



2017-18 Nursery Curriculum Report

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Community and Daily Routines

In the first portion of our curriculum report, you read about our philosophy, daily schedule, and the understandings supporting the ways that we use our time together. Most elements have remained the same, while the content and depth of our conversations have changed over time.



There are two new practices that became important parts of our day since December. The first was the process of signing in each day; in which children find their image and name and place it in the category that matches the way they are traveling home. This process was a wonderful way for children to create and interpret a bar graph each day, as they begin the sign-in from the bottom. Our other new ritual was having a regular afternoon meeting in which we count and read aloud the kindnesses we all witnessed during the day. Sometimes we would end the day with a song, game, or a little bit of yoga, and the children love saying (or shouting) “be right there buzzer” if the buzzer should go off in the middle of our conversation!

Social Emotional Learning

We’ve continued to grow as a community over the course of the year through sharing songs, gatherings, food (lots of food), work, and play. The work of being a community and being friends is never truly done, and the children have continued to add to, refine, and debate additions to our classroom agreements over the course of the year. This is how it should be, of course.

Over time, new questions, ideas, challenges, and perspectives arise, and the children grappled with such questions as, “What is fair, sharing or not sharing materials?” and “What should we do

on the swings?” Through ongoing conversation and use of dramatizations, children shared a variety of viewpoints and slowly came to a consensus, while still considering new questions. When we all collaborate to make our agreements, everyone has a stake in the outcome, and everyone feels included in the process, resulting in the agreements themselves being more meaningful and useful.

During morning meetings, we continued to practice a daily greeting, and predict the greeter using clues including how many siblings a child has, how old a child is, and things a child enjoys. Some of our favorite songs and activities in the second half of the year included: Here We Sit in a Ring (a game in which children hide under a blanket and we predict who is missing), My Roots Go Down, Herman the Worm, Where is Thumbkin?, Ooh Kaleala, Baby Shark, Lying in my Sleeping Bag, and As I Was Walking Down the Street.

In February we began practicing a daily yoga pose, selected from our deck of Yoga Pretzels, a process the children found exciting and challenging. Seeing their love of yoga grow, we invited them to create their own yoga poses and draw them, in connection with our study of animals. Once all of the poses were named, drawn, and photographed, the children taught each other their poses, one each day, at morning meeting.

Inspired by children who took care of a friend when she fell down, we started talking about the ways we can choose to take care of each other (and not just how we take care of each other when we've made a mistake or hurt someone). The children began to understand that there are many ways to show kindness to one another, and to recognize these kindnesses, we cut strips of paper to write them down, and then form them into a chain. Each afternoon we gathered to read the kindnesses aloud, show appreciation to the children who were kind by giving a thumbs up or applause, and count the overall number of kindnesses on a hundreds chart. As of the last day of school, the children in the nursery had counted 176 kindnesses, but had performed many more!

Literacy

Literacy in early childhood is often described as “emergent,” and this label is fitting, as literacy is embedded in so many facets of our experiences together, and bubbles up in almost every part of the day and every part of the space! We've continued to explore read alouds daily, and in March began reading chapter books aloud during rest. The children have explored many literacy experiences, including: plant observation journals, twice weekly journal writing with side-by-side teaching, making books as a class, creating stories on our own, responding to texts, making story maps, using the Wilson alphabet to support invented spelling and



phoneme identification, writing thank you notes, study of a collection of *Gingerbread Man* and *Stone Soup* tale variants, and bringing our stories to life with story plays.

Math

Math continues to be a way of making sense of the world in nursery, and we explored concepts related to sets, number sense, counting, number operations, pattern, measurement, data analysis, spatial relationships, and geometry. We deepened our exploration of measurement and describing attributes of sets as we baked bread, gingerbread cookies, “piece of cake” cake, and made our own butter. In our plant observation and journaling process, the children used rulers and unifix cubes to make measurements and used that information to make comparisons. Each day the children signed in and in doing so, created a bar graph to be analyzed. The children also engaged in data analysis through multiple voting processes for everything from names of our half groups to whether to make a book of or display a collection of drawings.

Through our kindness chain, the children explored number sense, number operations and pattern, as we kept track of our progress on a hundreds chart, made a pattern using the same color for each set of ten, predicted what the sum would be of the previous kindnesses and our new kindnesses, and found different ways to figure out “How many more until...?”

As we learned about predators and prey, and observed their different attributes, the children grouped them into sets, and then set about showing the relationship between predators and prey in their food web. Every day, children composed and decomposed shapes with Magnatiles, and used a variety of blocks and shapes to learn more about the attributes of shapes and their possible combinations. There is so much math embedded in our experiences together, this is simply a sampling of some of the ways we explored these big and important concepts.

Inquiry and Play

Gingerbread and Beyond

Inspired by the children’s interest in *The Jolly Postman* and the fairy tales therein that we read before winter break, we decided to return to school in January by exploring a variety of fairy tales. Of the many beloved stories, the children were quite drawn to *The Gingerbread Man*, and so we began reading and gathering many variations of the story. Some of our favorite versions included:



- *The Gingerbread Man* by Jim Aylesworth
- *The Gingerbread Man* by Eric A. Kimmel
- *The Gingerbread Man* by Beatrice Rodriguez
- *The Gingerbread Girl* by Lisa Campbell
- *The Ninjabread Man* by C.J. Leigh
- *Gingerbread Baby* and *Gingerbread Friends* by Jan Brett

As we read these stories, many learners mixed “water, sand, and goo” to make their own gingerbread on the playground, and debated the possible virtuousness of the foxes in the stories. The children were very attentive to the important features of the texts, and as we read more, began to ask questions including “Who is chasing the gingerbread?,” “Will there be a fox in this one?,” and “Will the Gingerbread Man get away?” As we read these versions, we experimented with gingerbread playdough and drew gingerbread stories while exploring the multiple types of media used by artists in the texts. We created story maps of Eric A. Kimmel's version of *The Gingerbread Man*. This process helped children recall the characters and events in the story, the order in which they occurred, and visualize the story on a single page.



We acted out *The Ninjabread Man*, and the nursery children recalled the sequence of the text and the details of what happened, and said, "Try, try as best as you can, you can't beat me, I'm the ninjabread man" with gusto! There is significant research delineating the benefits for children who participate in dramatic story reenactment, Sun (2003) states "they are better at connecting and integrating events to storytelling than children in a story reading group and it can increase their curiosity about literature before independent reading starts."

We asked the children to think about how the gingerbread character could get across the river without needing to get on the fox's back. Some suggestions included:

- Josie: Maybe we can make a boat.
- Sylvia: Maybe he could jump over on a bridge or maybe the gingerbread man could go over on a duck.
- Cy: Maybe a jet ski could turn on and off and go over the river.
- Lyndon: They should put some other gingerbread persons to swim in rivers. Or an airplane.
- Griffin: A special fabric and it would have clips. There would be a button that he thinks is to make it cozier, but its really a button that makes the clips drop it.
- Luca: He could hop on lily pads.
- Pearl: Take a boat or take a bridge.



After this conversation, we used blocks and other materials to build ways for the gingerbread characters to escape across the river. Of course we made our own gingerbread, first with Luca's mother, Frances, who helped us make Luca's great grandmother's recipe for gingerbread, and we concluded our study by mixing, baking, and decorating gingerbread and ninjabread

cookies (and inviting our buddies to come and decorate and taste with us).

As we studied this fairy tale, Rossana introduced the group to three versions of the folktale *Stone Soup*, including one by Jon J. Muth, one by Marcia Brown, and one by Heather Forest. Through the study, the children got to know the characters and the important elements of the story, and comparing and contrasting the different versions. At times they commented on the number of travelers, the ingredients of the soup, the number of stones, and the setting of the story. Rossana invited the children to paint what they would put in their stone soup, using watercolors like the illustrator. After learning more about the tales, the children selected their favorite version, remembered and wrote down the important details, and then acted out the story using props they had made.

A Web of Animals

During choice we saw children eager to explore different rocks and bones, and there were many questions about where they came from. The game Bird Family emerged on the playground; the children pretended to be baby birds hatching in the nest, practicing learning

how to fly (by jumping off the play barn), and engaging in all kinds of family drama including gathering food and returning to the nest. At the same time we explored working with clay, and the children created lots of spiky animals and creatures.

These two important experiences pointed to the children's interest in animals, the ways they live, and the ways they protect themselves.



We decided to take a closer look at animals together, and find out what questions and ideas the learners in the nursery were thinking about. We began by asking the children what they know about animals and what they wonder about animals. They shared fantastic information, including: owls have wings, zebras have stripes, elephants have trunks, purple martins fly, and snakes slither. We wondered where cheetahs sleep, what tigers eat, how kitty cats see with their eyes, what mice like to eat, if elephant blood is orange, and "what is a predator of otters?" We explored predators and prey by reading and acting out *Swimmy* by Leo Lionni, and reading *Feathers for Lunch* by Lois Ehlert. The children then considered what it's like for a baby fox to grow up and learn how to find food when we read *Fox* by Kate Banks and Georg Hallensleben.



Inspired by the Steve Jenkins book, *What Do You Do When Something Wants To Eat You?* we made drawings of what we would do if something wanted to eat us, and added watercolor paint to create the setting. The children created stories of foxes being chased by spiky fish, spiky spiders keeping red foxes away, cheetahs being kept at bay by cactuses, and even a firefighter ready to help someone (although a predator hadn't shown up just yet).

This book also led to a number of predator and prey games; we pretended to puff up like pufferfish, fly away to safe nests, and stick out our tongues like a blue tongued skink when a predator was “seen,” children hid plastic animal “prey” and played hotter/colder with friends who were predators to help them locate their prey, and even one where children decided to be vultures, living animals, or “stinky, dead prey” for the vultures to munch on.

Several of the texts that were integral to our study were:

- *How Many Ways Can You Catch a Fly?* by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page
- *How to Clean a Hippopotamus: A Look at Unusual Animal Partnerships* by Robin Page and Steve Jenkins
- *Animal Helpers: Wildlife Rehabilitators* by Jennifer Keats Curtis
- *How to Heal a Broken Wing* by Bob Graham
- *Vulture View* by Steve Jenkins and Robin Page

As we went deeper into our research, we wrote down everything we knew about what animals eat and how they get their food. Drawing on this information, we began to create our own food web. First we conducted research into specific predators and prey in collaboration with our buddies. We then drew the predators and prey, and began to connect all the parts of the web. During conference week the children explored camouflage by packing snow onto trees to hide them, and of course, they played snow kitties and snow snakes.



Later, we went on a trip to the Wagner Free Institute of Science with the nursery where we learned about animal adaptations and further explored predator and prey relationships. Inspired by our trip to the museum, we began to look around our own environment, practicing our skills of observation in our outdoor space by playing games like “handful of sounds” and turning over rocks and logs. The children were invited to find something they found interesting outside, and think about what was interesting or special about it. These artifacts were the start of our own classroom museum collection (which continued to grow until the last day of school). The children found new ways to represent their observations of their particular artifacts over several

weeks through line drawing, sun prints, drawing on transparent paper, sculpting with clay, and photographing it in a context selected by the artifact finder.

Another special part of our animal study was when Gus's mother, Caroline came to the class to share more about her work as a veterinarian. Caroline invited the children to care for their stuffies using kits with vet wrap, gauze, tongue depressors, gloves and surgical hats. The children continued to care for their stuffies with the materials provided, and several of the children built an x-ray machine and drew x-rays for the animals.



The children each wrote their own animal story for the Miquon Grass, and each tale reflected understandings of animals including: understanding habitat, defense mechanisms, and the workings of predators and prey. They also invented their own animal yoga poses inspired by our study and our daily yoga pretzel cards. Over several weeks, children taught each other their yoga poses at meeting. At meeting, we also began playing the animal stories the children wrote.

The process began by reading the story aloud, then talking about what characters are needed for the story, then the author of the story would become the director, choose the actors and teach them how to move like their character. Under the surface, the children also learned that stories can be told, written, and acted out, that there is a thread connecting all these layers of story that they can stitch together on their own. They observed how authors and players make choices and that there are different ways to show the same thing. This daily practice of shifting stories and identities is a study in cognitive flexibility and possibility. It is powerful to see how much literacy learning happens off of the page, and how much social and emotional learning can transpire inside a brief story.



Plants

As we connected our food web, we noticed how all the parts are connected to green plants, and how plants need sun, water, and soil to grow. Several children helped paint and draw the sun, rain and dirt. Around the same time in science class the children planted peas, and the children

began asking when we can plant some things outside at the nursery as well, so we decided to transform part of our outdoor space into a nursery garden.

As we planned the garden, the children documented observations of their pea plants growing in plant journals. Twice a week the children examined the plants, and considered what changed, how they look different, and how they look the same, and then drew and talked about what they noticed; they also explored measurement using rulers and unifix cubes. Drawing realistically and drawing from a model are different experiences; in these journals the children practiced how to be precise, and considered whether what they drew was an accurate representation of what they saw.

To prepare our garden, children gathered rich soil from behind the art room and carried the buckets all the way back to the nursery! They covered the garden with soil, completed the circle with stones, and explored stepping on "tree cookies" to practice not stepping on the plants. Science teacher Kate Shapero also shared a worm bin with us, and we learned how to care for the worms, and why the compost they create is important. We tasted some of the herbs we planned to plant in our nursery garden, including mint, basil, oregano, and lemon thyme.



As you've probably already observed, when children have the chance to participate in tasting food, and see the plants it comes from, they have a sense of ownership. A neutral setting for tasting, in which all responses are welcome, encourages children to take comfortable risks, and perhaps try something they might not otherwise do! We were delighted during the tasting process, the children discovered and explored how smelling the herbs was an important part of tasting them, and how even a tiny taste could have a big flavor. Weeks later, children continued to taste the herbs, and many children who had found the mint "too hot" or "too spicy" the first time changed their minds and found it delicious!

Together we mixed compost into our soil, planted mint, basil, oregano, lemon thyme, bee balm, lavender, garlic, and lemon balm. Once these plants were established, we explored the seeds of spinach, parsley, nasturtium, and purple hyacinth beans, and then planted them in the garden as well. A few weeks later, there were many healthy sprouts coming up from many of our seeds. The children made plant markers, and watered the plants with "rain jars" (mason jars with holes

punched in the lid, when shaken, mimicked falling rain). To help the plants get established, for several weeks, the children became “rain storms” by starting the morning with their “rain jars” and watering the plants.

The benefits of gardening with children are myriad, but some of the important things we observed were children communicating and working together, asking questions and considering what the plants need to survive, becoming aware of their bodies in the garden space, wondering what the plants will look like as they grow, and developing deep observational skills as they look for changes over time.

As we created our garden, we enjoyed reading *Planting a Rainbow* by Lois Ehlert, *And then it's spring...* by Julie Fogliano, and *Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt* by Kate Messner and Christopher Silas Neal. We later revisited *Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt* and paid close attention to how the artist gave a cutaway or “x-ray” view of what happens underground. Recalling some of the insects and creatures found in the story, students were then encouraged to imagine their own underground scene with sharpie. Learners then added layers of color using bleeding tissue paper, exploring how it left colors that we could see through, just like x-ray vision.



Closing Our Year

The end of the year is a time for reflection, a time for us to think about the many things we've done and made, the friendships and structures we've built, the songs, stories, and experiences that brought us joy together. Each child was asked to think of something they would really like to do before the year was over, either revisiting a treasured activity from earlier in the year, or something they'd always wished we could do. These requests then became our plans for the final weeks of the school year. The requests were a beautiful reflection of our time together, including having meeting on the playbarn, making cake and ice cream, having a pajama day, playing with water beads in the sensory table, rereading favorite stories, and playing games at meeting. The children were delighted to see their choices on a linear calendar, so they could anticipate the day their choice would happen!

We also prepared for our Night Party, each child looking through all of the artwork they made for the year and selecting a piece that was important to them that they wanted everyone to see. The students were interviewed to find out what they thought was important about the piece, and to talk about what they wanted everyone to know about them for their “about the

artist” statements. They made covers and end pages to bind their journals, and had their portraits taken in any pose/costume/place they wished. Finally, the children planned our night party celebration themselves, deciding on the Hamster/Ninja Night Party theme, where we share our work with our families, that we share the number of kindnesses we’ve done, that we make and play with ninja swords, decorate with flowers, drink lemonade, and eat hamster cake. Their plans for the end of the year and for our night party reflect truly that the simple and ordinary parts of our days together are often the most important. It has been a wonderful and magical year together in the nursery!