

When introducing new units, think beyond the crafts. A greater challenge is try to ditch the crafts all together. Let's dig deeper. The goal is evoke curiosity, engagement, wonder, and exploration. Document their play, aka learning, and build upon that. Display their experiences on bulletin boards so everyone, including the children, can reflect on them. For older children, ask them what they know about the subject. What do they wonder about the subject? How can you, as a class, research and discover together?

Instead of This

Focusing on close-ended, teacher driven crafts that we consider "cute."



Try This

Focus on thematic play scenarios / provocations you can set up for the children to explore. Authentic learning happens through hands-on sensory-rich experiences, not by semi-creating a "cute" product. Consider: How can you incorporate lights, shadows, different textures, shades of colors, different states of water, natural/seasonal materials, etc.?





Developmentally Appropriate Experiences for Toddlers

Toddlers learn best through hands-on, sensory rich experiences. Instead of focusing on a craft they can't independently do, focus on providing open-ended, sensory-rich experiences that will keep them engaged, in which they're naturally expand upon all domains of development.

Learning happens through the *process*! These scenarios spark cause-and-effect, trial-and-error, construction, deconstruction, creative and scientific thinking, discovery, imagination, focus, attention, self-autonomy, decision-making, collaboration, sharing space and materials, communication, gross and fine motor skills, and so much more!

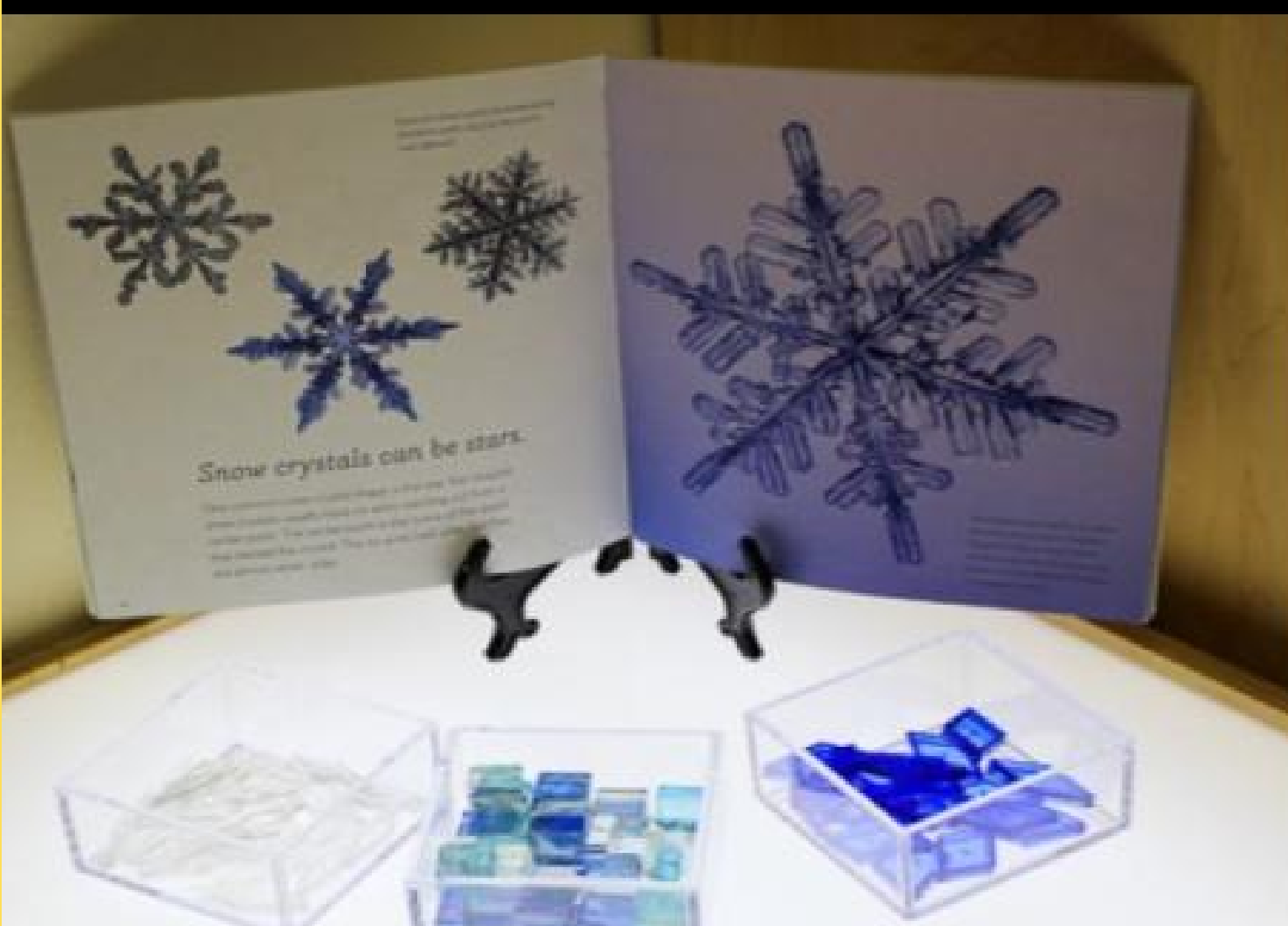




Developmentally Appropriate Experiences for Preschoolers

Preschoolers may now have the cognitive and fine motor skills to create concrete/recognizable images. When we offer close-ended crafts, we take away the thinking, planning, and adjusting process. You can present real life images and welcome them to figure out how they can replicate based upon prior knowledge, their observations, and open-ended materials at hand. This is thinking and learning!

Continue to provide children with small world play provocations to promote greater imaginary and social play. You can now provide a greater assortment of open-ended materials that are not a choking hazard or are less overwhelming to work with.



Meaningful Art (Not Crafts)

Instead of This

Close-ended, creativity killing crafts, with predictable outcomes



- Teacher cuts all parts of the penguin's body, including shape, feet, eyes, & beaks
- Child has to tediously paste cotton balls within the lines.
- Teacher directs where the eyes and beak should go.
- This experience is close-ended, teacher-driven, & limiting to all domains.

Remember, if you have to do more work than the children, it's not developmentally appropriate. Children do not learn of benefit from you doing more work than them. It's not about the product, but rather the *process of learning*.

Try This

Open-ended art provocations with unpredictable outcomes

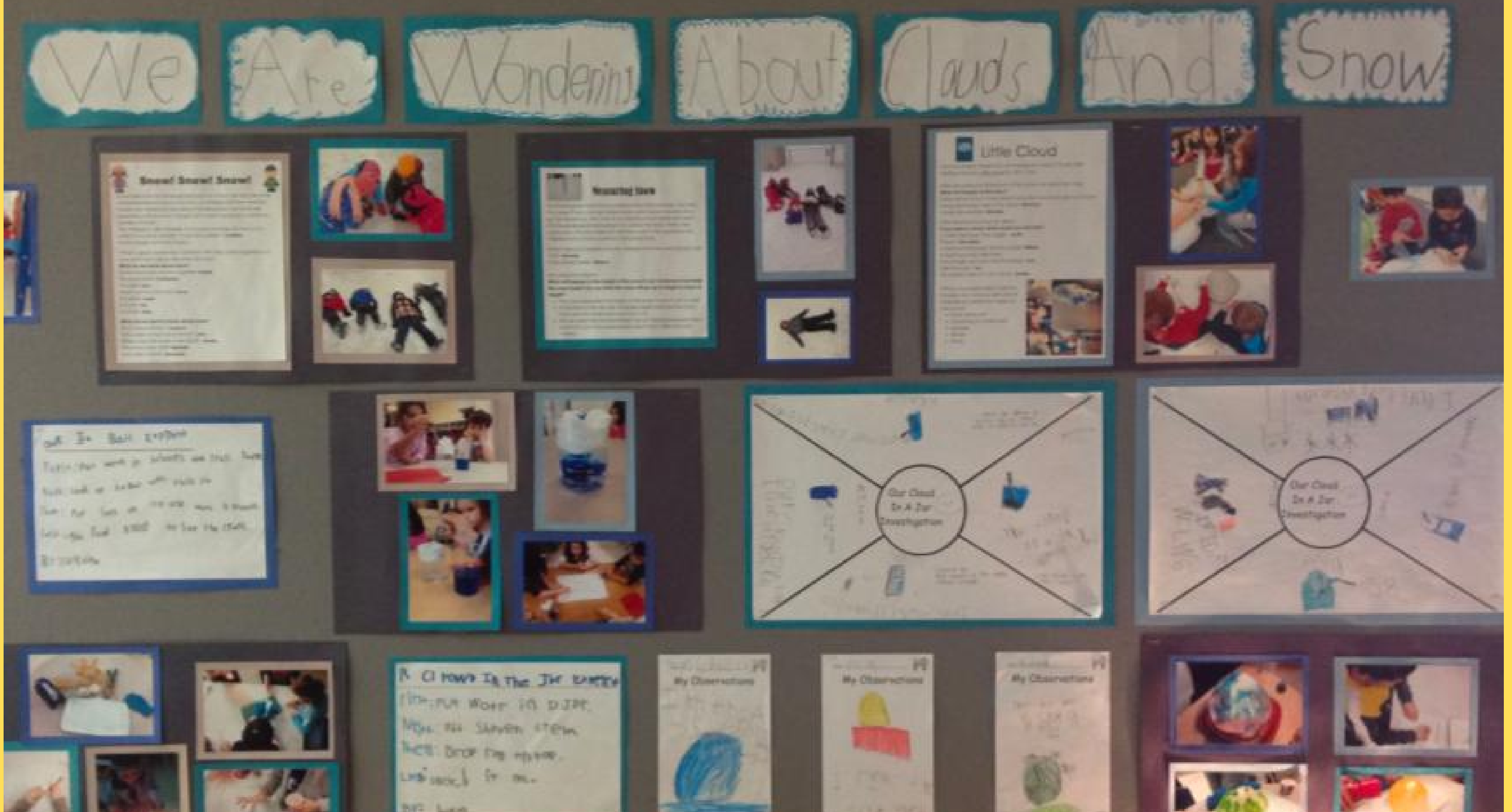


- Child is invited to explore the paints in their own way, while having a real-life image of penguins to potentially guide their experience.
- Open-ended art experiences do not have a predictable outcome and meets various learners where they're at.
- For the child who may be struggling a bit with fine motor development, they can freely practice mark making, color mixing, while freely working with a thin paintbrush for an unlimited amount of time - since there's no concrete end product in mind.
- For the child who may be advanced with their fine motor skills, they may be inclined to challenge themselves and try to replicate the real image of a penguin, or show you something completely different and unique.
- Because teachers are not directing and/or modeling what children should make, the children have to **figure out and experiment** with concepts of shape, size, scale, proximity, etc. **This is the process of learning.**

Instead of This: Bulletin Boards with a "cute" line and teacher's design . . .



Try This: Bulletin Boards that reflect the children's experiences, comments, questions, investigations, & learning process.



Instead of This

Planning an end to a unit, prematurely, then jumping to a completely new and random theme...

Try This

- Document the children's interest and experiences to guide further project planning.
 - Are they really interested in ice? Perhaps you all journey down a water investigation.
 - Were the Polar Bears of interest? Perhaps you look more at polar bears, before looking at and comparing and contrasting other bears from around the world, along with corresponding environments, lifestyles, etc. This can go on for months and months!
- Don't shut down an interest because the month is up. You may be taking the kids away from something of authentic interest and pulling them towards something they could care less about.
- Any investigation has the potential to evolve and take new directions if you give the process the right time and attention.
- Let's focus on quality experiences, not quantity of content they won't or can't internalize.

Don't feel confined to traditional practices. Just because it's been done a million times this way, doesn't mean there isn't room for improvement!

Don't feel like you have to stick to certain themes because it's a certain time of year.

Consider what's developmentally appropriate, relative, and interesting to children. For example, what does a handprint turkey have to do with a cooked and carved bird they may or may not eat/see on thanksgiving? We may make these connections as adults, but young children do not see it this way.



Children's possible and authentic experience with turkey on Thanksgiving - if they even eat turkey on this day.



How we represent it at school. Do young children even care about turkeys?

Research Emergent Curriculum & the Reggio Emilia Philosophy to take your early learning experiences to the next level. Happy learning & growing!