

Why Use Open-Ended Questions in the Classroom?

Too often we find ourselves solving problems on behalf of our children. We direct them when to add more glue, where to put the ramp, how to stabilize the tower. We do this because we sincerely care and want to help - it's often difficult and uncomfortable to see our children struggle or fail.

However, if we are able to remove ourselves from a situation and play the role of observer, we will see that a child is capable of hypothesizing, testing, and making adjustments to problem solve. The idea is this: if children aren't afforded the chance to fail, they will may not get the opportunity to persevere and develop creative problem solving skills. Perseverance develops resilience, which is essential for children to create their own successes both now and years in the future. In the face of failure, children who can think critically without always depending on adults for answers will grow to be independent, thoughtful, and creative problem solvers.

One way we can enhance opportunities for learning is to ask open ended questions. Instead of providing solutions for children, try open-ended questions like these instead:

What are you trying to make/do?
Can you show, explain, or draw your idea?
What materials might you need?
What is working? What isn't?
What else in the room could you use?
Who else in the room could help you?
Where is the point of failure that needs to be fixed?
I notice when "X" happens, it causes "Y". How come?
How will you know if the problem is solved?
What information would help you?
What could you use to measure that?
What surprised you about that?
What great mistakes happened?
Did you want to test that out?
How did your tests go?

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