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**Education**

# From airplanes to aviation design

Learning as a challenge and a team effort



**Big ideas**  
Norm Blaseg

Children's learning is shaped by their experiences. Four- and five-year-olds arrive at school as unique individuals with different interests. In school, however, friends play a big role in shaping the trajectory learning follows.

Dmitri Lavallée loves airplanes. His dad flies frequently and Dmitri goes to the airport to see him off and to greet him when he returns home. If you visit his early learning classroom at Redwood Acres Public School, you are likely to find Dmitri building airplanes in the block centre with his friend Dawson Dumont.

This friendship has developed because of their common interest in



Dawson Dumont (left) and Dmitri Lavallée share a common interest — building — in the Early Learning Kindergarten classroom at Redwood Acres Public School.

building.

Building creates many technological challenges that need to be solved. Dawson was interested in building tall towers, but they kept falling down when he put big blocks on top, said teacher Shannon Lafrance-Pitura.

"The big blocks keep making it fall when I put them on top. They must be too heavy," Dawson said.

Lafrance-Pitura showed him photos of buildings and he noticed the base of the structures, so Dawson decided larger blocks needed to go on the bottom.

"I did it all by myself," he exclaimed when the tower stood.

Dmitri spends a lot of time designing and building airplanes with blocks. Early Childhood Educator Dallas Cappelani saw how Dmitri noticed the pictures helped Dawson with his building design.

He was keen to use a picture of an airplane as a model to see how it might help him build a more sophisticated plane.

The teaching team challenged Dmitri to make a plane using recycled materials. He Dmitri created a list of supplies that was sent home with his classmates. Soon lots of recycled materials began arriving at school.

Dmitri selected the materials, designed his plane on paper, then started to build. Inspired by Dmitri's work, Dawson created an even taller tower with recycled materials.

In kindergarten, learning occurs in the context of social relationships as children make and build connections between experiences.

While Dawson and Dmitri each had an idea of what they wanted to accomplish with their individual designs, building with different materials presented new obstacles and opportunities.

Using models as a reference helped them revise their thinking and add to their existing knowledge. By paying attention to the strategies that each used, they advanced their own understandings of how to solve technological challenges.

When children are encouraged to identify and solve problems, they are willing to take risks. They become more confident learners.

In the next column, we will explore how outdoor play turns into a study in movement.

*Norm Blaseg is the director of education for the Rainbow District School Board.*

## A Feminine Approach to Plastic Surgery

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**In class**

## Province promises more math training

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The province has announced it's attempting to boost student performance in math by providing more training for teachers "to increase the number of teachers with mathematics qualifications," stated a press release from the province. The gov-

ernment also said it will explore how technology could improve instruction and student understanding, and it will help parents and guardians find resources that help them support their child's mathematics learning.

Meanwhile, a petition by a retired teacher to overhaul how math is taught in Ontario continues to gather steam on Change.org. Education reporter Heidi Ulrichsen takes a closer look in an upcoming story.

"We know we have more work to do in the area of mathematics," said Education Minister Liz Sandals in a press release.

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