



Even infants go outside in the winter

text & photo by Denise Topil

On a sunny day when the temperature was in the lower 20s we bundled up the babies in their coats and gloves with lots of extra blankets and ventured outside for a walk around the block. These winter adventures take extra time to gather up all the outdoor clothing and blankets needed to make sure these young children are properly attired for their outdoor experiences.

Some people might ask, "Why go to all that trouble?" One of the most important reasons we take our youngest children outdoors is that they learn best by using their senses. Even bundled up young children can feel the sun on their faces or the crisp wind blowing across their cheeks. They can smell the smoky scent of a fireplace or the pungent order of the cattle yard west of town.

The children might hear birds, dogs, airplanes or other children playing outside. They might see a bright blue sky or gray clouds. Maybe they will notice the bare branches where leaves used to be or plants that have shriveled up. They might even feel how cold the ground is or tree bark feels.

This type of multisensory learning allows children to build strong connections in their brains in order to anchor future learning. Winter outdoor excursions also continue to encourage the comfort level with the outdoor environment that we began fostering for the infants in the fall. This familiarity with the outside world provides a foundation for caring about our earth and its resources.

If this isn't reason enough to take the infants outdoors year round, think about the health benefits of fresh air and sunlight (vitamin D), of increased serotonin levels. When you look at these benefits and the learning taking place, you realize it's really no trouble at all to go outside!



Remembering the excitement and joy of giving

by Michelle Zimmer, Director

It seems to me that children are very wise. I wish I would listen to their simple and meaningful wisdom more often!

This is a follow-up to a story I did a few years ago on **Teaching the Joy of Giving**. I talked about setting up opportunities to teach our children to be gracious givers, not only during the holiday season, but any time.

In today's world it is so easy to get caught up in receiving. We need to provide opportunities for children to give in different ways. It could be time, talent or treasures; it doesn't need to be purchased. You will see their excitement, fulfillment and the deep joy that accompanies the truest sense of giving.

As the rush of the holiday season mounts, it's so important to take time to stop and realize that we aren't going to teach our children anything about the joy of the season, and especially the joy of giving, if we don't involve them in the process. Now believe me, I know that it is MUCH easier to

venture out into the hustle and bustle without a child in tow! But over the course of the years I've learned from my seven year old that he has very specific gift ideas in mind and it is best for me just to go with it.

One year I persuaded him to buy a gift for his Preschool teachers different than the one that he had chosen. (I didn't quite see the same beauty in his choice, a red polka-dot candleholder.) I could tell he wasn't terribly excited to give his teachers that gift. But he was extremely excited to give me my gift that he had gone out with his dad to pick out. As he helped me rip open the paper, he proudly held up that very same red polka-dot candleholder and said, "Isn't it beautiful?!"

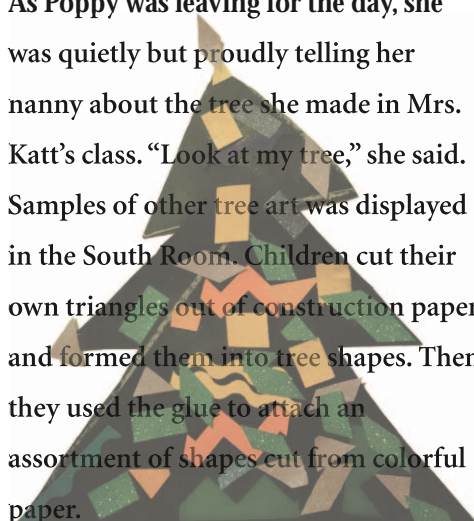


Every year for the holiday season I get that red polka-dot candleholder out and put it on my desk, and I remember that moment of pure joy, excitement and fulfillment that Caden felt when he held up that candle. It inspires me to make sure that he continues to have that joy.

Tree art brightens rooms

by Barbie Jensen

As Poppy was leaving for the day, she was quietly but proudly telling her nanny about the tree she made in Mrs. Katt's class. "Look at my tree," she said. Samples of other tree art was displayed in the South Room. Children cut their own triangles out of construction paper and formed them into tree shapes. Then they used the glue to attach an assortment of shapes cut from colorful paper.



Colors of the season

by Katie Dietz

Children in Toddler B are having a great start to the winter season! The end of fall and beginning of winter has been a colorful time to go for walks, explore in the Nature Explore Classroom, and play in the leaves around (First-Plymouth) church.



Children love to collect leaves. During a recent project they took the collected leaves, crunched them up and glued them to a sheet of paper to make unique pictures. Some of the children included the entire leaf in their picture. Everyone is also working on their fine motor skills by using their fingers to paint and manipulating markers to create pictures.



Music and Movement Time has been a fun time to work on singing skills. Some of the songs the children are singing include: **Jingle Bells**, **Frosty The Snowman**, **Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer**, and **Feliz Navidad**. Different materials such as bells, shakers, and the book **Frosty the Snowman** also help animate the songs. It is heart-warming to see the children dancing with HUGE smiles on their faces!

Key learning/skills

Visual-Spatial: observing closely

Language/Literacy: naming; telling stories... when on a walk many of our friends look for "leaf man" (from the book **Leaf Man** by Lois Ehlert). Cody picked up a leaf, put it in front of his face and said, "leaf man."

Mathematics: counting... many children love to count when they are playing. Josie was playing with the blocks outside in the NEC and I heard her recite, "one, two, three, four, five." Classifying; matching

Kinesthetic/Body Awareness: using body as a tool and learning to use tools; developing fine and gross motor skills... painting with fingers, using markers to make pictures.

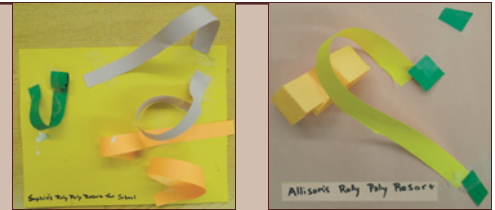
Social/Interpersonal: resolving conflict... talking about using "nice touches"

Construction: stacking; emptying and filling... in the gym we have a nature material table where children love to put acorns in small buckets and then dump them out.

Roly poly architecture

by Kris Van Laningham

Children have been learning about roly poly insects. They find them deep in the worm bin in the greenhouse. The children built with blocks around a piece of paper (making a fence) to contain their roly polys. As each child watched their roly poly carefully I listened to their comments about the way they contained the insects. Miley made a quick addition to her structure when her roly poly climbed through a hole in the mini brick. She created another barrier to keep the roly poly contained.



Ella said, "I'm making a roly poly resort!" Everyone joined in to make roly poly resorts from construction paper bases with strips of paper taped on for the insects to crawl through. Boston and Mark figured out they could connect their structures to make a larger resort for their bugs to be "friends"! It was great to listen to their ideas and comments.

Hoping for snowmen in Toddler A!

text & photos by Leah Zajicek

With a slow start to the winter season, Toddler A children have been busy learning about what keeps them warm in cold weather. Children expressed their opinions about the change to cold weather by saying "cold!" and have been reading books that show them how coats, mittens, and hats are all good choices for winter weather. With just the change in season, the children are experiencing **movement:** learning how to move and negotiate space in bulky winter gear; **time:** noticing changes in weather and season; and **social relations:** expressing emotion and communicating feelings about cold weather.

Now, all we need is some snow! During small group, the children helped decorate their room by gluing cotton balls to a big paper snowman. The children explored the cotton balls as objects that were "soft" to their hands and, of course, in their mouths. The children pointed to the snowman on the wall and exclaimed "Snowman!" throughout the day. They also read a book that showed them how snow is needed to ultimately make that perfect snowman. Bring on the snow already!



Toddler A was also introduced to a small group activity that gave them bird seed, cups, and scooping utensils. They were given the items without much direction, but without delay, all children began exploring the objects and their functions. They felt the tiny seeds between their

fingers and, of course, in their mouths. They experienced quantity and space by filling the cups with bird seed and emptying the contents to try it again, in a slightly different way. Blake said, "It's a pink one!" after noticing some pink seeds in the mix. They experienced sense of self while solving problems.



Maciek solved his problem by deciding that he wanted another cup to fill up, rather than dumping his current cup out. Soon, they all knew how they wanted to approach the dump and fill activity.

Lastly, Toddler A has been preparing for the holidays by exploring paint! Some used their brushes while others took the finger approach with red and green paint. Either way, they were able to explore the materials through touch, sight and, of course, their mouths! The children really focused by watching the paint from the brush slide onto the paper. All in all, there's been a lot of learning and playing in Toddler A!

Happy Holidays!



Hawk returns to NEC

Holly Murdoch, observer

In November a red-tailed hawk twice visited the Nature Explore Classroom. During the first visit, children's curiosity and close observation went hand-in-hand with bird field guides and pencils, paper and clipboards as they watched the hawk eat a pigeon on the roof of Dimension's office. This was a real-life lesson in how the food chain works.

Several of the children shared their thoughts with Ms. Murdoch. Oskar said, "There's an eagle on the roof. It's gigantic!" Henry chimed in, "It might be a hawk!" Lucy said, "It's eating a fish." Hudson said, "It's not a peregrine falcon." We looked up peregrine falcons in the bird guide and learned that, unlike the bird we were watching, they have sideburns.

Bella told Ms. Murdoch she saw the bird eating and then showed her how by using her fingers to mimic the bird's grasping and pulling action.

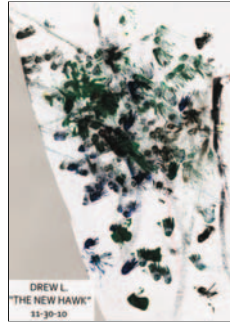
Several children sketched the bird and its prey using paper and pencils and even some of the feathers that had floated down to the ground.

Several weeks later, the red-tailed hawk was again observed in the Nature Explore Classroom with its prey, on the ground in the Climbing and Crawling

Area. After closely observing the red-tailed hawk from a safe distance, Drew was inspired to paint images with watercolor.

He cut his paper in half to help delineate his ideas. The first painting depicts, "The Hawk from Yesterday." The second painting includes hues of green. It's titled, "The New Hawk." Drew noted that some of the marks on that painting represented the hawk's footsteps.

In an effort to identify the banded hawk we have been in contact with the Bird Banding Laboratory at the Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Maryland. Eight of the nine numbers have been confirmed but they are still unable to positively identify the bird. A biologist there said not many people get a glimpse of a live, banded raptor!



Pete shows his friend Benjamin the field guide with the red-tailed hawk. Pete knows just where to find the book in the Science Area each day when he gets to school. Pete often says, "You know, I am still thinking about that hawk!" The hawk visited our NEC several weeks ago and Pete continues to check the skies regularly for a return visit and reads books to learn more about birds!

photo and caption by Chris Kiewra

Traditions important for children at Dimensions

by Barbie Jensen

The month of December is just one of the many times we share with each other how special our families are, children and teachers alike. Creating a unique hand-painted wooden decoration for our family is a tradition that has developed at First-Plymouth Dimensions Early Education Programs. The design selected this year was a snowflake.

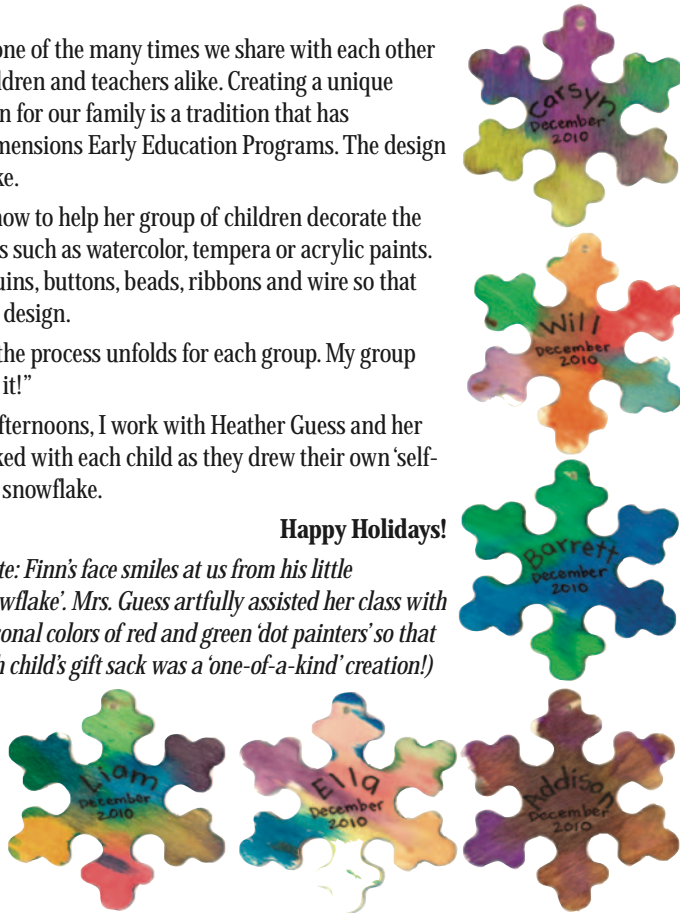
Each teacher carefully planned how to help her group of children decorate the gift for their family using options such as watercolor, tempera or acrylic paints. Teachers also offered glitter, sequins, buttons, beads, ribbons and wire so that each child could 'craft' their own design.

It is always great fun to see how the process unfolds for each group. My group mostly chose "color" and "lots of it!"

During Lunch Time and in the afternoons, I work with Heather Guess and her group. Mrs. Guess patiently worked with each child as they drew their own 'self-portrait' on a tiny white-painted snowflake.

Happy Holidays!

(Note: Finn's face smiles at us from his little 'snowflake'. Mrs. Guess artfully assisted her class with seasonal colors of red and green 'dot painters' so that each child's gift sack was a 'one-of-a-kind' creation!)



Learning to thoughtfully connect with one another

by Kris Van Laningham

One recent Sunday I walked out of church with the name of a child in my hand. It was Children's Sabbath. Each person attending was able to take home a card with a name on it (so we could pray for that child during the year). As I looked at my card I was really excited; it was the name of one of our preschool students. Knowing the child made it much more personal for me.

I am spinning this feeling of excitement into an experience for our class.

During the Thanksgiving season and throughout the winter, I am trying to find ways for the children in our group to thoughtfully connect with another child in our group. Your child randomly chose the name of a child in either my group or Ms. Murdoch's group. I encouraged you to talk about the friend your child chose and to think about something thoughtful your child could do for his/her "chosen" friend. This action might have been as simple as giving their friend a handshake or hug, drawing a picture for them, asking the child to play with them or something that would help your child connect in a new way. I hope this thread of friendship and community has been strengthened through this opportunity.

Children experience shelling corn and farming lesson

text & photos by Donalyn Katt

A recent task during small group time on the sidewalk outside our room was shelling corn off a corncob. Some of the children remembered from the year before how to twist their wrist and move their fingers around the cob to get the corn off. Other children, like Carson, tried picking kernels off one by one.

Jordan told me that it hurt her fingers so she decided to watch the rest of the children. Kenzie told Jordan, "You use your fingers to pick the seed off it like this (she used her index finger and thumb to pick a seed off the cob)." "See it doesn't hurt me." Logan tried another technique to shell his corn. He pushed his thumb on the kernels towards the empty part of the corncob.

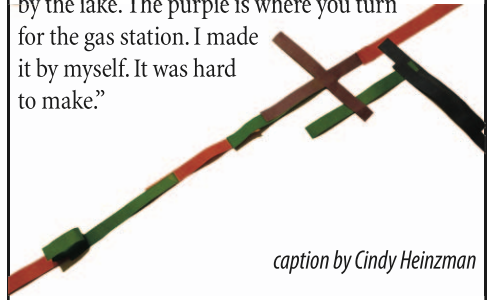
Graham experimented with his corncob and hit it on the cement. Kernels of corn flew everywhere. The children around him were shocked to see "flying corn" as Leighton called it. This brought on a commotion of activity as Ben, Leighton, Kenzie, Henry, Carson and Logan began hitting their corncob on the cement. Somebody said, "It looks like popcorn." Logan recognized that the corn kernels could hit our eyes so the children went back to picking the corn kernels off the cob except Graham, Ben and Leighton.

Since we had corn kernels all over the sidewalk, we needed to clean up. Fingers and hands were used until Henry suggested we use the corncobs as bulldozers. This worked very well and soon all the kernels were picked up or pushed off the sidewalk.

During another activity I brought in a tub of John Deere tractors, trucks, planter, plow and combine. There was a discussion on what farmers need to do when getting a field ready to plant corn, how it is harvested and what machinery is needed to do these tasks. The children were very interested in how the combine can take down the tall stalk of corn, take the kernels off and blow them into the grain tank. Then with two sheets spread on the floor the box of corn was dumped on it and the children got all the machinery on the sheet and started planting, plowing, loading, dumping and combining. At times the corn was spread from one corner of the sheet to the next and then again the children pushed all the corn to the middle to make a big pile. I witnessed a lot of sharing, persuasive discussions, and working!



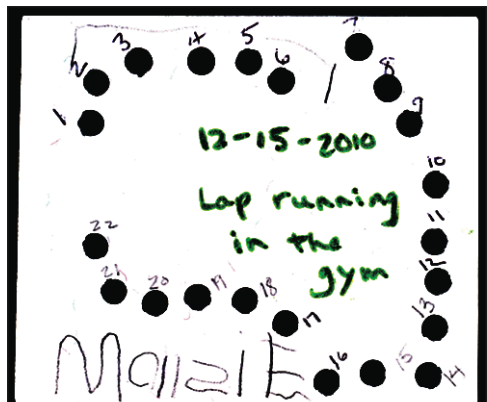
We made paper chains to decorate our Materials Exploration room. I gave the children colorful paper strips and glue sticks. Then I told them that after they made one for school they could make one to take home. This is what Reagan created. In her own words: "This is the road to Minnesota. You have to take a car. It's too far to walk. The blue is the lake. The green is the grass by the lake. The purple is where you turn for the gas station. I made it by myself. It was hard to make."



caption by Cindy Heinzman



"Circle of Hands" by children in Mrs. Tichota and Mrs. Heinzman's class.



Maizie experienced numbers, counting and large muscle movement as she ran laps in the gym. The just-turned-four-year-old had Mrs. Van Laningham count with her each time she completed a lap. Mrs. Van Laningham used a paper punch to help record the laps for Maizie.

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.

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