

w,©,w! newsletter #1



Cover image: a recent children activity trials with some play objects.

April 2016

Why, O, Why! (w,o,w!) is a space for design, research, and retail of products focusing on encouraging creativity and imagination in children. We develop play-objects, publications, activities, and workshops to create and facilitate meaningful interactions and play experiences for children.

w,o,w! newsletter puts together news, ideas, and references from our day-to-day practice and observations.

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Hello!

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Thank you for picking this up!

Why, O, Why! (w,o,w!) started out from a personal interest (with encouragement from my husband) and desire to create meaningful and quality products for children, after becoming a first-time parent in 2014.

With my time and energy stretched between bringing up Elias, managing Pupilpeople (Pp.) and a few other self-initiated projects concurrently, the inertia was huge to start something totally new, but this self-indulgent attempt is made possible with the support from people around us — our designers, friends and families — who so readily believe in our vision and passion.

With our backgrounds as designers (graphic and industrial), we hope to create products that develop curiosity and imagination in children, at the same time allowing for meaningful interactions between parents (including caregivers, and early childhood educators) and children.

In this little zine, we want to share some of the insights we have gathered through our research about play and education, as well as little observations and conversations we have held with people we interacted with.

We hope you enjoy this little something that we have put together.

Nicole Ong

Happenings: workshops & developments

Having gained initial funding support from DesignSingapore, we have embarked on an intensive process to research, design and develop play objects aimed at encouraging open-ended play. We believe that play should facilitate interaction between parent and child, as well as between children. We also believe that curiosity and imagination will eventually lead to discovery and learning.

After finalising one of our designs (OddBlocks) a few months ago, we have gone through a few rounds of prototyping, and trying them out in informal play sessions with children. Because of the chosen material (cork)—which appeals to us in many ways—we are now working to produce them with an established manufacturer in Europe.

We hope for this to be equally relevant in both home and educational environments, for casual play/discovery and as tools for learning. In line with this aim, we have recently conducted



1. A trial play session: introducing OddBlocks to some children we know
2. Discussion on the technical requirements for production of OddBlocks
3. We were glad to have met Karl Toomey from INT works (UK) to understand more about their work, as well as to introduce them our initiative



4. We conducted a parent and child workshop 'Discover Shapes and Forms through Play' with members of the public in March 2016, a partner event of Singapore Design Week 2016.
5. Close-up of one of the activities during 'Discover Shapes and Forms through Play'.

our first workshop, 'Discover Shapes and Forms through Play', which was a partner event of the Singapore Design Week. Groups of parents and children participated in a series of free- and guided-play activities, of which most encouraged exploration into shapes and forms through interaction with the unconventional geometries of OddBlocks.

Facilitating this first workshop has allowed us to gain experiences and insights. Together with advice from early childhood educators and further research, the team is currently designing the next workshops for preschoolers, which will contain a series of sessions that contain similar themes and objectives, most likely starting near mid 2016. There will be sessions catered for ages 3 to 4, and ages 5 to 6.

Join the mailing list on our website to receive more updates on this!



“In essence, play could be viewed in its broadest sense as describing almost all the activities that young children engage in. This [...] suggests that there is no standard definition for play, and that most of the behaviours and activities young children engage in can be termed as play [...].”

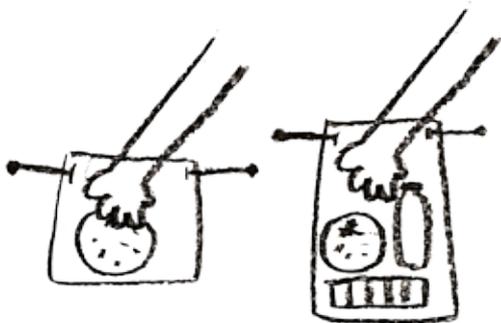
Marilyn Fleer, 'A Cultural-Historical Perspective on Play: Play as a Leading Activity Across Cultural Communities', in *Play and Learning in Early Childhood Settings*, ed. by Marilyn Fleer and Ingrid Pramling-Samuelsson (Springer, 2009), pp. 1-18 (p. 2).

“Playful learning typically involves objects with which children play to learn. Children learning shapes, for example, handle objects of different forms, perhaps tracing the forms with their fingers in addition to seeing them. In this way, it embodies cognition.”

Angeline S. Lillard, 'Playful Learning and Montessori Education', *American Journal of Play*, vol. 5 no. 2 (2013) <http://www.journalofplay.org/sites/www.journalofplay.org/files/pdf-articles/5-2-article-play-learning-and-montessori-education_0.pdf> [accessed 9 April 2016] (p. 163).

Feeling Objects

This activity allows children to discover the qualities of objects (shapes, forms, textures) through their sense of touch and to communicate their experiences using descriptive words.



Instructions:

1. Put an object in a bag A (e.g. orange), put the same object in bag B along with two other objects (e.g. apple, orange, peach)
2. Let the child feel the object in bag A.
3. Allow for the child to describe the object in their own ways, with guiding questions from parents.
4. Then, let the same child feel the objects in bag B and identify the one he/she felt in bag A.

Notes and variations:

- To begin, the forms of the objects placed in bag B can be very different from each other, and therefore easier to identify. As it progresses, parents can replace the objects in bag B with objects that are increasingly similar (e.g. the examples mentioned in the instructions)
- On top of encouraging the child to describe what they feel in bag A, parents can also ask them to represent it in drawing (making marks of its texture, softness/hardness, etc.). They can use guiding questions (e.g. asking about its shape, size, form) to encourage their child to be active in discussion while engaging with their sense of touch.
- Instead of placing two identical objects in both bag A and B, parents can replace them with different but similar objects, then asking the child to pick out the one (from bag B) that most resemble the item in bag A. Following this, there can be a quick discussion on their similarities. This allows for open-ended explorations into understanding relationships between objects, instead of focusing on getting the right answer.
- Parents can also choose to participate in this activity with their children. Instead of asking the child to pick the identical object from bag B, get them to communicate the qualities of the object in bag A to their parent, who will be the one identifying it. Reveal the objects at the same time and see what happens!

This activity is adapted from one of the activities we did at our recent workshop. Feel free to send us your comments or image documentations after trying it out! Email us at hello@whyowhy.sg

From Why, O, Why!:

Children are curious creatures. They are naturally drawn to new things, and it is their innate ability to be in constant wonder. We believe that the word 'why' — though simple and easily articulated — is very powerful. We love how it opens up opportunities for discovery, and above all, how the joy of these little discoveries can be shared with others.

With this, we asked the questions:

1. Can you share some of your observations on, or experiences with, how your /a child discovers?
2. How do you respond to your /a child's discovery?
3. Could you describe a time where your child surprised you with their discovery?

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Responses:

1. I think it is different at different phases of his growth. He likes to arrange things neatly, and I think he has his own way of establishing relationships / identifying patterns between different objects and arranging them accordingly. Maybe through this, he is discovering the different qualities and relationships of objects.

2. I don't think he knows how to articulate his discovery or observations yet (aged 2),

so I have to find a way to observe what he is seeing, and encourage him through words like, "Wow, you arranged them according to (something)! How about this?" and see how he responds from there.

3. I am surprised by his ability to establish the relationships / identify patterns in seemingly complex arrangements. Recently, one such incident happened with my wife. There were about 6 to 7 pens of different colours.

They had their caps on, and when he was left alone with them for a while, he suddenly returned with a cheeky look on his face, and proudly showed my wife what he did. She discovered that he had mixed up all the pen caps intentionally, i.e., each pen had a different coloured cap. She thought this awareness of colour differences was just something coincidental, but when she asked him to put back the caps according to the colours, he did it promptly without much difficulty. This is amazing because when we usually get him to sort colours (using lego bricks), he can't seem to distinguish between them. This incident seems to show that he can actually do more than what we recognize, or at a quicker pace than what we expect.

**— Dad, (Educator)
with Son, age 2**

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1. While observing a friend's child, I realised that he discovers so intuitively and naturally. There was once when he walked on some wood

panels that were creaking, he was immediately sensitive to the areas which were looser (that created more noises) and started bouncing more on those areas to create more sounds. (scary!) Some other examples were: him jumping off tiny ledges after counting off, "driving" his toy train around the open environment, or just wandering around. There seems to be no extrinsic purposes to these activities; it is just the child exploring the space in many different intuitive ways.

2. While he was walking and coming into contact with different things, I talked to him about things relevant to what caught his eye (e.g. say hello to mr ant!), reciting the alphabets that he encounters in public space, or even trying to describe certain textures to him as he touched them in the environment.

3. There was once he tried to slide down a normal ramp with just a small incline, (of course to no avail...) It was pretty funny to watch, but yet it showed me how sensitive

children are to the things around them, which I don't usually notice or take time to experience as much now...

— **Piano teacher / designer with Boy, age 2**
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1. Our boy loves to ask questions about things that fascinates him. He will also discover through exploration. We also realise that listening is a way of discovery for him. When the adults are talking, he will try to join in the conversation, by which he will discover new knowledge.

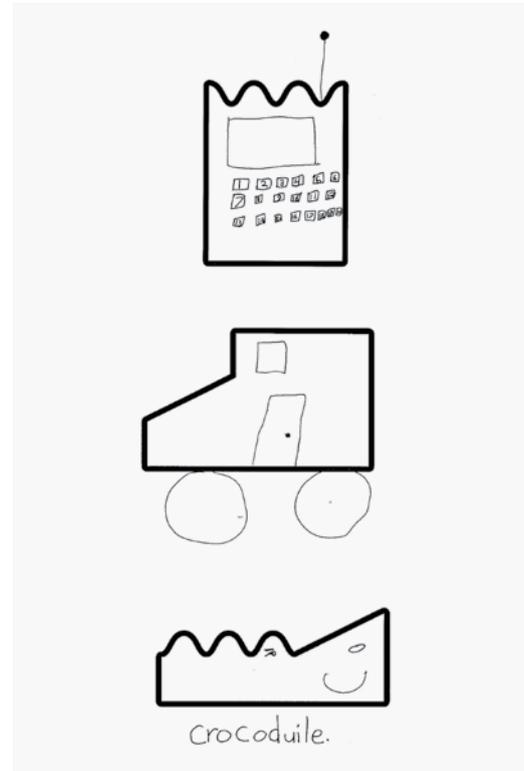
Pretend play is also a big part of discovery for Jayden. We engaged in different scenarios, such as being in the bus, a boat, or even in an office. He will take on different roles and discover different occupations and experiences through pretend play.

2. We like to hear his response towards his discoveries by asking him to describe those experiences. With that, we help him to make the experience more concrete by sharing with him and elaborating on what the

discovery is. We will also share with him what he can do with those discoveries.

3. There was once when we were outdoors, our son looked up into the sky and turned to us to ask about the type of clouds that are in the sky. We were pleasantly surprised by his question. Together with him, we researched on it immediately using our devices and found out the different names of the clouds through looking at images of them. He could almost immediately identify the different types of clouds!

— **Mom (Lecturer) / Dad (Business development manager) with son, age 2**



Sketches by Eliza, 6.
(Top: Jagged-top cellphone, Middle: Moving house, Bottom: Grinning 'Crocodile') These were Eliza's responses to a doodling activity book we made—they contain various abstract shapes for children to doodle over.



p. 14 Boy running down the grass slope. We also noticed a playground just beside the slope, did the grass slope appeal more to the boy? Or is he exploring / expanding his play territory?



- p. 15 Two children running around on a small but elevated platform. The metal floor plates added to the play experience through the sounds it creates with each footstep!
- p. 16 Two girls chasing each other along a slightly ramped walk way in a looping manner. The walls (taller than the girls) and sharp turns added to the play experience — the one in front is hidden from the one at the back when of a distance away, allowing her to stay hidden and jump out on the one running from the back whenever she finds the chance. When that happens, they then switch directions.



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