



New schedules...more play...incredible learning

by Michelle Zimmer, Director

Our new schedules are giving children more uninterrupted time in our Nature Explore Classroom as well as the indoors. This newsletter documents the rich experiences that children are able to have and the wonderful learning that is happening. Research is showing that children need extended time to play and we are finding that our new schedules are providing this for children. A New York Times article states:

“During the school day, there should be extended time for play. Research has shown unequivocally that children learn best when they are interested in the material or activity they are learning. Play — from building contraptions to enacting stories to inventing games — can allow children to satisfy their curiosity about the things that interest them in their own way. It can also help them acquire higher-order thinking

skills, like generating testable hypotheses, imagining situations from someone else’s perspective and thinking of alternate solutions.

A classroom like this would provide lots of time for children to learn to collaborate with one another, a skill easily as important as math or reading. It takes time and guidance to learn how to get along, to listen to one another and to cooperate. These skills cannot be picked up casually at the corners of the day.” (Playing to Learn by Susan Engel: Published: Feb. 1, 2010, New York Times.)

We know that in our busy everyday routines, sometimes it is hard just to figure out when to sneak in dinner. Take a moment to stop and consider what your days and evenings look like and if you are providing extended time for your child to explore, investigate, imagine and enjoy the wonders of childhood.

Budding artists use dots and lines in creations

by Donalynn Katt

We read the book **The Dot** in which the main character, Vashti, realized that everyone can be an artist even if all you can do is make a dot or a line! This book encouraged the children to look for dots and lines within their environment at preschool.

We first looked around our small group room and found many dots and lines. Poppy found a dot at the end of a straw and then exclaimed, “A straw has a line and a dot!” Carson found dots and lines around the bulletin board, which was a border. Holding up a lid Ben told the group it was a big dot and Kenzie pointed out the dots on the ends of the Lincoln Logs.

We ventured outside to see what other dots and lines we could find. Leighton found many lines encasing the bricks on the building, the mortar. Henry found a stick and told me it was a line, as he held it and examined it, he discovered that there was a little dot at the end of the stick. Logan found dots in the bird feeder, (the seeds) and the small eaten out parts of a leaf made negative dot space. Graham took his investigation to the sidewalk. He found that the tiny little sand pebbles were dots cemented together. He

also discovered the bubbles that were in the cement, that popped while setting, made holes that looked like dots.

More observations were shouted out as we walked around the church:

Poppy: “My eye is a dot.”

Graham: “When I smile there is a line.”

Logan: “Our head is a big dot.”

Kenzie: “My belly is a dot.”

Henry: “Arms and legs are long lines.”

Leighton: “The bells on the tower are dots.”

Jordan: “Zero, zero, one are two dots and a line to make 100.”

Ben: “The wheels and lights on the cars are dots.”

Carson: “There are so many lines and dots, Mrs. Katt.”

On Thursday the dot painters were brought out with each child having one color, which he or she used and then passed it to their neighbor until everyone got to use all the colors. At first we tried to make a certain amount of dots for each color but this only worked for a short time before many were just enjoying making dots! We will be making lines to connect our dots next week.

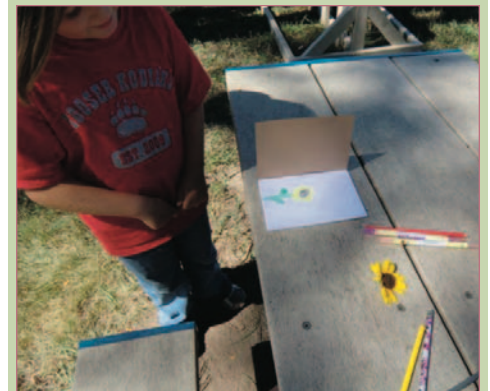
NEFC meets at Spring Creek

by Chris Kiewra, Outreach Liaison

The Nature Explore Families’ Club met at Spring Creek Prairie on a gorgeous September Saturday morning. We meandered through the prairie initially looking for shapes because that is something many children are interested in at school right now. It didn’t take long though for insects to steal the show! Children armed with colored pencils and nature journals sketched away making notes on intriguing things they noticed... colors, flowers, bees, spider webs, and grass taller than themselves...



The prairie is a gift for all of us lucky enough to live here, so take the time to go explore! Spring Creek Prairie and Pioneers Park are two close places to enjoy this fall!



Windstorm brings favorite tree, "Old Prickly," to the ground

by Kris Van Laningham

"Old Prickly," the pine tree south of the First-Plymouth Church building, fell down in a storm recently. When Mrs. Murdoch and I learned about the event we took the children outside to investigate. Some of their experiences from this included:

- kissing the tree goodbye
- climbing on the trunk through the branches to the top of the tree
- looking carefully at the root system that was exposed
- being amazed by seeing the tree horizontal instead of vertical.

After lunch that day, the children shared some of their thoughts and feelings about the fallen tree:

Jeremy: "I liked climbing on it."

Carly: "I liked digging dirt." (Children pushed at the dirt that was held in place by the root system.)

Owen: "I liked throwing dirt rocks by the roots."

Hudson: "I used short sticks and stopped the dirt from hitting me. I liked the branches because you could turn different ways when you're climbing."

Derek: "The tree fell down. The ground was so wiggly."

Evan: "I was climbing up. I got poked from a stick on 'Old Prickly' and he was mean...but I was just kidding, he wasn't mean. Then I went all the way to the top and I saw the bell tower and I thought I was going to fall down but I didn't."

I asked the children, "What did you like about the tree?" and Carson replied, "Climbing up it. I almost

fell two times but I didn't actually fall for real because of my hands grabbing onto the branches."

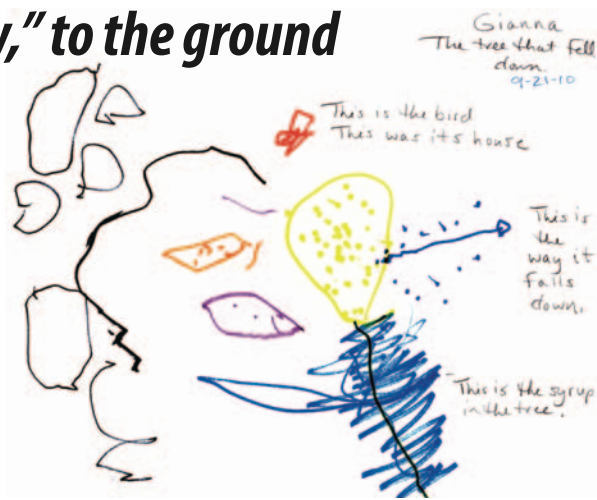
In the afternoon we went outside to see the tree being cut into pieces before it was removed from the church lawn. Ms. Logan made sure the tree trimmers created chunks of wood that we could take to our Nature Explore Classroom. They also cut some tree cookies out of the branches.

Getting the chunks of trunk to the NEC was tricky. Hudson, Ben and Mrs. V. rolled some of the chunks of wood down the sidewalk to the NEC. The wood was heavy and sticky from sap. But we used our muscles and our strong backs and feet to maneuver the trunk pieces back to the Nature Explore Classroom. It will be interesting to watch in the coming days to see how the wood is used by the children in the Nature Explore Classroom.

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by Katie Logan

When strong winds knocked down a favorite tree on the southwest corner of First-Plymouth Church, teachers and students made the discovery and proceeded to make the most of this learning opportunity.

Children climbed the length of the base of the tree, touched the sticky sap, talked about their feelings, and, later in the day, watched as the tree was cut into pieces and turned into wood chips.



Gianna pointed to the trunk and said, "I'm finding some syrup."

Drew pulled a stick across the dirt still attached to the roots, unsettling some loose particles, and said, "When I do this, some smoke comes out."

A passerby asked our group if we saw the tree fall down. "No," Bella answered, "We were gone to our houses for this event."

Later Ron the treeman arrived and agreed to salvage some parts of the trunk and branches for climbing stumps and tree cookies. Lazlo, Levi, Ben, and other friends helped me roll these items into our Nature Explore Classroom. "It's really an old tree," said Drew.

We watched as the tree was disassembled by the seven-man tree crew. "Those are tree scissors," Bella said as the chainsaw cut through branches. Ron brought the tool over to our group for a closer look.



"I think I can plant this tree again, because I have one of these," Levi said, showing me an acorn in the palm of his hand. He put it in his pocket.

Several days later, we went out to where the tree used to be, climbed on top of the dirt mound and root base that still remained, and thought about a song for the tree. We came up with a few words; mostly that we loved it, and we were sad that it was gone.

Bella improvised while I played my guitar:

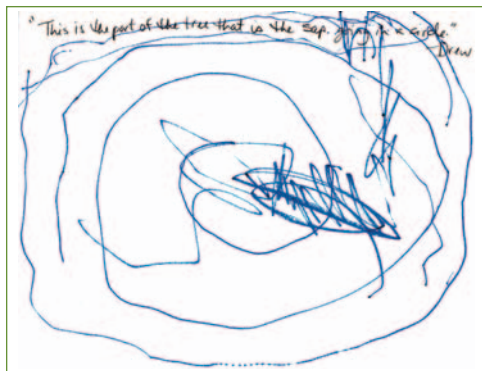
*"Tree Tree Tree
Come back alive!
Tom, Tom, Tom
Tree, I love you
Tree Tree Tree
I love you!"*

*I know you got cut down
I know you are cryin'
'Cause you got cut down
Then you got picked up
And you got turned into wood chips
I love you so much that I cried"*

Bella plainly recalled: "A truck came over here and he took the tree out. Then he came back and took out the roots."

Levi climbed atop the mound of dirt leftover and said, "This is sinking dirt."

The next week, Darci said, "Did you know, the rest of the tree is gone? It is gone. It is so gone."



Resources

Are You a Butterfly by Judy Allen and Tudor Humphries
A Chair for my Mother by Vera B. Williams
Does a Kangaroo Have a Mother Too? by Eric Carle
The Dot by Peter H. Reynolds
Goldilocks and the Three Bears
Guess How Much I Love You by Sam McBratney
I Like Me by Nancy Carlson
I Was Walking Down the Road by Sarah. E. Barchas
Jamaica Louise James by Amy Hest
More, More, More, Said the Baby by Vera B. Williams
The Relatives Came by Cynthia Rylant
Too Many Toys by David Shannon
The Very Hungry Caterpillar by Eric Carle
What Do Mommies/Daddies Do Best? by Laura Numeroff

arborday.org/explore/
arborday.org/explore/families/
communitycrops.org
springcreekprairie.audubon.org/

Children respect, value short life of butterfly

text by Holly Murdoch and Kris Van Laningham, photos by Kris Van Laningham

Bella brought a chrysalis to school from her yard. Mrs. Murdoch placed it in an aquarium for the transformation to occur. It hatched on a Monday. The excitement of the butterfly emerging from the chrysalis changed the experience of our morning at Dimensions.

Bella was excited to see the black swallowtail butterfly that Mrs. Murdoch showed her on the parsley. The children crowded around to see the beautiful black swallowtail.

Mrs. Murdoch explained that we would release the butterfly in our Nature Explore Classroom. Children asked if they could touch the butterfly but she explained that their fingers could hurt the wings and then the butterfly couldn't fly. So she suggested children could blow it a kiss goodbye. Bella willingly blew a kiss to the butterfly.



At this point Bella started crying and Mrs. Van Laningham asked her what was wrong. She replied through her tears, "I wanted to let the butterfly go in my garden." Mrs. V. looked at Mrs. Murdoch and suggested, "Why don't we walk to Bella's (two blocks from our school) and let the butterfly go?" A snack, wet wipes and communication to the other teachers completed the logistics of our trip. Bella used Mrs. Murdoch's phone to call her mother to see if the spontaneous field trip was okay with her.

Mrs. Murdoch placed the butterfly in a net for insects and everyone headed to Bella's home. Children walked in loosely formed groups and held hands as they crossed the street. Arriving at Bella's home and going into her yard was an opportunity for all the children to experience the space where Bella wanted to release her butterfly.



Bella specifically wanted to let the butterfly go in her garden area and pointed to the space she wanted the butterfly to be released. As it came out of the net it flew over the garden and up into a tree in the yard. Children watched as it flew away, tracking the path with their eyes.

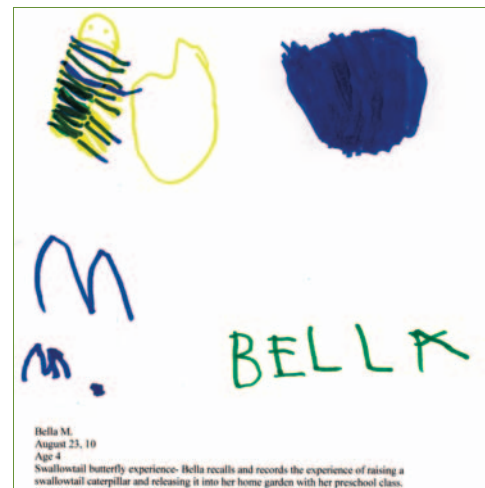
The experience of the butterfly release ended with a snack on Bella's patio of grapes and goldfish crackers. The children then played in Bella's yard (on her play structure, using badminton rackets

and birdies and looking closely at the pond with fish that Bella's family built). It was a day of connecting with nature, friends and honoring the wishes of a four year old.

The release poem the group recited as we let the butterfly go goes like this:

*Fly away, crawl away, run away, hop.
You're free to go – I'm not going to stop you
from living your life.
You deserve to be free.
Thanks for sharing this time with me.*

During Materials Exploration time Bella and Carter wrote to record and reflect the Swallowtail experience.



Toddler key experiences introduced in classroom

text and photos by Katie Mezger

Toddlers have started out the year with so many new experiences. . . from experiencing a fun and exciting new schedule to learning all of our friends' names by singing "Hickety Tickety Bumble Bee." The children are always so excited to see Hickety Tickety and to sing with him.

We have been working on colors, working with playdough, using our words to communicate with friends, dancing, singing, signing many new and fun things, and playing outside on our Nature Explore classroom.

It has been a wonderful beginning to many more fun and interesting things to come.

Skills learned:

Visual-Spatial: observing closely. (Ex. when we are in our Nature Explore Classroom the children observe all the materials closely to see what they can do with them. This is really happening when we add new toys outside and inside.)

Language/Literacy: each week we read new books in small group (*The Way I Feel*, *Brown Bear, Brown Bear*, *The Best Nest* and *The Crayon Box That Talked*). There are always new books available for the children to look at and read in the reading area. Children have also been learning new songs during music and movement time!

Naming: In the block area one day, Kale told me that his horse's name was Abby and he was very excited about it.

Telling Stories: We have been talking about families and colors and all the children love to tell stories about their weekend, or what their favorite color is.

Conversing with other children and adults: This is something that we work on every day. We talk about using our words and telling our friends what we would like to have. Cody was in the block area and wanted to use a block that Everett had so Cody asked Everett, "Could I use that block?"

Kinesthetic: Developing fine and gross motor skills. Toddler B children love to run and move. During gym, the children have been using their gross motor skills by bouncing the large



balls. They are also using fine motor skills outside in the sand box and the dirt pile.

Social/Interpersonal: learning cooperation and teamwork. Most children love to work together and some are more independent.

Resolving Problems: working on talking to each other about what has happened and talking through situations.

Learning to share: this can be hard for some children but most love to share.



Look Move Build Sketch used to explore "families"

by Kristi Reitz

We have been exploring the concept of families at Small Group Time. One concept that our program has designed in recent years is the Look Move Build Sketch concept. As we all know, children learn in different ways. Some need to see things in order to learn. Some children need to move their bodies. Others need to manipulate objects. Some will draw or 'produce' in some way to figure things out in their minds or to demonstrate what they have learned. Most children learn best by combining more than one of these methods. By using Look Move Build Sketch, we expose children to many different ways of immersing themselves in a concept so that all learn in their most fluent way. For our study of families, we spent several weeks learning in many different ways.

Look: Every morning we read a fictional book about a family. (See **Resources** pg. 3 for titles.) We also looked at photos of our own families while we told our classmates about our family.

Move: We spent two mornings 'playing family'. We used scarves in various ways to help represent the member of the family that we were playing. For example a scarf may be a tie or a belt. It could also be worn on the head or on our shoulders. Small wooden blocks and small rocks were used as our props. They became food, toys, games, etc. Another morning found us moving to the book *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* as we acted out that story. The children did a wonderful job when it was his or her turn to act out a part of the story. Every child participated, not one refused.

Build: Early in the year, after the children and I discussed what makes his or her family special, each child was given playdough and asked to show me something about their family with their playdough. The results were amazing. Donuts, bowls for cereal, a ball ... I loved seeing what each child

chose to make. Later on in the month the children manipulated or 'built' as they used small wooden blocks and small people. They built a variety of things for their 'families'. I saw houses, slides, a swimming pool, beds, a garden, even Great Wolf Lodge.

Sketch: One of the very first things that the children did was to draw a picture about their families. The results were varied. One drew an event from last year's summer vacation. One was a drawing of baking with her grandma. Some children drew faces to represent each member of their family.

A month and a half later, one of the final touches to our study has been a more formal drawing of our families. We carefully drew our families as we looked at our photos. One child even drew a new baby who had just been born.

Spontaneous play in the rain

by Kathy Tichota

As we watched the gentle rain fall outside our window, Henry suggested, "Let's go outside and catch raindrops on our tongues." So we did. No boots, no raincoats, no umbrellas. As I followed the children's lead, we lifted our faces to the sky, opened our mouths, stuck out our tongues, and caught large, warm raindrops. We watched raindrops appear as dots on our clothes, and soon our feet were drawn to puddles where we gleefully jumped and stomped and splashed. Our damp faces were smiling as we giggled and laughed. When we went indoors, we "dried" our wet arms and hair with our hands and exclaimed, "We had our morning shower!"

Sharing this joyful, magical, playful time with these nine beautiful children reminded me about how much children have to teach us adults about being in the moment!

Nature Explore® Classrooms are part of a national initiative that we are working with in partnership with the Arbor Day Foundation.

Dimensions First-Plymouth Early Education Programs is a non-profit 501(c)3.

Newsletters and Program information can be found on-line www.dimensionsfoundation.org or contact earlyed@dimensionsfoundation.org