



2017-18 Curriculum Report

December 2017

Marisa Campbell and Elisa Rosenwinkel

Community and Daily Routines

In the nursery, our learning follows the model of an emergent curriculum; our inquiries develop out of student interests and wonderings. An emergent curriculum is described by Susan Stacey (2009) in her text *Emergent Curriculum in Early Childhood Settings* in this way:

- While framed by the teacher, it is child initiated, allowing for collaborations between children and teachers, and giving everyone a voice.
- It is responsive to the child, thereby allowing teachers to build upon existing interests.
- In its practice, the teacher takes on the role of facilitator, taking what she sees and hears, and bringing to children the opportunity to discover more, dig deeper, and construct further knowledge.
- It is flexible in that curriculum planning, rather than being done well in advance, is constantly developing. Curriculum is dynamic, neither stagnant nor repetitive.
- It allows children's learning and teacher's thinking to be made visible through varied forms of documentation.
- It builds upon the recognized theorists in our field: the work of Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky supports the philosophy of emergent curriculum.

The ways in which these principles come to life are unique to each group of nursery learners, and allow us to work together in a dynamic way to meet both the interests and the needs of the children individually and as a group. The first three months of school have been a delight as we've begun to form our new nursery community. Our days are structured to allow ample time for independent play, the generator for all learning, as well as times to gather together to share stories, play games, and explore ideas in greater depth. During choice time learners discover how to become engaged in work and play, and through their experiences, they develop self-regulation and discover how they learn best, including choices about whether to work inside or outside, for how long, and when to stop to have snack. After cleaning up together, we read a story that connects with our interests and questions. At the center of our day is inquiry time, in which half of the group explores an idea or concept of interest in greater depth, in a focused and hands-on manner, while the other half of the group is learning with one of our specialists (and then we switch). After inquiry we eat lunch, transition to rest time, where children either nap, or practice the art of playing quietly and independently. After rest we play outside again and on some days we gather for a closing meeting or sing with Diego and the

kindergarten before going home. It is delightful and surprising to see how quickly the children have learned the schedule and found their own rhythms and routines within the structure of the day.

While below you will see that we describe the social emotional, literacy and math learning that we are exploring on their own, it is worth noting that they are most frequently are happening concurrently in our work and play, given context and meaning by the children themselves.

Social Emotional Learning

The process of becoming a community starts with playing side-by-side, and in the daily rituals of gathering as a group to talk, play, and eat. Each day begins with morning meeting, it is a chance to come together and talk and explore. As Tom Hobson (2017) says, we have morning meeting "not because we need children to practice being in meetings, but rather because there are certain skills required to build a democratic community, skills based in fairness and empathy." The meeting starts with a greeting, an extremely important ritual in our days together, the children select the greeting, and each child practices making eye contact and saying hello to his or her neighbors. During this time the children practice being accountable to each other and are aware of the needs of their neighbors and the group. As part of this process we use a series of clues to help the children predict who the greeter will be each day, and this provides the children with information about each other and encourages a host of literacy and math skills. For example, some of the clues we've used are the number of letters in a child's name, what the first letter of their name is, how many siblings they have, and things they like to do at school. The children are developing their knowledge about each other and about how much information they really need to discover the greeter. During meeting we also play games, sing, and share news. Some of our favorite games and songs so far this year are: The Itsy Bitsy Spider, Yellow Butter/Purple Jelly/Red Jam/Black Bread, Where is the crystal?, A Warm Wind Blows, One Potato/Two Potato (and deciding where to put our potatoes), and lots of enthusiastic freeze dance. The children have also been very involved in Elephant and Piggie puppet shows which help us think about important social issues, for example, how to include someone in play, how to share turns, and how to enter into play. The children are active in voicing their ideas for how the characters could solve their problems, and the open-ended nature of the puppet shows allows children to engage with the idea that there can be multiple solutions to a problem.

We have read many stories to support children in thinking about how to be a friend and how to be part of a community, including: *My Day, Your Day* by Robin Ballard, *Will I Have a Friend?* by Miriam Cohen, *My New Friend is so Fun*, *Happy Pig Day*, *Elephants Cannot Dance*, and *Can I Play, Too?* by Mo Willems, *Carrot and Pea* by Morag Hood, *Stick and Stone* by Beth Ferry, *Yo! Yes?* By Chris Raschka, *The Paperbag Princess* by Robert Munsch, *The Princess Knight* by Cornelia Funke, and *What a Treasure!* by Will Hillenbrand.

A big part of the work of the start of the year was developing our classroom agreements. As a group we considered "What rules should we have?" and discussed different ideas for how we should live together in the nursery. In this process children suggested rules and they were each discussed, and written down if everyone agreed it should be a rule. Some of our agreements included: no kicking, no hitting, ask someone before touching their body, and you

can get a turn by asking someone if you can use something when they are done. Because of the democratic process through which these rules were suggested, discussed, and adopted, the children demonstrate incredible ownership of the rules they have made. We hear them saying to each other, “remember, we agreed...” The classroom agreements are a living document that the children continue to add to as the year continues. These agreements inform our process of conflict resolution, which is a huge part of our social-emotional learning, in which children learn to ask and answer each other about what they need to feel better, and practice giving and receiving apologies of action. This process builds empathy, and empowers children to advocate for themselves and be an active participant in making things better.

Literacy

Our literacy curriculum derives from a collection of best practices in emergent reading and writing that are practiced in the context of the emergent curriculum. Our philosophy of literacy is rooted in the understanding that engaging, rich and inspiring interactions with others and with the surrounding world propel us to listen, speak, read, and write. We provide authentic opportunities to use these skills in work and play, and we model multiple ways to do so. Our approach to literature invites learners to delight in stories while simultaneously developing critical literacy skills. Children come to recognize their own ability to question the texts and authors, and explore intertextual relationships.

During daily picturebook read-alouds we talk together to interpret stories, make predictions and comparisons, immerse ourselves in story language, notice the parts of books, and simply fall in love with stories. The children are coming to understand books as made objects, with authors and ideas that can be responded to and questioned. For example, in reading *My Day, Your Day*, the children noticed that there were parts of our day that were absent from the story, and so they set out to add pages showing going in the door, snack time, and going home. We explored the rhythm and cadence of language through chants and fingerplays, poetry, songs and nursery rhymes.

As literacy starts with ourselves, a great deal of letter study happens through exploration of our names. Students have searched for their own name in many parts of the classroom, helped sort the names by starting letters, looked at each others’ names and discovered similar letters, and made connections between letters and sounds. The children are developing the powerful understanding that what you say can be written down, and they continue to refine this understanding through reading and adding to the morning message at meeting, having their text transcribed during journal time, and through making stories and writing mail during writer’s workshop. We are supporting the children in the process of writing their names, and noticing, isolating and transcribing the sounds in words. Daily opportunities to write and draw are available at the art table, in rest journals, at the easels, in booklets, and in clipboards that can go anywhere. Learners are encouraged and supported to use writing in their play, and they have created many restaurant menus and signs for their structures so far.

Math

Math is a way of seeing the world, of noticing particular qualities of the things around you and trying to make sense of them. We practice counting with one-to-one correspondence to figure

out how many children are at school and we are refining the understanding that it is important to count each object in a group just one time to know the true total. The children explore pattern by making patterns using attributes of our clothes to find seats at meetings, for example, “if you’re wearing stripes, sit down next to someone who is not wearing stripes.” Each morning we solve an equation using our fingers to model how many minutes until meeting, for example, 2+2 minutes until meeting. A significant part of our math explorations has involved comparing quantities using representative marks and graphing. We’ve voted to decide our half-group names and what foods we should cook, and the children are becoming familiar with multiple ways to visualize and analyze data. Block play and exploration has also been an essential part of our math explorations, children are describing and comparing attributes, exploring symmetry, balance, and shape. There is so much we can explain about the world using the language of math.

Inquiry and Play

The children’s play and questions propel our study, inform our selection of texts and materials and experiences and questions. To begin the year it is always informative to begin with open-ended materials that invite children to layer their own meanings upon them in work and play. Blocks were a natural starting point this year, and through block play we saw the children making a variety of structures including: houses, beds, jails, restaurants, grills, baby cribs, and tall towers. In their outdoor play we observed a great deal of play involving baking; children made cakes, cupcakes, super-energy muffins, and cookies. We sought to bridge these two interests, and so we invited the children to build kitchens and restaurants, using the book *Big Jimmy’s Kum Kau Chinese Take Out* by Ted Lewin for inspiration. The children used blocks, fabric, wooden cubes, and pots, pans and plates to make their restaurant come to life. They served each other, wrote and drew menus, and found there are many different ways to build an oven. We read *Eating the Alphabet* by Lois Ehlert and *Ada Twist, Scientist*, by Andrea Beaty and practiced tasting food like a scientist. We recorded our observations and created charts to show whether we did or did not like apples, dates, and radishes.

Sensing that the group might be ready to shift directions, we asked “What are some things we can build with blocks?” to generate some ideas together, and we found that most of our ideas centered on airports and planes. The children set out together to build an airport, using *Airport* by Byron Barton and *The Airport Book* by Lisa Brown as guides. They created runways, planes, luggage conveyor belts, a security checkpoint, a restaurant, and an elaborate waiting room. We invited the children to build and take on roles in the airport themselves, and children became pilots, flight attendants, builders of the jetway, and, delightfully, most of the children wanted to be involved in serving food on the airplane. Again, they made menus and served block food on plates. Seeing this interest in food was still running deep, and that their play continued to feature baking and cooking, we saw it was time to return to baking.

To enter back into the baking process, the children made popovers during inquiry and it was declared by one child that “There’s nothing better than popovers.” As we cooked and read, we developed our understanding of what recipes and ingredients are and how we can use them. Together we cooked cupcakes, apple turnovers (with help from Griffin’s mom, Laura), chocolate cake, play dough and pumpkin seeds. Several key texts in this exploration include: *Mooncake*

and *Sandcake* by Frank Asch, *Little Elliot*, *Big City* by Mike Curato, *If You Give a Cat a Cupcake* and *If You Give a Mouse a Cookie* by Laura Numeroff, *Peeny Butter Fudge* by Toni and Slade Morrison, and *The Bakeshop Ghost* by Jacqueline Ogburn. At inquiry we explored baking using play dough with knives and toothpicks, and moon sand with small tart pans. A sprinkle factory built out of hollow blocks and small cubes by a group of students inspired us to take a closer look at the sprinkle making process by watching a short video, and then making our own sprinkles using plastic bags as extruders. The whole group continues to be fascinated by sprinkle factories and has been building different ones during inquiry, demonstrating their understanding of the parts of the factory, including the conveyor belts, extruders, drying fans, and the labeling machine, and the steps in the process, and how everything works together. In a rather decisive vote, the children selected ice cream as the food to eat with the sprinkles, and it was delicious. We were also delighted to have Sylvia's mother, Tamara, come to make struffoli with us!

In the past two weeks, an interest in mail, both in writing, and delivering it, has come to the surface in the group. We built on this interest by reading *Dear Juno* by Soyung Pak and *The Jolly Postman* by Janet and Allan Ahlberg. Inspired by the book, the children received an invitation to a pajama day celebration, and we spent the day enjoying being cozy together and sipping hot cocoa! The interest in this idea and the text of *The Jolly Postman* may spark greater inquiry into mail, or into the fairy tales that are featured in the story. We'll watch and listen closely to see where their interests lead us when we return from break.