

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

Children Discover the Variety in Nature at Dimensions

Summer Sessions continued in a whirl of activity on and around the Nature Explore Classroom™ this week at Dimensions...

Infant/Toddlers

The Toddlers were very busy exploring with items in nature this week.



We went on nature walks to collect treasures that come from trees. We collected many leaves, sticks, acorns, and pinecones. Then, we discovered different ways of using our treasures.

We saw that some of the leaves made shapes. "I found a heart shape," said Avery very enthusiastically. Some also noticed letters in nature. "I found the letter 'Y,'" said Ava as she picked up a small stick.

We were inspired to look for letters in nature after reading the book, "Discovering Nature's Alphabet" by Krystina Castella and Brian Boyl.



The children had a "stick-y" day all around as they used glue to create nature collages of sticks and other items shaped like the first letter of their names.



Our infants experienced the Nature Explore Classroom™. Whether it was playing the marimba, being in the dirt or relaxing on a bench, they

independently picked out activities to enjoy. Teachers focused on the differences between "sun" and "shade" and smells outside. Infants also discovered outdoor smells while they were inside by exploring recycled plastic bottles filled with dirt, grass, flowers and more!

Preschoolers

We were busy this week preparing our planting area by pulling out roots and turning over the soil. It was hard work, but by working together, we got our spot ready for planting our flowers.

Children chose the flowers they wanted to plant. Petunias, begonias, impatiens, coleus and vinca are now in the beautiful flower garden. We put straw around the flowers and gave them each a drink.



Kindergarten – First Grade

One of our Small Group activities discussed "What is a Habitat?" Here are some of the ideas the children had about roly poly habitats:

Preston said habitat means a: "Highly advanced way to say home." It is "A home well done."

Madeleine "Do we need a roof?" "We'll return them to their natural habitat."

Christian D's choice was a red wiggler. He built a rectangle frame around the worm.

Zach got two tall arched blocks "I'm making the Eiffel Tower" he said as he placed the roly poly inside his house.

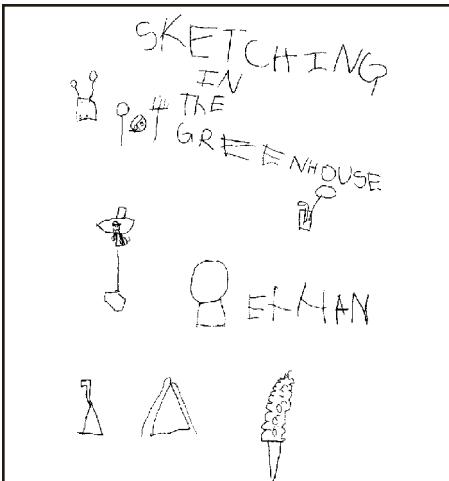
What if they have babies? Brody said "They'll be roly littles."

One of our days this week was spent loosening soil... then we planted begonias, zinnias, day lilies, cat mint, moss roses, oak leafy drangea bushes, rudabeckia, coral bells and hostas.



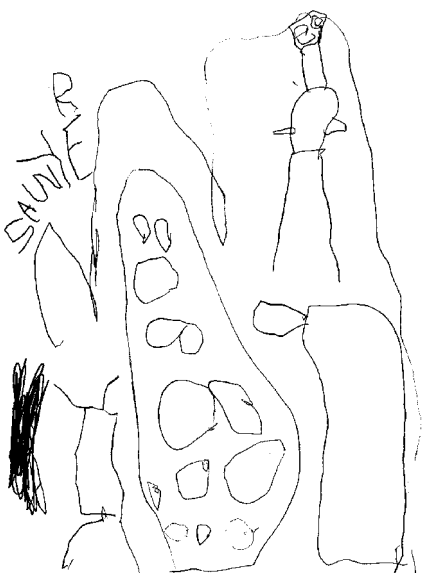
During Greeting Time, we did a pantomime to music. First we were seeds, then we became roots and finally we turned into plants. The children took turns guessing the plants that were pantomimed.

(cont.)



"Greenhouse Garden" Session

This week has been all about discoveries in nature! Children have been touching, smelling, seeing, tasting, and experiencing all the joys of nature while they enjoyed spending time in our greenhouse and walking the pathways of our garden. As they observed closely, they discovered insects, worms and beautiful flowers. As they planted, sketched and created nature art, they were inspired by all that the natural world has to offer. From delicious snacks to interesting nature-related books and stories, a world of natural wonders was waiting for them to explore at Dimensions this week.



A sketch of plants in the greenhouse by Sawyer, age 4 1/2.

Carson B. (after digging in very dense soil with a big shovel on the Nature Explore Classroom™): "I like this, I could do it all day. I could plant plants all day."

K-1st Group

(cont.)



Later, we closely observed various types of flowers at the art table and sketched them. We then created our own garden in the block area by building from the sketches. When we went outside to the Nature Explore Classroom™ everyone found something to sketch that caught their eye. Bailey sketched a footprint. Carson B. sketched corn stalks.

Wednesday we all walked to the Sunken Gardens. Mrs. White sketched landmarks in advance so that the children could point them out as we walked. At the



Gardens the children explored and each chose an object to sketch.

Nature Explore Classroom™ Shared with Youth from McPhee

Second – Fifth Grade

One of the highlights of the week for this group was a visit from the McPhee Elementary Summer Programs. They are the closest summer program to us and a Nature Explore Classroom™ pilot site.

Judy Thietje brought two groups to the Dimensions First-Plymouth Early Education Nature Explore Classroom™ to enjoy what our children are fortunate to experience every day. She noted that most of the children who visited had never seen a greenhouse before.



The older children paired off with those from McPhee and shared their knowledge of the Nature Explore Classroom™, including naming many of the plants and inviting the visitors to use their senses to smell and touch plants like Lamb's Ear.

The Three Sisters mound of corn, green

beans and squash was explained by one guide in this way: Corn, beans and squash help each other. The beans grow up the corn stalks and provide nutrients. The squash makes sure the water doesn't go to waste.



The greenhouse continually had clusters of children inside, either planting pumpkins, beans or watermelon seeds to take back with them, or, digging in the worm bin.

Many of the visitors were hesitant at first to touch the worms and roly polys. It wasn't long, though, before children were collecting worms from the worm bin and watching roly polys open up in their palms.



We hope to have McPhee visit us again!

Nature Explore Classroom™ Digging Space Project Continues to Evolve

Based on a conversation with Eve DiMagno and Cady Gallagher (middle school volunteers)

The digging space project began two years ago when Eve DiMagno, Cady Gallagher and Nic Torracco decided they wanted to work on a "cool project" together. (Eve and Nic have been a part of the Early Education programs since they were young, and Cady has been volunteering during the summer for the past two years.) They thought it would be cool to "have this completely, sort of linear, cubic space, and then have this sort of like wavy puzzle piece pattern." A brick bordered digging space was created in summer 2005 but Eve, Cady and Nick are continually refining it. This summer they want to add a cedar lattice arch to "mix it up a bit, to make it more abstract, because nothing in nature is a cube." Their goal is for the space to be colorful and "non-conformist." Cady said "What pushed us to do more this year was that no one was really using it and



we're like 'Well, why is that? What can make it better?'" So they did a little "digging" to find out why. The children told them the quality of the dirt (high clay concentration) made it hard to dig and the space was really hot in the full sun. Eve and Cady are soliciting donations of dirt and sand to change the texture of the soil and hope the lattice arch will provide shade.

Their goal is for the digging space to be a place

where children can get dirty. Eve said "there is this little toddler mechanism, 'dirt, let's go jump in it, let's rub it in our hair, let's dig for worms'."

Cady added, "You want to give them that opportunity because once you get a little older it's not really socially acceptable to just dig in the dirt. So that's why we need to let them get the best of it. While they are allowed to."

Cady continued "It makes us appreciate kids more. Not just the digging project but their whole experience here. It allows you to see how they interact with each other and how they interact with nature. And what works for them and what doesn't. Which is really where we got most of our ideas from. Because that was just a big open space and so they weren't really inclined to go dig in it. And once we put the digging area in, it showed them that that was an opportunity for them... that it would be a good thing to do.

"Digging in the dirt is like a treasure hunt. You're digging in there and you'll say 'Oh, look., I found a bug' and everybody comes to look at

your bug. You let the bug go and you can find it again tomorrow. It's all new," Eve said.

"I think it's so cool that the children are so into it and that we help them get so into it. It's just a really great feeling," replied Cady.

Eve and Cady have been seeking donations to refine the digging space. Donations include dirt and sand from Stinson's Ace Hardware (27th & E Sts.); paint and stain from True Value Hardware (56th & Hwy 2); and mulch from QP Ace (70th & Vine Sts.). Additional donations are welcome.



Summer Sessions Bookshelf

Discovering Nature's Alphabet by Krystina Castella and Brian Boyl

Have You Seen Trees? by Joanne Oppenheim

Staff Birthdays

Theresa Frey.....	June 30
Nancy Rosenow.....	July 1
Cami Burchett.....	July 7
Barb Jensen.....	July 15
Denise Topil.....	July 21
Kathy Tichota.....	July 22
Tara Hild.....	August 7
Kristi Reitz.....	August 13
Chris Dickhaut.....	August 16
Sue Erdkamp.....	August 17
Ann Watt.....	August 19