

## Why Is Small Group Planning So Important To Us?

By Ann Watt, Art Specialist

In our last newsletter, we shared some of the experiences your children were having with “dots and lines”. So what is this all about, you wonder? Here is some information about your child’s day and our Small Group planning.

The beginning of a school year can be overwhelming to young children. During the past month they have been getting to know their teachers, adjusting to a new environment, adapting to a new routine, and meeting new friends. To keep things as simple as possible, while at the same time engaging children in enjoyable activities, we developed a Small Group curriculum plan that follows a particular concept for a length of time.

Small Group Time is the part of the daily routine during which teachers provide children with new experiences, such as exploration of clay or paint. They also introduce children to new materials that they will find in the rooms during Work time. Activities follow the “Look, Move, Build, Sketch” model to assure that a variety of learning experiences are provided. The goal is to help children develop critical thinking skills. Above all, it is important to keep things simple and age-appropriate and

to make sure children are actively engaged in enjoyable activities.

Each of our plans is centered on a particular school-wide concept or focus for teachers to follow. Focus themes are line, shape, form, color, texture, and space. The focus is the same for about two weeks and acts as both anchor and springboard as new concepts are introduced over time. After all the concepts have been introduced the sequence is repeated with all new experiences.



Teacher Laurie Flynn takes her group on a Shape Walk around the church grounds. The children are finding lines and circles. Regan noticed a rectangle pattern in the sidewalk.

Following a concept such as dots and lines or having a continuous focus over a long period of time provides the following benefits:

- Children are able to process information more fully.
- Because the focus remains constant and familiar, children can accept more readily the variety of new materials and experiences that are introduced within a short period of time.

- The shared vocabulary and experiences that emerge from having a common theme eventually contribute to the development of a school culture.

We have chosen focus themes based upon the elements of art and design because they follow a logical progression of concepts and present materials and a vocabulary found in other domains of learning and development such as math, science and literacy.

Children develop an understanding of concepts and make connections across disciplines. For example, in exploring the relationship between dots and lines children have been using not only art materials such as markers, crayons, watercolors, and oil pastels, but they have also been exploring body movement and music. They have closely observed nature while looking for dots and lines during outdoor walks, while working in the greenhouse, and as they explore the outdoor classroom. They have practiced their fine-motor skills as they formed dots and lines using pegboards and blocks. They have practiced early literacy skills by twisting pipe cleaners into letters of the alphabet and using their fingers



As children walked through the arches on the church grounds they excitedly shaped their bodies into arches. Henry used his feet and hands to help his body make an arch. Then he created another arch from a standing position.



to trace letters and other shapes in the air while their teachers read books such as Harold and the Purple Crayon and The Dot.

This integrated curriculum plan is designed to help children explore and acquire the key concepts in ways that are comprehensible and accessible for their age. As teachers provide many opportunities for children to plan, think about, reflect on, and revisit their own experiences, they increase children’s ability to make connections over time. This is the basis for critical thinking skills and creative thinking.



Anthony “built trees” on the Nature Explore™ Classroom. First he poked a stick through leaves. Then he used tree blocks to build. Inside the classroom Anthony taught his friends how to draw. He said “First draw grass. Next draw a straight line up and then draw ‘hump bumps’ on top.” Anthony knows trees!

from Chris Kierwa

### Toddler B

Toddler B friends are learning all about lines... lines we can see, lines we can touch and lines we can make or draw. We also learned that when lines bend, they become shapes. Toddlers looked for circles using their “shape finders” (a paper tube) and they sketched the shapes they made with chenille stems. Our story time books, Harold



Rory used a straight pipe cleaner to create a bracelet shape by bending it around his arm.



Ella uses her “shape finders.”

things. Next week we’ll look for squares and rectangles.

We even use a fun song and game, “The Circle” by Hap Palmer, during our music and movement time to help reinforce the round shape of a circle. We will be exploring all sorts of shapes in the upcoming weeks. You can explore at home by helping your child find circles in everyday things around your house and yard. You’ll be surprised at how many you find.

Sign language is off to a great start, too. Teachers often use ASL (American Sign Language) during story time and music. We

are learning the signs for animals and colors as our group reads Brown Bear, Brown Bear. (The signs we use can all be found at [lesstontutor.com](http://lesstontutor.com))

Contributed by Amy Jensen, Theresa Frey and Chris Kierwa



Andrew sketches the shape he made with his chenille stem.

# Preschool Groups Have Been Busy...

We have been busy learning...  
 ...each other's names with the help of Hickety Tickety bumblebee  
 ...how to work and play together and be kind friends  
 ...about dots and lines, and that they are everywhere—even letters are made of dots and lines  
 ...to move our bodies through space at different levels and to stop and start

...about words and letters and the sounds that begin our names  
 ...how to listen when a friend is telling a story  
 ...some Sign Language  
 ...about the life cycle of a butterfly (as Savannah told us that is called "metamorphosis")  
 ...how to be close observers.

Because we are young children, we learn through experiences, and our learning takes place indoors and outdoors. We spend at least 75 minutes every day in our Nature Explore Classroom, and we are discovering the awe and wonder of nature. We are learning, to love the earth and to be kind and gentle with all living things.

I interviewed children about what they like about our Nature Explore Classroom. Here are some of their responses:

"I sit on the log, and sing the froggy song." Avary

"I like to play outside with Sawyer in the muddy place." Connor

"I like to play in the sandbox. I make sand castles." Henry

"I like to go to the garden. I walk around on the pathway." Jena

"I like to play games outside with Sophie." Jessie

## Bookshelf

*Soft Shapes* published by Innovative Kids

*Active Minds Shapes* published by Publications International

*Nature Walk* by Douglas Florian

*Harold and the Purple Crayon* by Crockett Johnson

*Brown Bear, Brown Bear* by Eric Carle

*Straight Line Wonder* by Mem Fox

*Round and Round* by Cana Hoban

*The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown

*The Dot* by Peter H. Reynolds

*I Love Mud and Mud Loves Me* by Vicki Stephens

"I like to play in the Messy Area."

Kai

"I play with Kai in the Messy Area. We play pirates." Nolan

"I like the garden. I like to smell the flowers." Savannah

"I like the Messy Area. I play there with Connor." Sawyer

"I like to eat tomatoes from the garden." Sophia

contributed by Kathy Tichota

We have had a great week together. The children are still looking for lines and dots around us. We practiced cutting paper strips (the important thing about cutting is to put your thumb in the little hole). We used our ideas with strips and tape to make artwork filled with dots and lines. Cooper cut black strips of paper and chose a black background to glue on, so he had to use colored paper to highlight his black strips. Katie used her shapes to make a face and Gavin framed his paper with dots.

Mrs. Murdoch used the Block Area with our class to pretend they were on the prairie. (We will be visiting Spring Creek Prairie, an 808-acre tallgrass prairie nature center near Denton.) We will continue to do things to support learning about the prairie.

Gina, Gavin and Lauren had umbrellas on Monday so we took a walk around the block in the rain. Gina saw a spider web that was covered in raindrops. We could hear the rain dropping on our umbrellas and saw puddles. The sound of the train from the zoo was easy to hear! If we have another rainy day we will do it again. (On rainy days if you have an umbrella please send it with your child or if you're willing to donate an umbrella, we will keep it at school.)

The three pass-around books highlighting your children and their lives will begin making the rounds this week. "The Important Book" has been the model for our pass-around books. This book shares why different things are important. (For example, the important thing about rain is that it is wet. It falls out of the sky and makes things shiny.)

contributed by Kris Van Laningham

## Pancake Breakfast Reminder

We are sending home a Pancake Breakfast postcard with each child...feel free to use this to invite a friend or family member!

Our pancake breakfast (with fun pancake toppings) and garage sale is September 29, 8:30-11AM. This will be a great way to find a "new" toy or outfit for your child(ren).

Mark your calendars for this fun chance to get to know other parents and enjoy a low-key morning with your family.

## Infant Room

Our focus has been on shapes. We've been on nature walks where we blew bubbles (circle shapes) and dug in the dirt. Hudson pointed at squirrels and birds. They made him squeal and smile. We looked for dots, lines and shapes in nature. Jake said "Dot, dot, dot!"



Lazlo and Jake look at shapes created on a geoboard.

Small Group time has been spent experiencing ring stackers, shape makers, and painting with sponges. We've explored magnetic parquet blocks, geo boards and using dry erase markers on small and large mirrors. We looked at shapes and how our faces are shaped.

During Music and Movement Time we used rhythm sticks and danced around to the "Stop and



Bella explores a puzzle.

Go" song:

Well, you WALK and you WALK  
 And you WALK and you STOP  
 And, you WALK and you WALK  
 And you WALK and you STOP  
 And, you WALK and you WALK  
 And you WALK and you STOP  
 And, you WALK and you WALK  
 And you WALK and you STOP

We have also **looked** at squirrels, mirrors and books; **moved** by dancing to music, using rhythm sticks and outlining shapes in books with our fingers; **built** with stacker toys (putting rings on a pole), geoboards and magnetic parquetry shapes; and, **sketched** on mirrors and used sponges to paint different shapes.

contributed by Jolene Podtburg, Denise Topil and Kris Sieckmeyer-Hajny



Toddlers patiently wait to release the hatched butterflies back into nature.

## Toddler A

Our mornings were spent outdoors tracing lines on the bricks with our fingertips and making curved lines (like bridges) with our bodies. As we sat on the sidewalk finding up and down and side to side lines, we enjoyed feeling the warmth of the sun on our faces. We also went on a journey through the Nature Explore Classroom garden path. Snail Trail and

Nature Walk are books that we have enjoyed reading.

The butterflies emerged from their chrysalises September 1. The following Wednesday, the children met the butterflies and noticed their dots and lines. That Friday, the butterflies fluttered around the classroom and at the end of the day we released them back to nature.

contributed by Joy Ritchie, Chris Dickhaut and Kathy Perry

Photos contributed by Theresa Frey, Joy Ritchie, Beth Pauley, 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](http://www.dimensionsfoundation.org) or [www.firstplymouth.org](http://www.firstplymouth.org)