

It is important for a young child's development to play and to use their imaginations. More and more children are spending time with electronic devices, and spending time indoors. Over the past few years we have noticed in our class a shift towards more students having difficulty knowing how to play or how to play imaginatively without adult intervention. That is one of the reasons why we started learning and exploring with loose parts materials. Last year we first started using the loose parts materials in the classroom and then expanded it by using some materials outdoors. Using these materials outdoors became a bit difficult because there was no area that encouraged the use of these materials, nor an area to store the materials. We also did not have a lot of loose parts materials specific for the outdoors that would promote imaginative play. Last year, with the support of our parents, we created a few areas for the K4 students that would focus on imaginative play and where we would be able to provide them with opportunities to use loose parts. In this PDIG project, our goals were to expand on the areas that we created previously, create new structures/areas and collect appropriate outdoor loose part materials. We also wanted to show the staff that these areas would help keep the younger ones out of the older ones' areas; which created conflict during recess. We were also hoping that these areas would help with parents' insecurities on their child feeling intimidated by the older kids.

* Please see the attached document which shows the areas we created last year, the posters we were able to accomplish this year as well as photos of the areas/projects we had anticipated to do in this PDIG. I have also attached a section of the slideshow we created for our staff to get them on board with our project.

Since this project involved some organization, fundraising, building structures, coordinating with other CLC partners and growing plants, we saved a bunch of our PDIG days for in the Spring. My partner and I used our first 6 days on preparing for the Spring. First, we applied for additional grants to try and receive funds for the project and we also organized a school wide spaghetti supper fundraiser. It was amazing to see the staff, students, local girl guides and community members come together to support our project. We surpassed our goal and made a profit of just over 3000\$. One of our PDIG days was spent on visiting Franklin Elementary and learning about their outdoor play area and how they have incorporated loose part materials. We wanted to use their expertise to help us figure out the best projects and materials to use in our areas. The last few days were spent on figuring out what new materials we were going to add and what areas we wanted to expand on. We then put out an add on the school's facebook page to see if there were possible donations to be made from the parents. From there we began purchasing a few materials that we would need for the Spring. We created two signs that went up to teach the students about the rules and responsibilities of our new areas and materials. Also, since we had already a few loose parts materials we decided to slowly introduce them in the winter. It was great to see students of all ages playing with the materials and creating cakes and pies out of snow. This introduction allowed us to solve an issue with taking out and putting away the materials at recess. We needed a different approach than the one we saw at Franklin since our number of students is greater than theirs. We were

able to acquire the help from our learning center; taking on the responsibility of organizing the materials for the students at recess. We even modified the bell schedule to have a “warning” clean up bell 5 minutes before the end of recess, so no time is wasted. We felt very confident and excited everything was planned and organized for the Spring. Then the pandemic hit!

We unfortunately have not been able to complete our project due to the pandemic. Through this project we have learned that no matter how prepared you think you are, you can never be prepared for everything. We have not been able to fully gain the observations and obtain the results that we wanted from this project. We have not even been able to put our areas together. It is too bad that the last 6 days were the ones where we would be putting our materials and areas together. Due to the amount of prep we were able to do in the Fall we can however confidently say we partially completed it. Due to the pandemic there were several reasons why our project could not be completed as anticipated. For one reason, I have not been physically present at school; working from home. Also, because of the physical distancing measures, my partner and I could not create the areas while maintaining a safe distance. In the end, even if we managed to create the areas on our own time, due to the current restrictions at school, the students would not be allowed to use the areas or the materials. We really hope to be given the opportunity in the future to complete this project the way we intended.

Even with the partial completion of this project, I still have gained a deeper knowledge of how young kids developed and learn. I have seen first hand how loose parts encourage the students to use their imaginations and how amazing it is to see them see things in a different way. I really feel more than ever that being outdoors and playing with open-ended objects is beneficial to not only the K4 students but students of every age. With this gained experience, my goals for the future would have to include creating a space outdoors where I could do some of my lessons. I will continue to use loose parts in the classroom as well as outdoors. My partner and I will go ahead in the future with our projects that we planned for this year even if it takes more time.

My partner and I were able to gain expertise from the teachers at Franklin Elementary. We saw some of their outdoor designs and heard about what works and what does not. We were super motivated seeing a route we could explore further. We took some of their elements and modified them to fit our play areas and even came up with some different ideas. In the future, we plan to contact Howick Elementary who also has an imaginative play area and see if we could share info and ideas. We also have intentions on sharing materials with other schools, so they can add similar elements to their areas. We have already notice duplicates of many donated items that we would gladly share. On one of our last PDIGS, the K4 teachers in our school board got together and created a K4 private facebook group where we could share stories and materials. Our plan is to create a discussion on our group page about loose parts and share with them about our project; hopefully getting some interests in coming to visit our play areas. We have also planned to create an up to date slide show for the staff so they are able to see what stage we are in the project. In addition, once we finally complete our areas,

we will be contacting our local newspaper “the Gleaner”, to help us write an article about our outdoor, imaginative project. It would be a great way to promote our school.

This project was first envisioned for the younger students. Parents were commenting that the younger kids were feeling intimidated by the older students and we thought that designated play areas would be a solution. However, it was quickly realized that the whole school needed this type of play and were benefitting from the initiative. It was rewarding to see all ages interacting, sharing and playing together with minimal conflict. We can only assume that by adding our new areas in the future, we will continue to see the benefits for everyone.

From what we have accomplished so far, we are really encouraged by the tremendous support from the community, staff and parents. We are excited to get this project completed hopefully in the next school year.