

TURNING BOXES INSIDE OUT :

CONNECTING TO PLACE AND
SUSTAINABILITY

Introduction

This presentation explores how young children at The Point Preschool, Oyster Bay, Dharawal Country, used recycled cardboard boxes to create original and exciting artefacts. It demonstrates how their encounters with this material enabled and afforded opportunities for them to practise and learn new skills, connect to each other and explore their creativity.

Through the children's encounter with boxes, they developed a deeper knowledge of this type of material and an understanding of the potential and capability of box construction. Their playful interactions and art making supported their connection to place and increased their awareness of issues that relate to sustainability.

As Kelly (2013) identifies it can be through visual art that teachers and children can reduce, reuse and recycle materials in new and creative ways.



“Materials and objects create meeting places ... ”

(Kind, 2014, p. 865).

Pacini-Ketchabaw, Kind & Kocher (2017, p.1) state that in an early childhood context educators and children can “gather around materials to investigate, negotiate, converse, and share. A block of clay, a brush, pots of paint, a brilliant sheet of paper, a heavy rectangular wooden block, a thin piece of willow charcoal – materials beckon and pull us in”.

For these authors, “Materials can evoke memories, narrate stories, invite actions, and communicate ideas”.



The presenters for this encounter with materials are:



Catherine Lee

<http://thepointpreschool.com.au/our-team/catherine-lee/>



Lisa Terreni

<https://people.wgtn.ac.nz/lisa.terreni>



Catherine Lee is the Director, Early Childhood Teacher and Educational Leader of The Point Preschool. Catherine has been teaching for over 38 years and is passionate about inquiry play based learning, mindfulness, reconciliation, education for sustainability, the inclusion of Aboriginal culture, listening to children, documenting children's voices and social justice.

Catherine's skills are evident in supporting the children's discovery of a lifelong love of learning and ensuring their smooth and successful transition to school. She delights in bringing happiness to children through play and yoga, supporting each child's individual learning journey and sharing their journey with their families. Catherine is a strong advocate within the early childhood profession and believes in sharing her knowledge with her team, families and the early childhood community to build high quality teaching practices and strong respectful relationships.

Catherine's strength is in her leadership and she has been the very proud Director and Early Childhood Teacher at The Point Preschool for 20 years and is very honoured to work in collaboration with her team of very dedicated professional and innovative Early Childhood Educators, and Parent Management Committee. She delivers training and speaks at conferences within Australia and overseas and has authored and co-authored books about sustainability and the inclusion of our Aboriginal culture in early childhood.



“One of my most favourite things is watching cats and young children play with boxes. I delight in seeing the joy they find in the simplicity of a box.

When I was a little girl, my parents would wrap my birthday gifts in a box and then place that box inside another box and then place that box inside another box. The possibility of what was contained in those boxes was so exciting. And equally exciting was spending time with my Dad creating with the empty boxes after I had discovered my gift. The possibility of the box was endless – a bed for my doll, a puppet theatre, a tall building in the city where my Dad worked, a plane, a garage for my cars and always a box for my cat to hide and play in.

As a teacher I have continued to share my joy of boxes with the children. I love using boxes with the children to create and I love to read to them the story “My Cat Likes To Hide in Boxes” by Eve Sutton and “The Man Who Loved Boxes” by Stephen James King.

The possibility to create, construct and design with is endless. The opportunity to reuse boxes brings another dimension to our arts practice. Caring for our Earth and being good custodians of our land to honour our Aboriginal peoples is very important to us. Reusing and repurposing materials supports our commitment to sustainability. Our involvement in our ‘Turning Boxes Inside Out’ Project was an absolute joy”.





Lisa Terreni is a senior lecturer at Victoria University of Wellington's Faculty of Education, School of Education teaching in the early childhood education degree programmes. She has been involved in early childhood education for many years—as a kindergarten teacher, a senior teacher, and as a professional development adviser for the Ministry of Education. She is also an artist.

Her Masters in Education research focused on children's and teachers' use of an Interactive Whiteboard for visual art learning experiences in a kindergarten setting.

Her PhD investigated the current extent of art museum visiting by the early childhood sector in New Zealand and investigate barriers to access. It also investigated existing practices between art museums and early childhood centres, and examined ways in which art museums and early childhood centres can effectively work together to create meaningful learning environments for young children.

Lisa's current research interests focus on exploring how visual art can be used to enhance young children's thinking, and the types of ECE environments that best foster visual art education.

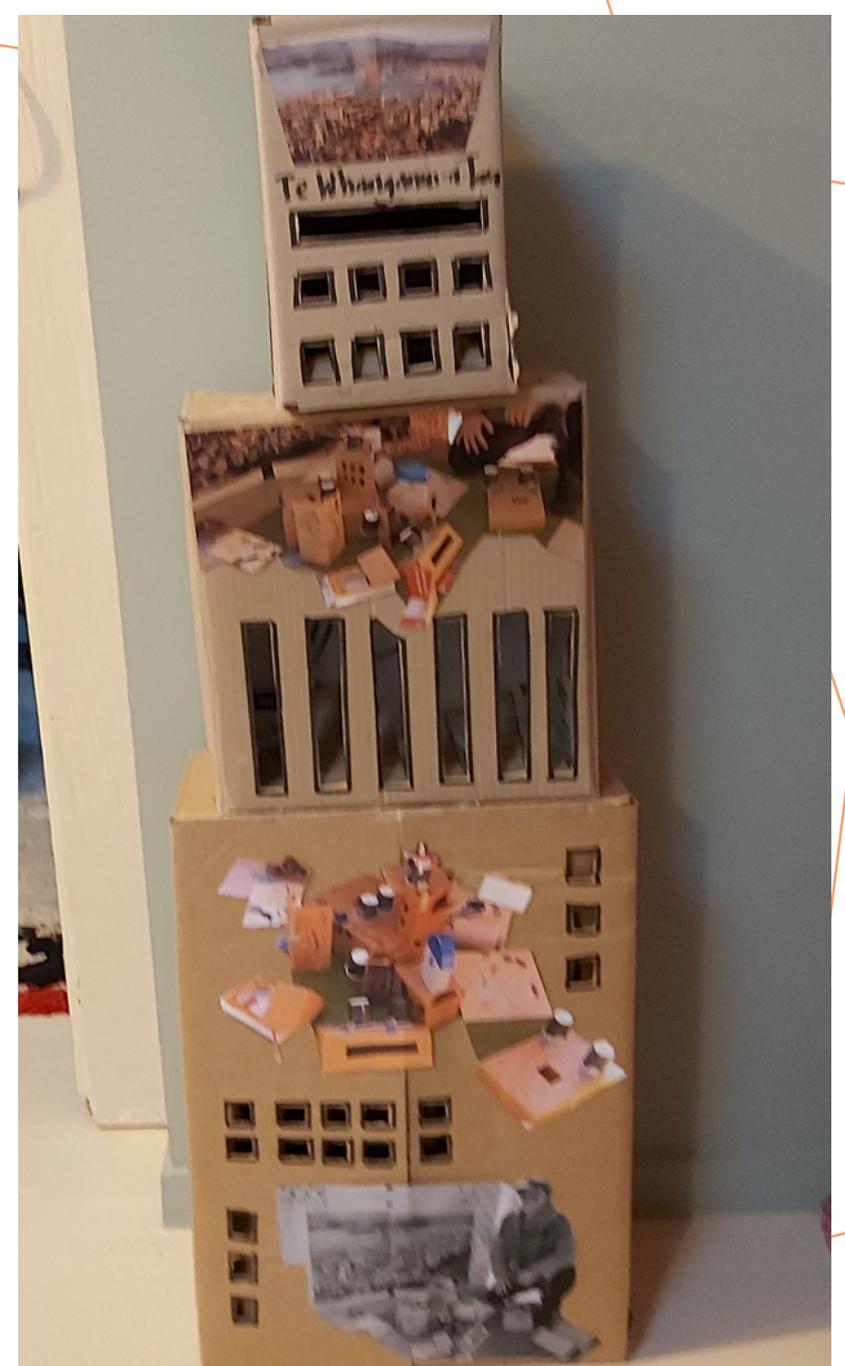


"I've always been attracted to empty cardboard boxes.

I remember as a 4 year-old having the most marvellous game with a boy I met when my parents and I were staying at a hotel in Denmark. His parents owned the hotel and out the back of the hotel were a big pile of empty cardboard boxes which must have come from all the supplies going into the hotel. We played in those boxes for hours! I can still remember the smell of the boxes, and the suppleness of the cardboard and the warmth and smoothness of that material.

As an adult I still love them because as an artist and a teacher I see the potential of their creative possibility, particularly when they are stripped of their advertising and become a clean canvas for children's art work , designs and constructions.

Which is why I am keen on turning boxes inside out...which is the name of this presentation!"



The Turning Boxes Inside Out project actually started during a Covid 19 lockdown in New Zealand. Lisa was thinking about parents at home with their children and some ideas for art making that they could do together. She made a little series called *Art Ideas from the Tiny Studio*.

Here is the link:

<https://learningfromhome.govt.nz/resources/art-ideas-tiny-studio>

Catherine saw one of the videos and really liked it, and showed it to her children at **The Point Preschool**.



About The Point Preschool

<https://thepointpreschool.com.au/about/>

- Acknowledges the original custodians of this land, the Dharawal people and their language and culture and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the community past, present and future.
- Embraces education for sustainability and social justice into daily practise.
- Places high importance on play outdoors and spending time with nature and instils a sense of belonging and a connection to place.
- Nurtures a deep respect and a positive attitude towards the environment.
- Advocates for the rights of the child, values individuality and honours diversity and difference.
- Values play and inquiry based learning as essential in the lives and learning of young children.
- Inspires innovation, creativity and leadership in the early childhood profession.



Teachers and educators at The Point Preschool believe in building a community that values children, respects their rights and prepares them for the transition to school and readiness for life.

The preschool's longstanding and strong commitment to the environment and education for sustainability is demonstrated through their embedded practices, many awards and achievements, as well as the building itself; redesigned and renovated in 2010 according to sustainable and exemplary environmentally friendly practices.



They support Kelly's ideas (2013, p. 74) that "within and beyond early childhood education setting we can find creative and expressive ways that engage the heart, mind and body and impact positively on the earth...

Using our heads, hands and hearts together, we can teach and learn in ways that incorporate the 7rs [respect, reflect, rethink, reuse, reduce, recycle, redistribute], and meet our current needs without compromising future generations' abilities to meet their needs".



What follows is a series of questions that Lisa asked Catherine about the *Turning Boxes Inside Out* project that took off at The Point Preschool.

Catherine carefully observed the children and noted their conversations as they engaged in their individual creative process with the boxes. Their responses are also described in the following slides.



“How did you go about introducing the materials to the children?”



“We are always collecting boxes and other recycled materials to reuse and repurpose into artworks. At the time we had many boxes and baskets filled with boxes. We were waiting for inspiration to use our boxes in a way we hadn’t used them before.”

Lisa, we watched your video on a warm November afternoon and immediately, the children were captivated to turn our boxes inside out and make houses just like your houses.

When we entered our tiny studio – our atelier, we were greeted by our collection of boxes. There was no order to the display of boxes. The boxes were overflowing onto our table and the children were overflowing with possibility and ideas for design and construction.”



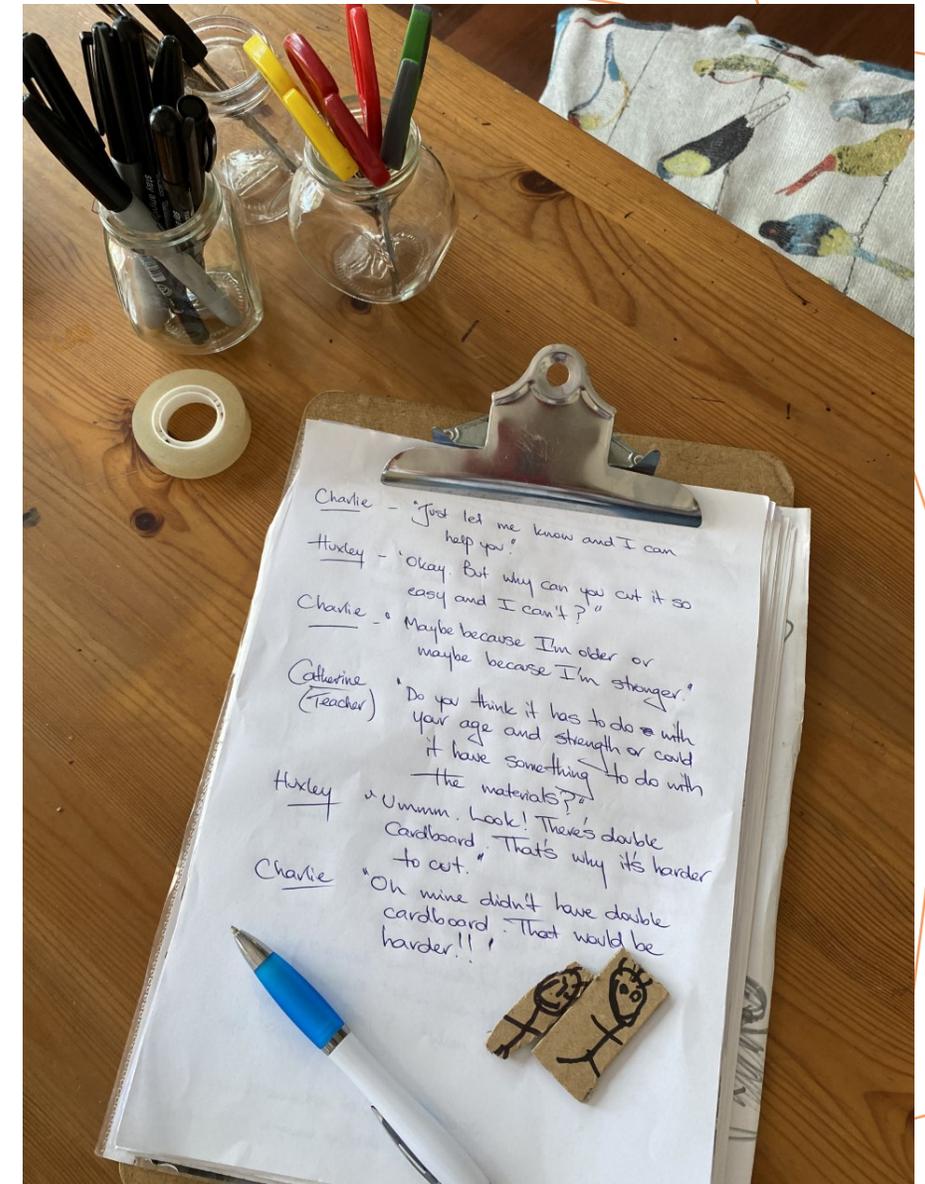


“What was the teachers’ role in this investigation?”



“My role in our investigation was to provide provocations; to inspire; to question and to listen to the children’s theories; to imagine and investigate with the children; to guide and support their critical thinking; to teach skills; to support their explorations; to collaborate and to be an active participant; to reflect deeply and critically; to document their learning; to assist the children to find their voice; to share stories and to play and to wonder.”

I am inspired by Loris Malaguzzi’s words “Nothing without joy” and strongly advocate to all teachers to bring joy to their teaching, arts practice and the time they engage with children.”





“What did you notice with the children’s initial engagement with these materials?”



“The children’s engagement with the materials was filled with excitement, enthusiasm and joy.

Initially, some of the children explored the properties of the boxes and delighted in discovering what a box ‘could do’ and what they could ‘do with a box’.

I remember with great joy when a group of children held the boxes in their hands and imagined the box was cockatoo. They manipulated the boxes to open and close like the birds beak. They described themselves as the ‘laughing cockatoos’. Their boxes became birds and filled us all with great joy.

Other children immediately connected to the possibility of the boxes and immediately chose a box and began to turn your box inside out to design and construct their house. “





“Did their work become more complex the more they used the materials?”



“Yes as the children continued to use the materials their creativity and ideas became more complex and filled with richness.”

Some children visited the atelier many times each day while they were at Our Place. They engaged in many discussions about their family and their homes and the process of turning the boxes inside out. They discussed their families, love, sustainability, connection to Country and place, and delighted in adding more detail to their boxes.

The children’s skills in noticing and their understanding of the materials were highlighted in their discussions. Their skills in using the materials became more complex and they demonstrated their knowledge of the materials while they supported each other to be manipulate the materials.”



*“Boxes are clever. I got into a box yesterday.
It was really big and I played in there.*

*I can make a house with boxes.
You can make an even higher house
with bigger boxes.*

*I turned a box inside out and it opened and
I taped it back shut in a different way.
It’s still the same box but inside out.*

*I’m making something with recycling and not
making rubbish. I’m making art.”*

Huxley (4 years).



“I live on earth” said Luke.

“I live in the universe” said Rafa.

“Earth is in the universe” said Luke.

“Oh I know that. There’s Jupiter too” said Rafa.

*“Oh that’s in a galaxy. That’s space.
On Earth I live in Oyster Bay on
Dharawal Country in Australia.*

*It’s a perfect place to go for a bike ride
or to turn a box inside out” said Luke.*

Luke (5 years) and Rafa (4 years).



“It’s good to reuse boxes because they may be good houses and apartments.”

I played in a box. The box was really big. We got a new table and a new couch and Daddy said we could keep it. Me and Elise played houses in it.

Boxes make good houses.”

Zara (5 years).



“You’re doing a great job. Just hold this part of the box and I’ll put the sticky tape on it for you. It’s sometimes too hard to do it all by yourself. Sometimes you need a friend to help. I can be that friend that helps” said Finn.

“When are going to work on your box Finn?” asked Flynn.

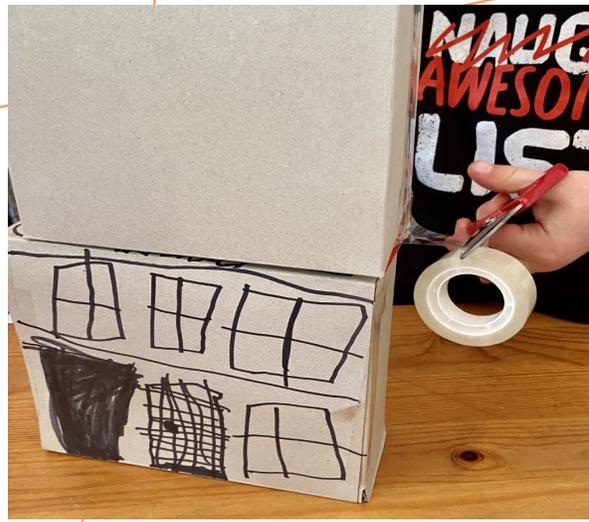
“When I’m finished helping you and everyone” Finn replied.

Finn (5 years) and Flynn (4 years).

*“If I didn’t live in my house that I live in now,
I would still love another house because it’s not
the house really, it’s my family that I love.”*

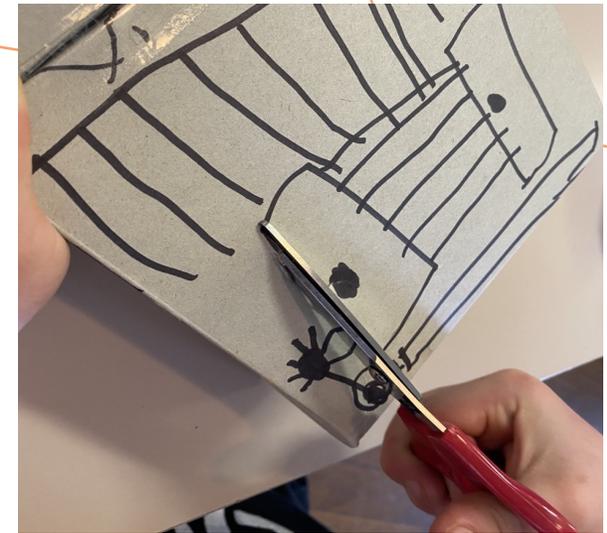
Amelie (5 years).





Lelia Gandini and Judith Allen Kaminsky (2005) believe that “Materials seem to have their own inner life and their own story to tell. Yet they can only be transformed through their encounter with people”.

This is clearly what happened for the children.



This discussion with Catherine and the accompanying video have demonstrated the magic and special language of these materials, and their creative potential for children.

But teachers love them too! Lisa recently ran a workshop for teachers where they had the opportunity to explore these materials for themselves. The teachers also made small clay people to inhabit the city they created.

Here is link to *A City For Reggio Emilia* created by teachers who were exploring the potential of recycled materials for themselves.

<https://youtu.be/AZ3082bXkls>



Conclusion

This presentation explored how young children at The Point Preschool, Oyster Bay, Dharawal Country, Australia, used recycled cardboard boxes to create new and exciting artefacts.

It demonstrated how their encounters with this material enabled and afforded opportunities for them to practise and learn new skills, connect to each other, and explore their creativity.

The children's engagement in this investigation was filled with awe, wonder and joy.



Acknowledgments:

Thanks heaps to Peter Morgan for his technical support and amazing musical abilities
– see <http://www.petermorganmusic.com.au/indexe900.html?Module=education>



Related videos:

The Point Preschool Boomerang Bag Community – The Point Preschool

<https://www.facebook.com/344781175558109/videos/381609859324191>

Making the ordinary extraordinary – St James kindergarten, Auckland, New Zealand.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xNffAF5zjDQ&feature=youtu.be>

References:

Kelly, J. (2013). Artfully caring for the environment. In B. Clark, A. Grey, & L. Terreni (Eds.), *Kia tipu te wairua toi - Fostering the creative spirit: Arts in early childhood education* (pp. 66-77). Pearson.

Pacini-Ketchabaw, V., Kind, S. & Kocher, L. (2017). *Encounters with materials in early childhood education*. Routledge.

Gandini, L. & Kaminsky, J.A. (2005). *Reflections on the Relationship Between Documentation and Assessment in the American Context: An interview with Brenda Fyfe*. Retrieved from <https://www.reggioalliance.org/downloads/reflectionsfyfe:gandinikaminsky.pdf>