

Mini story: Hidden Patterns of Study in Play

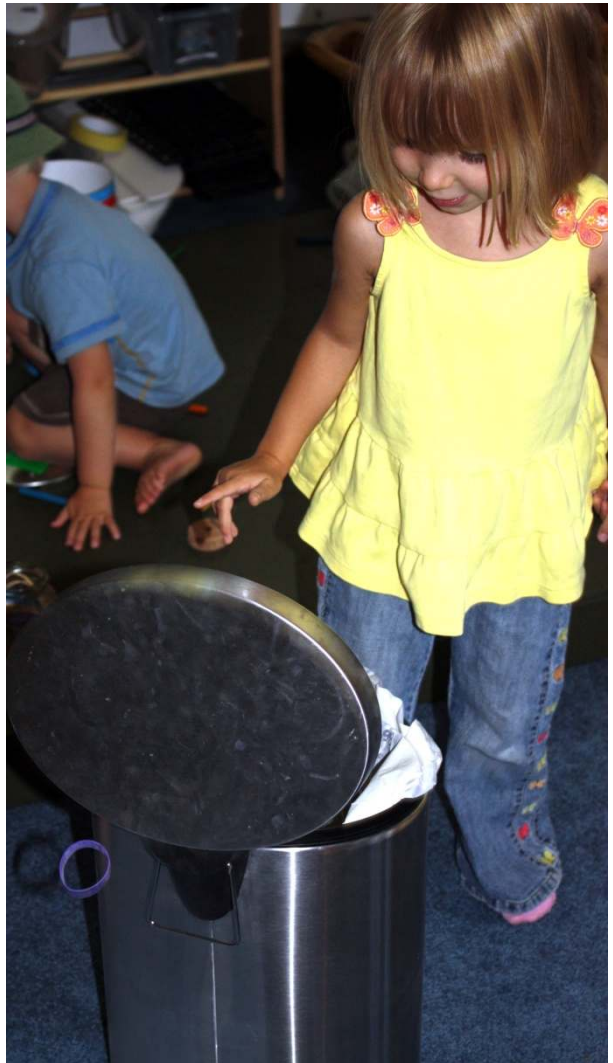
Sometimes children's interests are difficult to pinpoint, and seeing patterns between their actions that highlight their topic of study can be challenging. Since the beginning of school (and probably well before then), Dylan has been exploring how objects and liquids move through space. He has been doing this mostly without having specific activities set up for this purpose. He throws balls, pompoms, rocks and dirt, but his explorations are more complex than this.



Above, Dylan is unsatisfied with exploring glue simply while sitting at the table. He has his mother, Kirsten, lift him up so that he can see the glue move further through the air from a greater height. Similarly, when given the opportunity to paint with a brush, he finds was to use the brush as a tool to propel liquid (either paint or water) as far as possible.

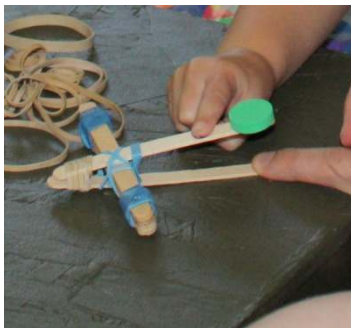
How can we honor and support his research?...

Sometimes children's self-initiated research can be mistaken for misbehavior. For many days now, as part of his research into how objects move through space, Dylan has been experimenting with placing objects on top of the garbage can in the classroom and then pressing the pedal on the can to make the lid fly open and thereby launch the objects (demonstrated to the right by Maya and a purple rubber band). Teacher Emily has been quietly observing this activity and considering the significance it holds for Dylan. When she shared this observation with Kirsten, Kirsten was moved by the respect Dylan is being shown when adults – rather than reacting and judging too quickly – pause, step back and try to understand what is meant by his actions and how best to support him.



“At other schools, he would get in trouble for doing this. Even at home, I would probably tell him to stop, but here you try to figure out how to extend the possibilities for him.”

Emily invited engineer Jay to help build a catapult that Dylan could use to continue his inquiries into how objects move through space.



Jay's craft stick catapult held together better than the Tinker Toy catapult Emily built. It worked great for launching foam shapes through the air.

Dylan was so excited, both by the new opportunities for launches and by having Jay visit, he needed some help to calm his body down. After refocusing, he came up with even more possibilities for moving objects through space, shown to the right.



