



Prairie Celebration

Please bring your entire family and join us as we celebrate a fantastic year full of fun and learning.

In honor of Earth Day, Arbor Day, spring and most especially our Nature Explore™ Classroom prairie, we are hosting an hour of performance art featuring the children in our Dimensions First-Plymouth Early Education Programs.

On Friday, April 25th meet us at our outdoor classroom from 6:30pm to 7:30pm and be ready to join in as we sing, dance, and drum to accompany the children as they transform into elements of the prairie through expressive art techniques and become the stars of the show. There will be a few surprise guest appearances and an opportunity to tour the amazing transformations taking place in the green house.

Every child is creating a personal drum to express their own feelings and ideas about nature and the prairie. The drums will be a featured element during the hour and we will have plenty more available for adults, too.

This is an opportunity to join our family community of Dimensions First-Plymouth Early Education Programs that you won't want to miss. Mark your calendars now and we'll see you at the celebration!

**If you are interested in being one of our surprise guest performers please contact Tina Reeble at 476-8304.*

Conference followup

By Sue Erdkamp
Operations Director

It was nice to see all the parents who made it to Parent-Teacher Conferences. It's such a wonderful time to get to know each other better and to learn more about the children as parents and teachers share observations. Thanks to everyone who attended.

Surveys have been trickling in. We truly value your input. If you have not already turned yours in, please do so as soon as possible. As we approach the end of the spring sessions, we welcome your feedback, questions and suggestions.

Together, let us continue to strive for excellence for our children!

Former student, Ben Norton, teaches children about drumming

By Tina Reeble

You may be wondering who Ben (Norton) is. To the children he is "Mrs. Reeble's friend," "a really cool guy," and "my new best buddy."

For those of us who have been around for a while, Ben is a former preschool student. He made the most memorable connection with his teacher, Mrs. Tichota and recalls special moments with her with great fondness.



Ben Norton demonstrates different drumming options.

About Ben

Ben is now a high school senior planning to spend his summer on a scholarship trip to Japan and then study languages at UNL. He is a member of the steel drum band "PANgea" and the Lincoln Southwest High School Marching Band, Jazz Band and Symphony. He is a considerate and generous young man who impressed our teachers with his poise as he spent two days of his spring break with our children.



Lou, Zachary, Quintin and Gavin try out different types of drums.

The children got to know Ben during music and movement times when he came to play drums with us. The children were completely enamored with Ben and listened as he told them about the sounds and rhythms that drums can make. We experienced several kinds of drums

and learned that drums can look and sound very different and that they come from many places all over the world. But all drums can be played to help people express how they feel.



Ben relates his passion for drumming to the children.

Drums used as a form of communication

Long ago drums were used as a way to talk to each other or tell a story. The children were excited to use their hands, bodies and drums to practice steady beat, a few simple rhythms and to communicate how they were feeling! Ben described his own experience to us.

"It feels to me that when it comes to drumming it's just a different form of expression. You don't have to tell with words, you can show feeling, the good or the bad. It's expressing myself through sound using my body and my hands; it's more than just words.

As a baby my dad listened to music and would pat me on my back. I have some kind of intuitive memory of that. Drumming for me is about feeling. It's intuitive, too, it's just inside me."

When you hear and feel the drum beat you can't help but move to the rhythm – so we sang "Funga Alafia" and danced to the beat. A few of the groups had a surprise visit from Jumpin' Kate Logan who played along on her guitar and sang for us as we

danced. In those groups we were able to compare the guitar and drum and noticed both were made of wood and had round holes where the sound came out.

Everyone has an internal beat

To end our time together, Ben helped us find our own heart beat and think about the internal beat that we each carry with us.

My parting message to the children was that all children have their very own beat – their heart beat. Just like children all over the world; their mama's heart beat is the first sound they hear as they grow in their mama's tummy. Sit and be still and feel your heart beat and know that you are connected to every other person all over the world. We are all alike and we are all different. The children of the world may look and sound different but they all started with a heart beat and we can all tell each other how we feel through the music we make. That is a beautiful thing!



Ben and Ms. Ragland help children feel their very own inner beat – their heart beat.

Ben Norton, in his own words:

I believe that the best word to describe my experience as a preschool student at Dimensions First-Plymouth Early Education Programs is "exposure."

During my time as a student I was constantly seeing new and extraordinary things every day that would otherwise seem mundane to adults. First-Plymouth was able to channel these new things I was experiencing and show me that I can make a living from these interests of mine.

For instance, on a special day in Mrs. Tichota's class I got the pleasure of going to the Lincoln airport with her and experiencing the planes up close. She knew I loved planes and gave me, at an early age, exposure to them. At the end of that day, we made a book of the pictures we took when we were there and I got the honor of adding some more illustrations. That experience fuels my love for aviation to this day and I still have that book.

As far as drumming is concerned, I always played drums with my grandpa and my dad, so my drumming abilities probably started at home but evolved when I entered First-Plymouth. During play time, we were free to make choices

on which activity we wanted to participate in. So, when we'd all sit down and the teacher would give us our choices, I knew that I was probably going to want to play with the toy planes or drum on some pots and pans. These choices were really revolutionary to me because I didn't have to do the same thing as everyone else and could express myself doing what I chose to do.

I remember seeing a lot of "first" things at First-Plymouth. For example, First-Plymouth was the first time when I really learned about how books fuel the mind. When we'd study authors, like Eric Carle,

the teachers gave us the understanding that he did this for a living and it was what he wanted to do with his life. By being happy doing what he was doing, he made others happy reading his books and gazing upon his illustrations. That was an epiphany to me. I soon realized that I could be anything I wanted to be when I became an adult. So, instead of just playing with toy planes or playing pots and pans, I chose to immerse myself in new and different activities so I could gain a larger understanding of all the different kinds of things I could be interested in.



Drumming with Ben Norton was a very positive experience for all the children and it made a lasting impression on them. Anna remembered when Ben sat on the drum and played, and Andrew remembered his favorite drums.

Two of the thank you cards the children made for Ben are pictured here.

contributed by Katie Sharp



Infants love the dirt – especially when it comes inside!

by Denise Topil, Kris Sieckmeyer-Hajny and Joleen Podtburg

When it's too muddy or cold out for our youngest friends to experience nature outdoors, a Texture Table is the perfect solution for bringing the outdoors in! Add a couple of shovels of dirt, some red wigglers (worms), scoops and containers, and the recipe is complete for infants to explore a little bit of nature. Using a Texture Table for this experience allows the older infants to stand and participate in the play. Even those not yet walking can use the table for support while they scoop and dig!

Why do we love playing in dirt?

Dirt offers a multi-sensory activity. Carson and Teddie are able to feel the textures and smell the scent of the earth. Ruyter and Jack



Miss Joleen and Miss Denise assist the infants around the Texture Table (l-r: Miss Joleen, Carson, Teddie, Allison, Jack and Miss Denise)

can visually explore what is in the dirt (and sometimes taste it). Children in the infant room are in a developmental stage where sensations like tasting or feeling things in their mouths is a large part of their exploration. (We are vigilant to provide safety within these experiences and try to keep consumption to a minimum.)

When gathered around the Texture Table with teachers and each other, children work on developing social awareness by sharing the limited space and materials with friends. They develop a sense of pride in selecting their own activities and doing things

independently.

The children also engage in both verbal and non-verbal communication. For instance, Allison backed away from the texture table when shown a worm; another time she said “unh, unh” and shook her hand to remove the worm that had been placed there. The children are exposed, too, to early math concepts such as weight, volume, density; and to nature awareness of living animals, soil, plants and seeds — all of this comes from dirt!

The simple act of bringing dirt inside provides a rich environment for learning for young and old (and don't forget to use the dirt outside for learning experiences as well).



Carson picks up a red wiggler worm. Teddie examines the dirt while Allison discovers a red wiggler.

Infant/Toddler arbor damaged, needs replacement

The arbor on the Infant/Toddler Nature Explore Classroom has been damaged beyond repair by the wind.

The arbor, which connected the two planting boxes, was covered with a beautiful vining plant last summer. The plant produced striking purple flowers and interestingly shaped bright purple colored seed pods.

The children enjoyed tending to the plant and watching it grow to maturity. The process provided exposure to the life cycle of a plant.

The children used plant and color identification skills. The children also engaged their gross motor skills to harvest the pods.

The arbor created a quiet space for the infants and toddlers and became their secret garden.

Estimated replacement cost of the arbor is \$50-\$75. If you would be interested in contributing toward a new arbor contact Theresa Frey or call the office at 476-8304.



Toddlers nurtured the vining plant on the arbor during the heat last summer.

Toddler B children find their beat!

by Kristine Roit

After exploring rhythm during music and movement time, and taking music to our Nature Explore Classroom, music and rhythm also came to our Block Area.

We have been spending quite a bit of time imagining with sticks after reading *Not A Stick*. The children made trains and planes and trumpets and combs before striking up a band in the Block Area.

Friends were singing into “microphones,” playing pianos, drums and even guitars, all by using blocks of wood or sticks and their imaginations. It is amazing how something as concrete as a stick can turn into so many abstract ideas. Encourage your child's imagination to grow!



Mac, Keenan, Charlie, Rory, Henry and Helen make their own music using materials in the Block Area.

Wildlife captivates, educates children

by Kris Van Langingham and Holly Murdoch

Mrs. Murdoch has been working diligently on attracting birds to the window by the South Room.

Thank you to Anthony and his grandmother (the Bockelman's) for the gift of a beautiful birdbath for our school. The birdbath is located by the bird feeder outside of the South Preschool classroom window. Cardinals, juncos, house finches and sparrows have been viewed at close range.



Mrs. Murdoch found out that the sound of water attracts birds, so she used a tall plastic container and had children help make a hole in the bottom. They filled the container with water. The children realized the water poured out of the hole instead of dripping. The children thought about the problem and decided to add sand to the bottom of the container to try to slow the water down. The “scientists” poured sand from the sand box into the bottle, added water and realized that the water became very dirty. Katie and Lauren then dictated the following to Mrs. Van Langingham:

Katie: We put sand in the cup.

Lauren: We put water in it so the water can drip.

Katie: There was dirt in the water. Then we saw if we poured it (the water) out, there's clear water left!

Lauren: Then there's sand left to drip and the birds will hear it drip and we're going to hang it up.

The two girls washed the sand

over and over by filling and stirring and dumping. They worked about 20 minutes on the project. You can see the finished project hanging over the bird bath

by the South Room window!

Thank you to the Wild Bird Habitat Store for supporting our efforts to connect children to nature. The store donated a wonderful, quality feeder made of recycled materials along with safflower seed to attract cardinals and chickadees. They also gave a generous discount on realistically detailed plush birds. Each bird makes its own beautiful bird call when gently squeezed. The store, located at The Alamo, 56th & Hwy 2, is a fun destination for families interested in enjoying backyard birds.



Infants enjoyed playing under the arbor this past summer.

Photos by Theresa Frey, Kris Sieckmeyer-Hajny, Beth Pauley, Tina Reeble, Kristine Roit and Denise Topil

Nature Explore™ Classrooms are part of a national initiative involving the partnership of Dimensions and the Arbor Day Foundation.

Newsletters and Program information can be found on-line ...
www.dimensionsfoundation.org or www.firstplymouth.org