it can be as important as the words you use.

The effects of the physical environment—noise level, temperature, overcrowding and light are as significant for children’s development as psychosocial characteristics such as relationships with parents and peers. Indeed, the physical environment profoundly influences developmental outcomes including academic achievement and cognitive, social and emotional development.

We will also be thinking of employing a ‘curiosity mindset’ when designing and preparing the learning or therapeutic space. When people approach life in a more curious way, as opposed to a goal-focused, urgent mindset, it engages areas of the brain linked to broader attention spans, allowing us to digest different and useful information we were not necessarily seeking. It is why a curiosity mindset is so supportive of behavioral change.

Just Glue It

“We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.” -John Berger

With traditional loose parts play, we do not use glue or tape. However, you can create engaging and unique loose parts out of other parts. These are “transfigured loose parts.” By carefully curating objects, we can open up opportunities for visualizing meaning and seeing complex ideas as something tangible or relatable. During this training we will also explore the possibilities within ice, clouds, fingers, and shaving cream.

In a word, objects – and the stories behind them – are fascinating. Objects help us make connections to history, art and culture and are relatable to all ages. Objects are powerful tools in teaching intellectual skills, including observation, analysis, inference and critical thinking.

Teaching with objects can enhance your strategies in a variety of ways. These materials can engage students who don’t always respond to written materials; they can be used to reinforce new ideas; they can connect students with their own environment and culture, as well as with other cultures. Teaching with objects creates a direct, sensory connection between learners and their subjects that results in new levels of interest and attention. Teaching with objects also creates students with higher levels of visual literacy.

What Happens Here, Displays Here

“When we are looking at how our environments function, do we begin with observing the movement patterns of the children within the spaces? Where do they go? How long do they stay? Are there spaces that they avoid? Are there spaces that seem to experience more conflict? Do we think about the messages that the children are giving us in the ways they move their bodies and where they take them? Do we document such movement? What would we learn that we don’t know now, if we did?” -Daniela Lanzi

A central feature of the Reggio Emilia approach is extensive documentation through observation, reflection, and analysis by teachers of children’s development and behavior. Documentation makes children’s learning discernable and encourages them be confident that they are central to their own learning. During this training we will find fun ways of documenting children’s learning processes, because it can easily feel more like a daunting and time-consuming task.

Pedagogical documentation is a research story, built upon inquiry and holds in it the idea of not presuming to know, and of asking how the learning occurs, rather than assuming—as in transmission models of learning—that learning occurred because teaching occurred. With standardized curriculum, once teaching has occurred, there is a tendency to assume that

learning may be tested. Thus, pedagogical documentation is a counteragent to the positioning of the teacher as all-knowing judge of learning.

The outcomes you will examine in this session encompass the impact of reflection on the observation, documentation and scaffolding process as a whole. We will find effective tools for improving your capacity as an educator, practitioner, or administrator.

A Bond Is Forever

“If everyone is moving forward together, then success takes care of itself.” -Henry Ford

Those who play together, stay together. Would you like to reduce turnover and have more engaged dialog with your colleagues? If so, this is the session for your team. Individual freedom (expressing self) while respecting community responsibility (**group** agreement) is our goal with teambuilding through play.

Removing a team from their normal work environment is good for their creativity and helps them to develop new ideas. This improvisation training provides a way for people of different cultures, with different personalities and life experiences to work together collaboratively to achieve productive outcomes. It is a way for individuals to participate fully and authentically in solving interpersonal issues. It is a path to innovation and inspiration and personal commitment.

At work, politeness usually takes precedence, which means that conflicts are repressed, making them bigger than necessary. The methods we will use can make it possible to better anchor difficult conversations and tackle uncomfortable situations. In a safe and playful way, you can find new ways of celebrating your team’s distinctive characteristics.

Think Outside the Fun

“Resilience refers to the capacity of a dynamic system to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten the viability, the function, or the development of that system.”
-Ann Masten

Our youngest citizens and their families commonly experience instability due to multiple factors. For children and families, these forces translate into worry and uncertainty in their day-to-day lives. These stressors, which are conceptualized as environmental chaos, confer strain on families and undermine healthy functioning. Numerous studies have identified links between environmental chaos and children’s physical, socio-emotional, spiritual, and cognitive well-being.

Although there is a substantial body of literature linking chaotic experiences to negative outcomes for children, the current understanding at Wemagination is that playing and reflecting builds our capacity to combat toxic stress. It is a direct antidote for upset. This training is based on the belief that playing in a safe and secure environment supports a more pliable and viable way to interpret our emotions. Through experimenting with loose parts, individuals can begin to process their distress or trauma in a way that allows them to find healing.

Have Grit Your Way

“Research indicates that the ability to be gritty—to stick with things that are important to you and bounce back from failure—is an essential component of success independent of and beyond what talent and intelligence contribute. Grit is passion and perseverance for long-term and meaningful goals.” – Angela Duckworth

What’s your accelerant? How do you personally face obstacles? How do you stay committed to a task that may be difficult or boring? What are the characteristics that foster perseverance?

When I surveyed workshop participants about what they wanted help with the most, two things rose straight to the top of the pile—balancing all the many aspects of a complicated and busy life and getting out of their own way. We all have beliefs with negative narratives which are behind the parts of our lives where we feel stuck. Part of the reason we get in our own way is that we were probably taught one way of going about things—which is to think harder and work harder. We spend years in school learning how to be logical, but we have not studied self-compassion. It's not that we can't force ourselves to grit our teeth and push through another four hours of work. It's not that we don't know what we should be doing, or how we could better apply ourselves. Self-sabotage happens in small, almost undetectable moments.

It is brain-appropriate to have self-defeating thoughts, or spend time with people who demotivate us, or give up after a temporary setback. With the use of functional MRIs, brain scientists have learned that the negative experiences we have stick with us far more than the positive ones do. The good news is that by upping your grit quotient in relation to happiness achievement is very do-able, and the dosage and frequency are quite low. By attending this session, you will come away with easy-to-use tools to help you get there.

Expect Less, Play More

“My dear, In the midst of hate, I found there was, within me, an invincible love. In the midst of tears, I found there was, within me, an invincible smile. In the midst of chaos, I found there was, within me, an invincible calm.” - Albert Camus

This session is dedicated to individual acts of repair. Nobody teaches us how to unfold, but this is a needed skill for reshaping how we see ourselves. In a world full of constant analysis, comparisons and judgements, we forget to truly connect to ourselves. Often, we are zoomed in so narrowly by the problem at hand, we lose the ability to back up and re-set. You will be invited to spend time in a peaceful realm where you can decompress.

Our examination here will include writing exercises that will help us see the things that are troubling to us through new lenses. The value of writing by hand has phased out of our awareness, yet when we read (or listen to something) and then write down key takeaways by hand (not by typing), it engages motor circuits in ways that deeply embed information to memory - so that we can keep what we have learned available to our conscious minds.