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*Step into new beginnings.....*

*Thinking about thinking.....*

*Katherine Orgill RECE*

The new year is often a time when we take a fresh look at things. Many people in the community are exploring the idea and practice of observation and documentation. The practice of making a record of what is happening or what we have seen with the children wasn't really happening 20 years ago and is evidence of how our work has changed. Our challenge now is to make it more meaningful by moving to pedagogical documentation.

There is a difference between documenting (recording what we see) and pedagogical documentation (seeking to understand and wonder). Moving to that next step where we are creating documentation means that we are thinking about and reflecting on what we have seen or heard. The videos of Think, Feel, Act from the Ministry of Education include one with Dr. Carol Anne Wien called: [Pedagogical Documentation – From Observing to Interpreting Children’s Learning](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-PvvLED5jY) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-PvvLED5jY)

Having some questions to ask ourselves is a way to move in this direction. One tool that is available is **The Thinking Lens**® which was developed by Margie Carter and Deb Curtis. It consists of 6 groups of questions for reflection and inquiry. Over time, it can help you to develop an approach or framework for making meaning of the interactions that you have with children and the things that you observe.

Here are examples of some of the questions:

- What delights me as I watch and listen?
- What do I notice in the children's faces and actions?
- Why might the child be interacting with others this way?
- What new or existing relationships could be strengthened?

There are many questions in **The Thinking Lens**® but you do not need to use all of them at any one time. Some may be suited to using while you are active in the program and some may be used when reflecting afterwards. If you are looking to make more meaningful documentation, this tool is worthy of consideration.



The Thinking Lens is available online: <http://www.ecetrainers.com/taxonomy/term/32/0>

**“To take a step forward, you have to lose your balance.”**

*A child from Reggio Emilia*



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## Rethinking Gun Play

*Ashley Sanderson RECE*

**M**y practice was always to have a no gun policy. I always looked at gun play as the red zone...or that it was off limits. I never wanted my after school program at Otonabee Valley to be viewed as out of control, or that children were allowed to be aggressive. It was always easier to say no.....

I was often *saying* things like:

- We aren't making/building guns here....
- What are you making, I hope it isn't a gun?
- We don't use guns here.....
- Please stop making guns and let's make something else.....



I would often *hear* different responses such as:

- It isn't a gun, it's a bubble blower.
- I am making a view finder.
- I don't use guns, I am making a force field.

What was I doing? I was making children lie to me. I was telling them not to make guns and they were getting more and more clever coming up with different names for guns so I "wouldn't know" what they were actually doing.

The school age group I am now with primarily is mostly boys. They love to manipulate blocks and building materials to create different things. Our toy selection is comprised mostly of different materials such as: blocks, straws and connectors, magnets, different building and connecting blocks (lots of loose parts to create with).

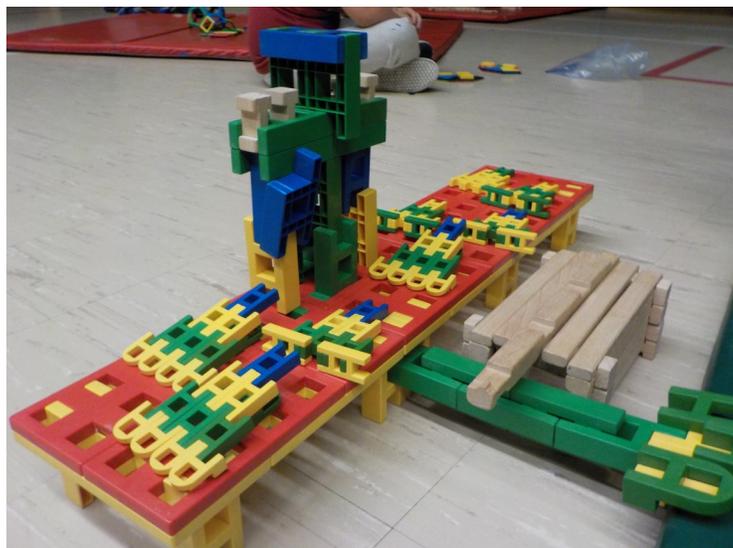
It wasn't until Hilary (a fellow colleague) was talking about gun play in the office one day that I really sat back and thought about it. I began to look back at what had been going on in the program. I sat and thought: *What is the worst thing that could happen if I let it happen? What could happen if children were allowed to create different guns, weapons, fighter machines and had good guy/bad guy scenarios?*

I decided to sit back more and listen to their play and the words they were speaking. I would watch what was being created and ask questions instead of shutting it down. This is what I discovered.....

The morning began like every other:

The boys rushed in to grab their blocks and manipulatives. One little guy (7 yr) had been talking about the War and the French Revolution lately and today he grabbed the wooden blocks and connectors and started building a tank. Next came the medic tent, the soldiers and the battlefield. I asked some open-ended questions about what the jobs were for the different soldiers and for him to explain what was happening.

To my surprise the play was based around the medic tent and how soldiers needed to be saved and treated for their injuries. There was no shooting people in the face and no children screaming and being aggressive to one another...WHAT??!!!! He had built this amazing structured play around helping people. Yes, it involved tanks with massive guns, hurt soldiers and war. But it didn't involve crazy or out of control play. It didn't involve



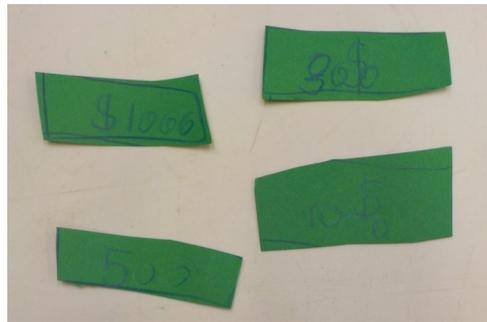
# Rethinking Gun Play - Cont'd

Ashley Sanderson RECE

destructive behaviour toward one another. It was amazing.

The next day, the Navy and their ships with fighter jets were involved. The children created an amazing replica of the Navy Seal Ships that fighter jets land on and fly off of. The children spent the whole morning creating these special things and sitting back looking at them, proud of what they had completed. The play and imagination involved was simply awesome.

Now, I did have one instance where I had a boy (Grade 1) tell another boy (JK) that he had to be a bad guy and steal weapons for a vault they had built. The younger one told the older one that he didn't want to be a bad guy (good for him!) and the Grade 1 boy said to him that they could both be good guys and instead of stealing weapons they could buy them. So this morning turned into a craft morning where the boys made their own paper money. Again.....AMAZING!



This has changed my outlook on gun play so much. I felt the children were empowered by making their own choices, rules and props for their play. They were able to tell the truth about their play instead of hiding it. They made safe choices and there was no turmoil between them while they were engaged in this play. There is far less restriction on their play and it feels quite liberating. There hasn't been one instance where a child was aggressive, inappropriate or violent toward one another.

I am so glad I opened my mind and decided to give this a try. It took me one day and I was a changed ECE!!



**Ashley Sanderson is an RECE with Nursery Two.**

# Professional Learning Highlights

## The 3 R's of Relationship

Join Dr. Jean Clinton as she explores the developing brain and the crucial role relationships with others play in child mental health and development.

Thursday, January 26  
7:00 - 8:30

Queen Mary Public School / 1445 Monaghan Road

## Gun Play and Challenging Play

An evening to think and reflect with others on the challenges around children's play. (Details to come soon).

Thursday, February 23  
6:30 - 8:00

IIQ office / 550 Braidwood Ave

## A Day on Documentation

A day looking at making meaningful documentation with Ellen Brown.

Saturday, March 4  
9:00 - 3:30

Westdale United Church  
(details to come soon)

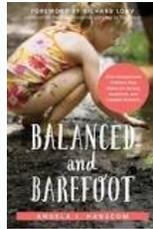
## Inspiring Early Learning Conference

Keynote Speaker: Martin Liberio  
Workshops on a wide variety of topics.  
Registration will open in mid-February.

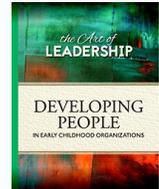
Saturday, April 22  
9:00 - 3:30  
Fleming College

## Resource Library - New Additions

In **Balanced and Barefoot**, a pediatric occupational therapist and founder of TimberNook shows how outdoor play and unstructured freedom of movement are vital for children’s cognitive development and growth, and offers engaging ways to help ensure children grow into healthy and resilient adults.

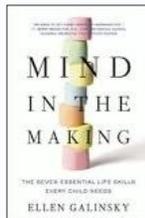


**Developing People** offers practical advice from leading experts in our field on selecting, training, and appraising staff, as well as promoting teamwork among staff members. 144 pgs.

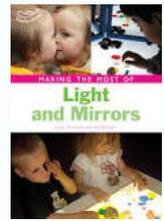


**Part of a series of 4 leadership books: Engaging Families, Leading Early Childhood Organizations, Promoting Early Childhood Services.**

**Mind in the Making** offers insights into the science of early learning. These are skills to be fostered: Focus and Self Control, Perspective Taking, Communicating, Making Connections, Critical Thinking, Taking on Challenges, Self Directed and Engaged Learning.

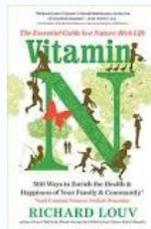


**Making the Most of Light and Mirrors** celebrates the wonderful ideas and theories that babies and young children demonstrate on a daily basis. Each scenario is accompanied by full colour photographs.

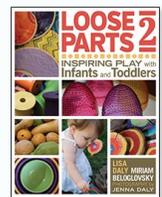


**Also: Making the Most of Outdoor Learning**

**Vitamin N** is a comprehensive guidebook for families and the wider community with tips to share with kids. It is a dose of pure inspiration, reminding us that looking up at the stars or taking a walk in the woods is as exhilarating as it is essential, **at any age.**



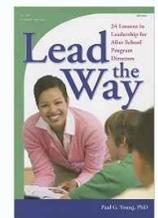
**Loose Parts 2: Inspiring Play in Young Children** brings the fun of found objects to infants and toddlers. A variety of new and innovative loose parts ideas are paired with beautiful photography to inspire safe loose parts play in your infant toddler environment.



**Making the Most of Reclaimed and Natural Materials** - In all their variety of colours, shapes, sizes, textures and origins, these are fascinating to children of all ages! This book celebrates the wonderful ideas and theories that babies and young children demonstrate daily.



**Lead the Way** provides short, self-guided overviews that both aspiring and practicing after school professionals need to thrive in their roles. The 24 fundamental insights and strategies can be used as professional development topics with after school program staff.



Other new additions include: **Leaders Eat Last, Good Leaders ask Great Questions, Pedagogy and Space, Designs for Living and Learning** (2nd addition), **The Art of Awareness** (2nd addition), **Documenting Children’s Meaning, ECERS 3** as well as a series of 8 Beginnings Workshop books from Child Care Exchange on **Behaviour, Brain Research, Child Development, Curriculum, Environments, Literacy and Play.**

For more information see the website: [www.investinginquality.ca](http://www.investinginquality.ca)



For information on professional learning events, contact Katherine Orgill :  
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For full details and registration information, visit [www.investinginquality.ca](http://www.investinginquality.ca)  
 Check periodically to see new additions.

