

INVITATIONS FOR LEARNING

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I Never Had A Young Child Ask Me?

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- "Can I make a plaster paris hand and attach a poem to it for mother's day?"
- "Can I bring Valentines Day Cards to school and give them away to all the other children?"
- "Can I have peppermint smell in the playdough?"
- "Can I make sure that all my clothes match before I leave the house?"
- "Can I share my toys with 18 other children?"

At the completion of a keynote, a director of an early childhood program asked me, "Do you have any ideas for a graduation ceremony for our preschoolers going into kindergarden?" My response was, "I am not the right person to answer that question, because that is something I would never do."

This made me think about how many experiences we provide young children that are not relevant to them. I have never had a young child asked me, "Can I stand on a stage, in a cap and gown, so my parents recognize I am no longer a preschooler?"

What is relevant to a young child is the "present". What is happening to me right now, not the past or future. So the focus should be placed on how do I make the remaining time in preschool the most

fun, appropriate and respectful.

Another event I often get asked about, "What are some fun activities for a young child's birthday party?" I have never had a young child ask me, "Can I have a party where I invite lots of other children over and slice up MY cake and let them play with MY toys?" Young children are so egocentric that they only want cake for themselves, not shared with others, and only gifts that they play with and control. Children as they grow become less egocentric and enjoy the time with others. It is better to wait until then.

Adults need to step back and remind ourselves what is relevant and appropriate for young children. Some of the activities we attempt to do with young children can wait until they are older.

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What is relevant to Young Children?

We have to be careful observers of what children need and want.....Hang around and watch!

- Instead of a graduation - My friend, author and teacher Bev Bos does something that is so sweet and respectful at the end of the year. It is called a Memory Box. Children are given shoe boxes, to decorate if they please. Adults place on tables, containers of "things" that children used throughout the year (ex. scrap material, nature items, sparkles, buttons, sand). Children go around with their boxes and gather as much as they want to remember the place they have been at for this past year. What a respectful way to remember.*
- Instead of a birthday party - What does the child like to do? It is his/her special day. Maybe a "play in water day" or "play in mud day" without any games or "hoopla".*
- Instead of crafts for presents - Taking pictures of children doing their "thing" and assemble into a book. Avoid intruding on children's play, make the photos spontaneous and candid.*
- Instead of peppermint playdough - Provide natural clay or dough without any color or scent. If a child asks for colors or smells, ask, "What will we need?" and include them in the process of doing.*

(I recognize there are times when adults have to make choices for children. Make sure they are relevant and appropriate for their stage of development.)