Learning Stories, Pedagogical Practice, & Assessment

Sascha, Pattern Blocks, & Emilly: Writing a Learning Story




We begin by examining the documentation collected by Emilly Hillsten Kays.

Documentation Record

Sascha says,

"I am making it the same on both sides."

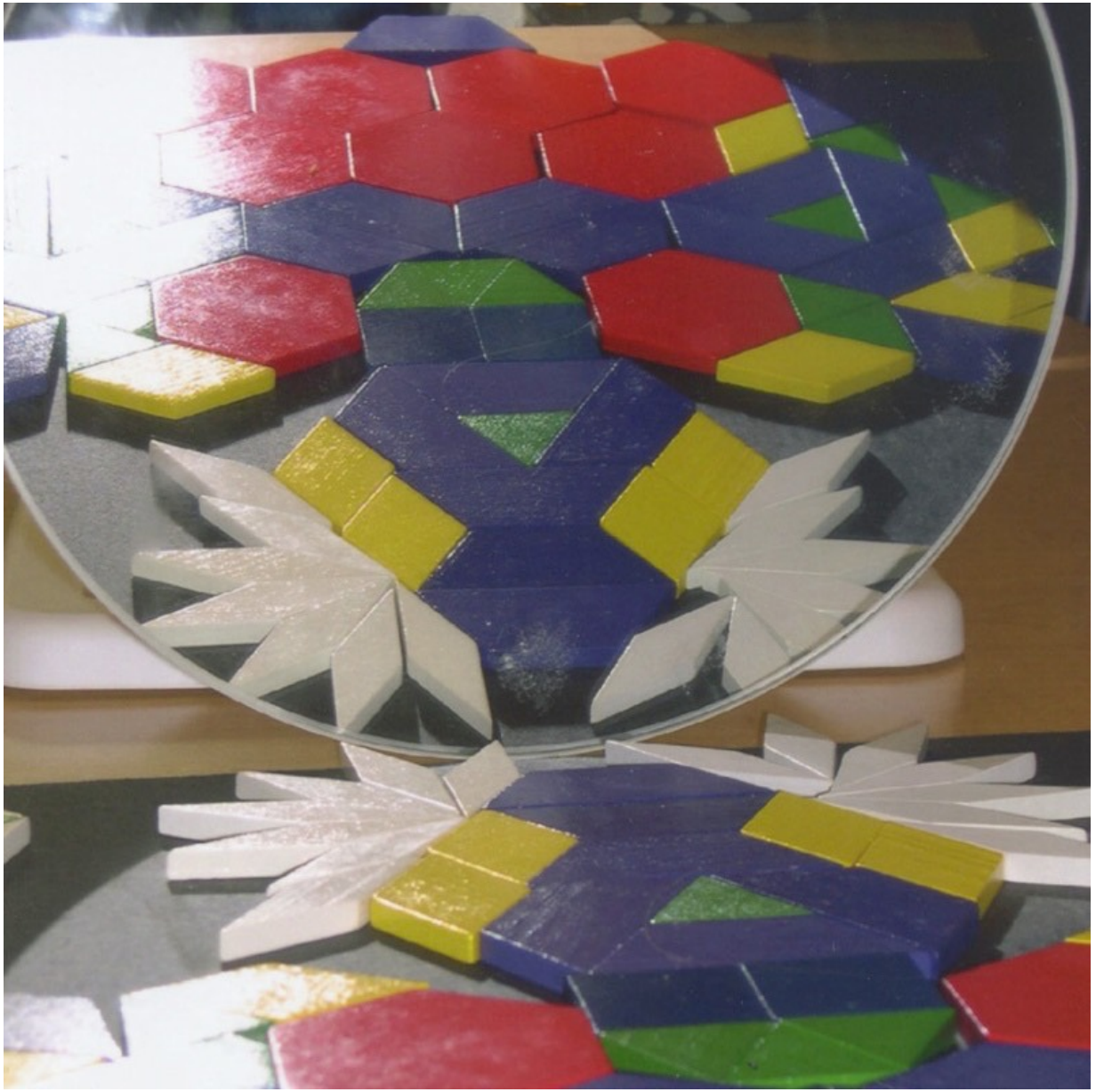
Documentation Record

Sascha says, *"It looks like Rafiki from the Lion King."*

Documentation Record

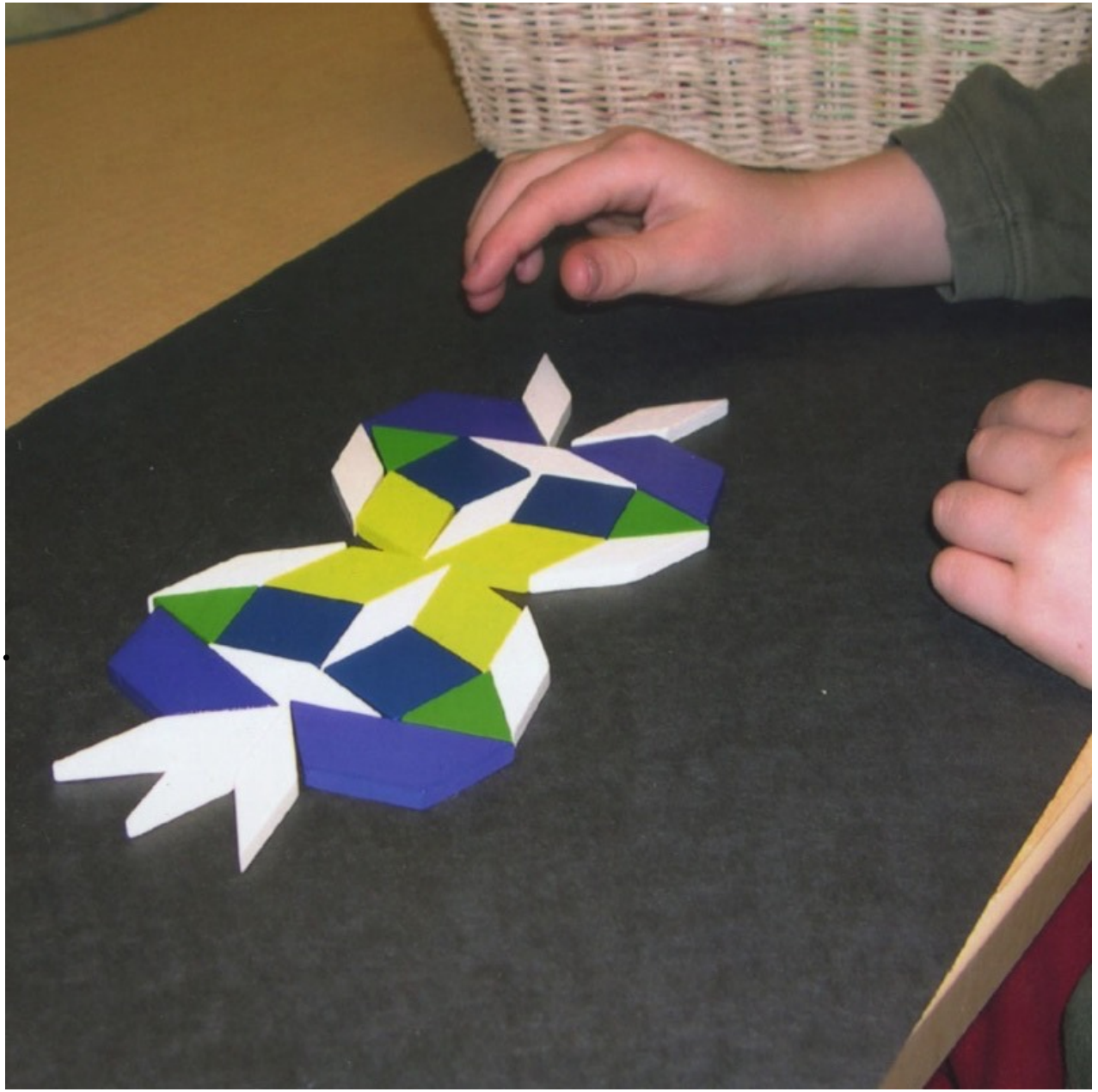
Emilly brings the round mirror.

Sascha begins to roll the mirror around the design to see it from different viewpoints.



Documentation Record

Sascha pushes away that design and builds this one.

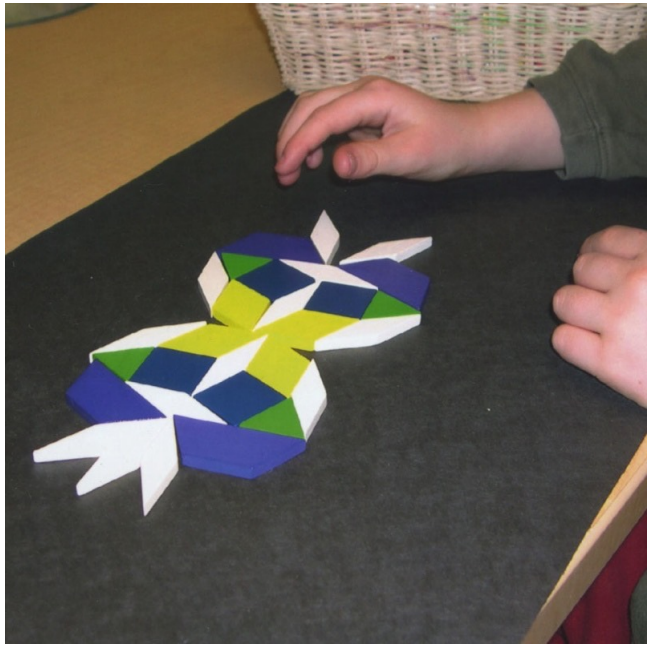


Documentation Record

In the space below that design Sascha creates a new design.

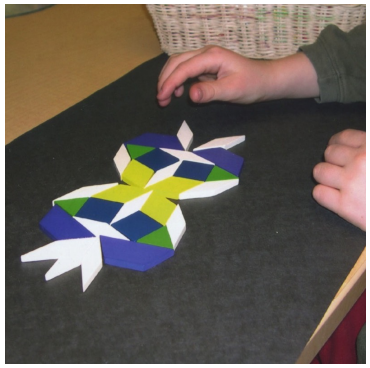
Documentation Record

What do you think happened?



The Facts: Physical Reality






Before

indoor free play

black felt

pattern blocks

baskets

During

5-year-old Sascha acts and speaks

Emilly takes photos

adds mirror

After

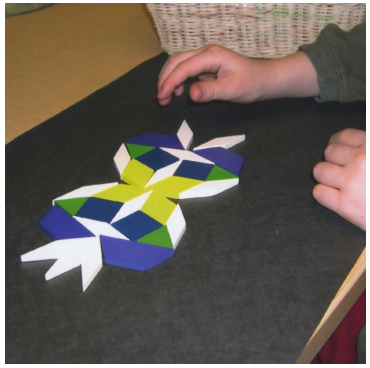
Emilly selects photos and words

shares with Tom

Do we really know anything at all?

We can’t see his experience or understand his decision-making.

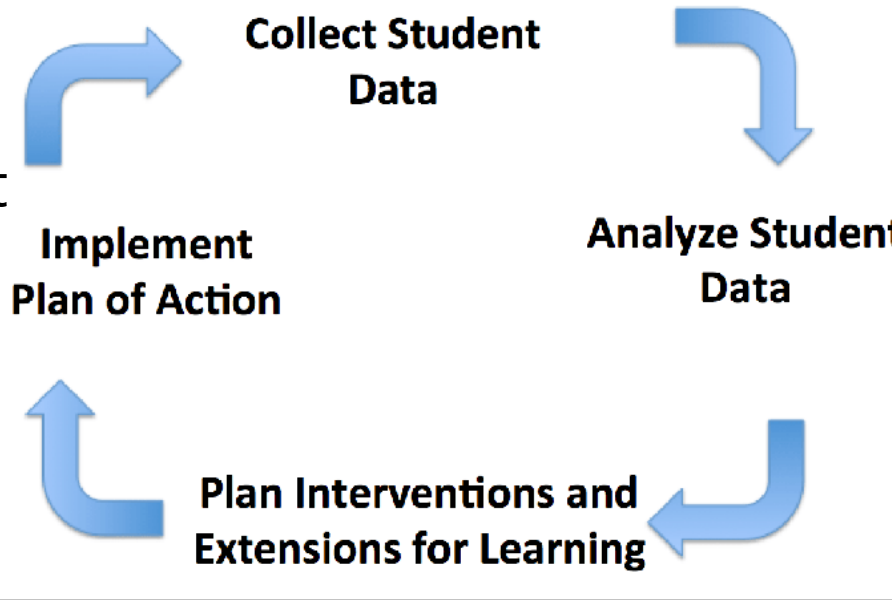





What can we do with this documentation?

As it stands now is this assessment?

Assessment



Generally, the term assessment refers to the methods or tools educators use to gather facts (physical reality) to inform instruction.

Assessment discussions are usually about compliance with enforced means of collecting data.

It seems contrary to best pedagogical practice that anyone outside the community––*who can't analyze the data, nor plan extensions, nor implement that plan*–– should have any say in choosing how a school has to collect its facts.

Four Choices for Use of the Facts

1. We can record these ***facts*** somewhere– in a book, a file, or marked boxes on a form.

2. We could record ***our experience*** of this event– describe our personal view orally or in writing. *"I saw Sascha make a pattern."*

3. We could offer our ***opinions*** or ***judgments***– *"Very clever." "Sascha worked hard." "I like that."*

4. We could write a ***learning story.***

Learning Story

We use the facts we have to create a story,
fully based in our own point of view,
what we saw and thought as skilled educators.

We create an engaging story of what happened
one day, without making judgements.

We share this story with many audiences who
care about Sascha—the child, other children,
the family, educators, future children…

Sasha's Learning Story

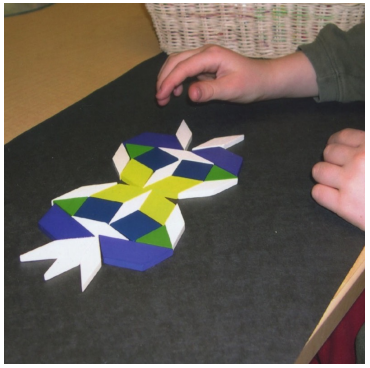
We educators, Emilly and Tom, work together to combine our insights about this event.

We become storytellers, charged with making a story that is not only memorable but also educational for everyone who reads it.

In the story people learn how educators think, educators learn from each other, and educators plan the next experiences.

Learning Story Example






Sascha's pattern block experience told by Emilly and Tom in a learning story.

Sascha and the Mirror

This morning I put out the pattern blocks to see what the children would do. I kept an eye out to see what would happen.

Several children checked out the pattern blocks and left.

Then I noticed Sascha stayed. He kept making designs long after others had gone.

I hurried off to get my camera in the hopes of capturing what might happen next.

By the time I got my camera, Sascha already had nested together a lot of blocks on his black felt. He fit each block snugly against the others.

In this photo I count 35 in the center arrangement and 5 green triangles in a row in the corner.

Since Sascha placed each one carefully, I knew something interesting must be going on in his mind.

When Sascha noticed me watching he said, *"I am making it the same on both sides."*

Indeed it was true. His design was symmetrical.

He added white parallelograms to the very top that radiated out like rays from the sun.

Sascha said, *"It looks like Rafiki from the Lion King."*

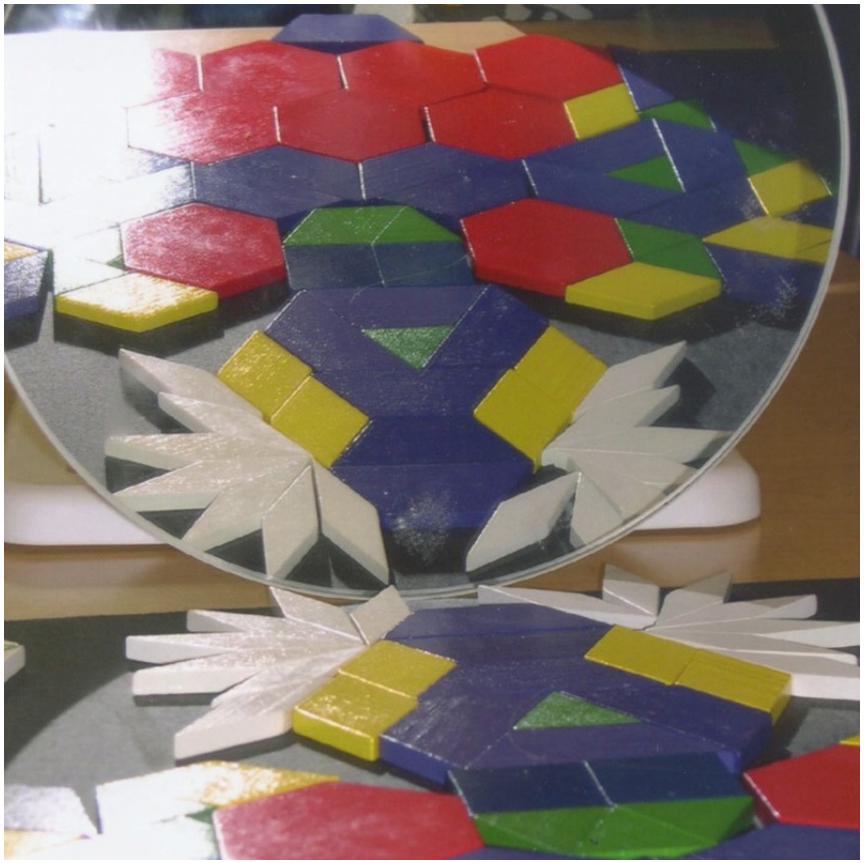
It does! I can see the hair all around the face of a mandrill.

I found a picture of a mandrill just to make sure.

Yes, it is true. It is Rafiki all right.

I thought it would be interesting for Sascha to see this creation in a different way, so I handed him the round mirror.

Sascha began rolling the mirror around the design. I made sure to get a photo.



No matter where he put the mirror he could see the design was the same on the table and in the mirror.

Well, kind of the same, upside down.

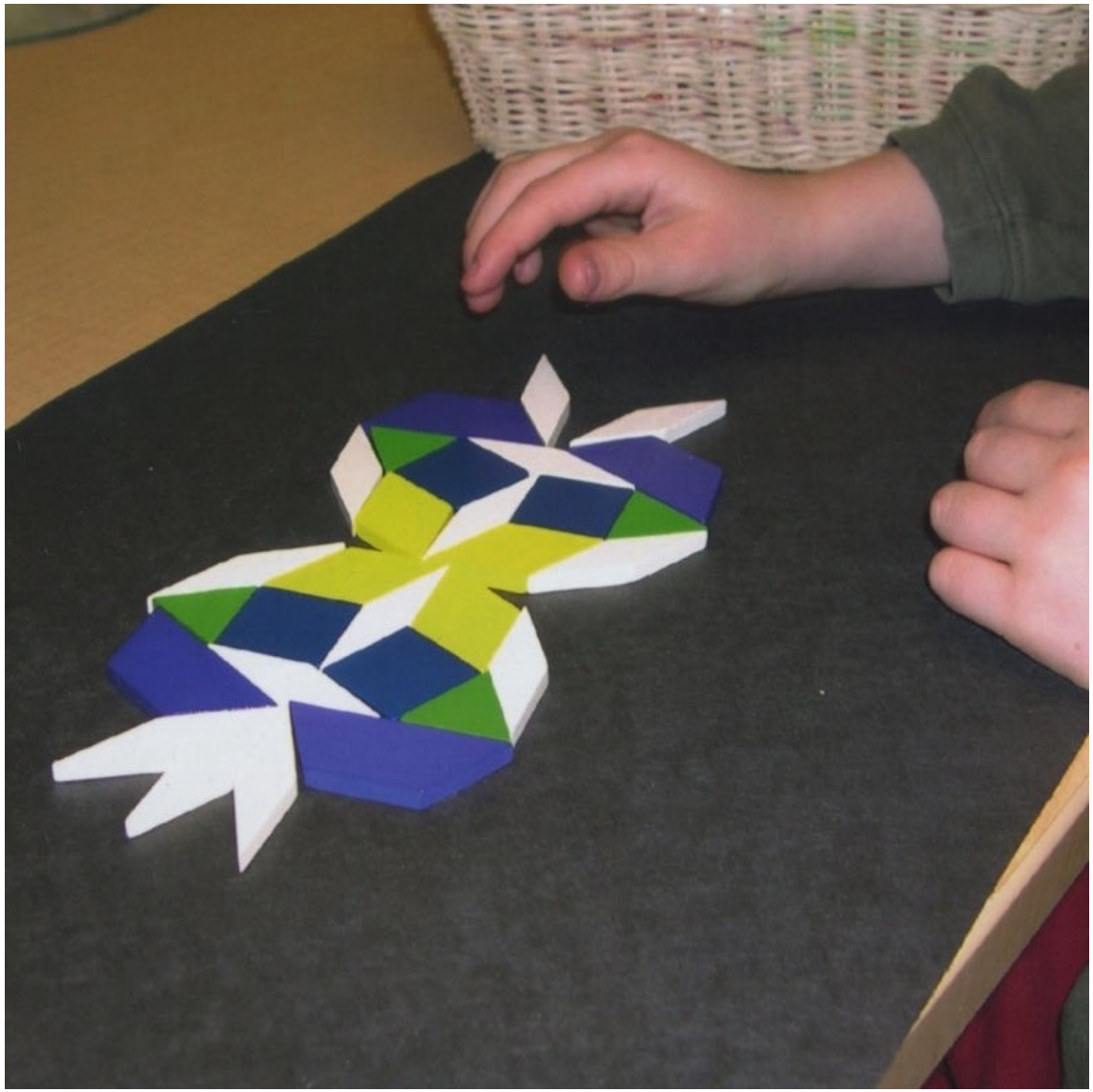
Sascha dumped those blocks back in the basket. I thought he was finished for today, but no way!

He began working on the design you see here.

It looked to me like the mirror was in the center of this design, but there was no mirror!

No mirror?

Huh?



Right below that Sascha created a blue and white design and then a green and yellow design next to it. Then he repeated both designs beside the first.

What was amazing was that it didn't stop! Sascha's design kept on going. He added another, just like the first, right onto the end. Then another!

Sascha invented a pattern! But this was a very special pattern, because each part of it had a mirror in it, too. Each section was the same on both sides!

What does it mean?

Sascha, I was fascinated watching you today. You created designs with symmetry. That is the word we have for being the same on both sides. You saw in the mirror how the reflection creates symmetry, too.

You then created the symmetrical design in this picture. This is a design of beauty. Not only is this design the same on both sides, it is pleasing to the eye; it is a work of art.

You didn't stop there! You began to create mirrors that went on and on. You created a design that could be repeated, each section a mirror image of the last section.

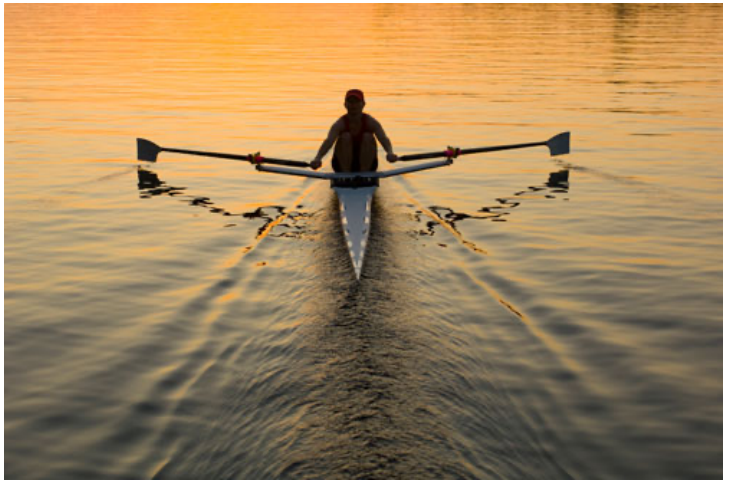
You made a pattern of symmetry!

You created a sequence of designs, each one a mirror of the last, going forward one way and going back the other way.

This could go on and on forever. But you would need a very long table and millions of blocks!

Opportunities and Possibilities

Imagine what Sascha can do with this amazing discovery. He can take his inventive mind and build amazing creations in the block area, or in drawing, or even in clay!



When a person discovers symmetry he or she can find it everywhere, in our hands and bodies, in the way you build a car and a boat, and the shape of a leaf.

With an eye for patterns one can find them in numbers, too. All of arithmetic is patterns.