



2018-19 Kindergarten Curriculum Report

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I can not begin to tell the story of this kindergarten year without first thinking about and celebrating Sherry. She shared so much of herself with us - her passions, her creativity, her gentle humor, her sense of adventure, and her delight in the magic and beauty of the natural world. She was a devoted and loving teacher. She was our dear friend.

While her passing in January was difficult for us to comprehend and to process, we did our best. The children spoke of Sherry with such eloquence and love. They shared their questions, their memories, and their feelings. They honored her and their love for her by creating our "Sherry Wall". They filled the wall with their drawings, origami, weavings, valentines, and many other treasures. Clearly, Sherry had inextricably touched their hearts and their minds. Our kindergartners were truly blessed to experience her as their teacher. They loved her very much.

Our Group

Elisa, Sherry and I truly enjoyed the privilege and challenge of working with this extraordinary group of kindergartners. Our group was a dynamic mix of eight girls and nine boys: ten children were newcomers to Miquon and seven were already seasoned Miquon kids.

Clearly, the group of children moving on from Marisa and Cassandra's nursery had formed comfortable relationships during their previous years together. In September, they happily reunited, quickly renewing old ties.

Of course, they were also eager to develop new relationships. While our newcomers joined the group exhibiting a mix of curiosity, excitement and trepidation, it was not long before they too seemed at home in the Miquon kindergarten.

The children, Elisa, Sherry, and I worked hard to build a sense of community within our group. Our goal: to create a safe, supportive, and joyful environment where each and every group member felt respected and valued. We consistently worked within the framework of the class guidelines developed by the children: *We take care of ourselves. We take care of each other. We take care of our environment.*

Developing and maintaining positive social skills continued to be an important piece of our group work throughout the year. The kindergartners primarily focused on communicating effectively. They practiced stating their needs and ideas directly and calmly, listening carefully to each other, responding thoughtfully, and resolving issues peacefully.

The kindergartners grew tremendously in their ability to lean into the important work of building a healthy community. They seriously considered issues such as teasing, taking responsibility for one's actions, trying to see someone else's perspective, showing respect for each group member, treating one another fairly in work and play, and learning to be a good friend.

It was a deeply satisfying experience to observe and guide the collective effort and wisdom of these children as they raised complex social issues and thoughtfully worked through them. Over the course of the year, the children developed an appreciation and understanding of each other and gradually coalesced into a strong, vital community.

Our Day

Since play is the work of this age group, it was essential to have an extensive supply of open-ended materials and activities that supported cognitive, social and physical development, both indoors and out.

Each morning began with a short period of Inside Choice followed by Morning Meeting. The first activity during our meeting was always Morning Greeting, an opportunity to acknowledge, greet and check in with each other. We also reviewed the daily schedule and updated the calendar and clip counter. (We were keeping track of the number of school days.) Another regular feature of Morning Meeting was Sharing. One of the children's favorite methods for sharing was the Mystery Bag. A child chose an object to place in the Mystery Bag. He/she then created three clues to help the kindergartners guess the contents of the bag. Once the mystery was solved, the child would share a bit more information and field a few questions.

We often varied the activities which occurred during Morning Meeting.

We shared big books and followed up our readings with a variety of activities geared to encourage familiarity with concepts of print, phonemic awareness, phonics and comprehension. Many meetings were devoted to math games and explorations.

We frequently played games (Twenty Questions, I'm Thinking of a Number, What's My Rule? and Detective were favorites.), enjoyed a rich variety of children's literature, and held wonderful discussions on all sorts of things.

We then moved into Choice Time. For about an hour, children were free to make a variety of choices within the room or on the playground. They might also choose to work more intensively on a particular project. Choice Time was always lively!

The block area was always a busy place. Vivid imaginations and dramatic flair transformed it into a racetrack, a maze for Nibbles and Squeakie, a fort, a cozy home for stuffies, a castle, a market, and the site of an alien invasion. The dramatic play which evolved along with each structure was as rich and involved as the building process.

Choice time also provided plentiful opportunities for children to explore the many materials in the art area. Lovely sketches, dramatic easel paintings, whimsical puppets, props and costumes for dramatic play, origami, jewelry, informative signs, colorful weavings, gifts, maps, greeting cards, masks, beautiful junk constructions and much more were created. Special art activities and cooking projects happened several times each month under the guidance of a teacher or visiting adult.

Legos, pattern blocks, sorting collections, puzzles, geoboards, board games (Chess and Checkers, in particular), and playing cards were popular choices. You could often find a child or two curled up on our pillows deeply engrossed in a good book. Many children wrote their own books, recording their words in kid writing and carefully matching their illustrations to the text. Our guinea pigs, Nibbles and Squeakie were the recipients of much love and attention. A few children would spend great chunks of their Choice Time observing, handling and caring for our pets.

For many of our children, Choice Time was synonymous with the outdoors. The creek, sandbox, "twirly slide", and other play equipment were frequent play destinations. Many of the children enjoyed fast-paced chase games such as Freeze Tag. My Little Pony, Ninjas, Brothers and Sisters, Swing Games, Pinching Beetle Tag, Pumas, and the Floor is Lava were also favorite Choice Time games. Tree climbing was a popular activity, as well as serious practice with jump ropes, romper stompers, and hula hoops. In the sandbox, pies and cakes were baked, volcanoes erupted, rivers were carved through steep mountains, and delicate fairy houses were built. Song and dance routines were performed on our kindergarten playbarn. Potions were made, snow forts and snowmen were built, animal tracks were discovered, and honeysuckle was sipped.

Visiting with the goldfish and frogs at the Walbridge Pond was a daily ritual for many of our kindergartners. Feeding them was a favorite kindergarten activity. The kindergartners also spent a great deal of time observing caterpillars and other insects, salamanders and crayfish, toads, tadpoles, and even a pair of mallard ducks. They

observed and delighted in the various signs of the changing seasons. Imagination, creativity, and high drama were seamlessly woven into their explorations. It was always a pleasure to receive an invitation from the children to venture into their magical outside world and view its wonders through their eyes.

Snack was available during Choice Time so children could decide for themselves when to take a break from their activity to fill their grumbling tummies.

After an efficient clean-up, we gathered on the rug for a quick game or song before heading off to a specialist. Our kindergarten schedule accommodated itself around the specialties of Music with Diego, Library with Sarah, Science with Kate, PE with Lisa, and Art with Nicole.

We were able to feature one specialist each day, which lent our room a wonderful regularity. This gave diversity to our program and structure to our day.

In our classroom, Elisa, Sherry and I worked with each half-group in turn on social studies/science, language arts, and/or mathematics activities (often integrated). This was a special time affording each teacher the opportunity of working with only a few children at a time.

While lunch was set up by our lunch setters, the rest of the group relaxed on the rug and listened to a story. We enjoyed many picture books written by a variety of authors. As the year progressed, stories linked to class themes were shared as well. The children were captivated by the many Mexican folk tales we read, especially those told about the tricksters, Coyote and Rabbit.

Immediately following Story, our group shared a noontime meal and animated conversation. Once finished lunch, children would head outside for Lunch Break – an opportunity to enjoy our outdoor space before returning to the classroom for Rest. During Rest, children quietly relaxed on their cots while reading books, drawing and/or writing in their cot journals, playing Dice Race, solving mazes and dot-to-dots, or weaving. They also listened to audiobooks or a teacher-read chapter book such as *My Father's Dragon*, *Gwinna*, *The Mouse and the Motorcycle*, and *The School Mouse*.

Definitely one of the most exciting developments in our classroom this year was our relationship with Wendy and Rich's group as Reading Buddies. Each kindergartner was matched with a third/fourth grade child who was his/her buddy for the entire school year. On Wednesday afternoons just as Rest Time ended, each older child joined his/her kindergarten buddy to share some good books. It was gratifying to watch the buddies respond to each other with such pleasure. The kindergarten children were attentive listeners obviously enjoying both a fine story and the company of their good friends. Throughout the year, our kindergartners and their buddies worked and played together in many ways ... pumpkin decorating, holiday celebrating (in general), author/illustrator sharing, playground frolicking, and curriculum sharing. The kindergartners loved their buddies! These buddy relationships will continue to be important throughout their Miquon careers ... and perhaps, beyond.

The final hour of the day was a flexible time, used variously for outdoor play, continuation of work started earlier in the day, long term projects, handwriting practice, or additional Choice Time. On Wednesday afternoons, we also joined Diego and our nursery friends for a rollicking sing-along. We gathered on the rug at the very end of the day for Afternoon Circle. We shared information about upcoming events, created our daily entry for the Kindergarten Newsletter, and sang our goodbye song.

Language Arts

Language Arts activities were integrated into our entire day, as we think of Language Arts as relating to all aspects of language – speaking, listening, reading and writing. From the knock-knock jokes gleefully told during lunch to the beautifully written and illustrated books shared during our Authors' Tea, children constantly developed and refined their facility with the various components of language.

Our Language Arts program was based on a literacy rich environment.

The literacy rich environment emphasizes the importance of speaking, reading, and writing in the learning of all students. This involves the selection of materials that will facilitate language and literacy opportunities; reflection and thought regarding classroom design; and intentional instruction and facilitation by educators.

Literature of all kinds was displayed on our classroom bookshelves including picture books, how-to books, magazines, wordless books, big books which we had read as a group numerous times, non-fiction (some of which was related to the social studies/science topics we were exploring), maps, alphabet books, poetry, children's dictionaries, class books (Each child contributed a page which was based on a particular topic or joint experience, such as *Guess Who, I Am Thankful, or What's for Lunch?*), and of course child-made books. We also had a wonderful collection of pre-reading and early emergent books for children to read successfully.

The children's engagement with books was an all-day affair. In the morning, a parent who was reading a book to his/her child would soon find an extra few listeners snuggled close by. Elisa, Sherry and I could never read long enough to suit this group of story lovers! Echoes of "one more page" or "just a few more minutes" would often follow an attempt to end a story time.

Children frequently referred to our wide selection of non-fiction books to further their knowledge on topics that were of deep interest to them. Big books (with their highly repetitive text, reasonable amount of print on each page, and strong correlation between the illustrations and text) were favorite choices for rest time reading. Class books and the children's individual works of fiction/non-fiction (such as their *When I Was Your Age, Guess Who, and All About Me* books) were also highly sought after.

In our room, there were many opportunities for children to create written language for themselves. There were magnetic letters, chalk boards, paper of every shape and color, as well as pens, markers, crayons, and pencils. Children often chose to label their drawings, write messages to each other or their family members, or create letters or greeting cards. They produced signs to share important information, designed props for their dramatic play (such as surveys taken or lists made during play), and made self-initiated books.

More formally, the children labeled everything they could see in our classroom ... and then accepted the challenge to find even more objects to label! They dictated many letters and thank you notes to Miquon families and friends, brainstormed lists to help us remember ideas or develop plans, and created fabulous birthday cards for each member of the kindergarten community. They contributed pages to class books, published individual stories, and participated regularly in an approach to literacy instruction called Writing Workshop.

The basic premise behind Writing Workshop is that children will learn to read and write most successfully by reading and writing for themselves.

The kindergartners filled their writing journals with colorful illustrations and labels or sentences that described their drawings. They wrote in "kid writing" (recording any sounds they could hear and recognize in a word). Elisa, Sherry and I would then transcribe their kid writing into "book writing." This was a perfect opportunity to give mini-lessons on individual letter sounds, spacing between words, punctuation, etc, as well as a wonderful chance to celebrate a child's progress and suggest a goal for future writing.

Our handwriting program, Handwriting Without Tears, is a developmentally-based program. The multi-sensory lessons teach to all learning styles – visual, auditory, manipulative, tactile and kinesthetic. The purpose of our work is to make handwriting available to our children as an automatic, natural skill. The children began with pre-pencil readiness activities for learning uppercase letters and numbers. They used unique materials such as the upper case wood pieces and the "smiley face" slates. They practiced using good posture, a good pencil grip, and good patterns for letter formation. In their workbooks, they first practiced letter formation in grey blocks (pictures of smiley face slates) before moving to actual lines for writing.

Oral language development was highly encouraged throughout the day. We talked all the time, telling stories and jokes, discussing problems, formulating ideas and plans, reading and reciting poetry, and sharing information and important personal news at Circle. We also played numerous games involving riddles, phonemic awareness skills,

listening skills and following direction skills.

The children always looked forward to our weekly visits from Jen Curyto, our Language Arts and Learning Support Coordinator. They loved the marvelous stories she dramatically read to them. They especially enjoyed the opportunity to share their observations and personal connections about each story. They also appreciated the wonderful variety of listening and reading readiness activities Jen shared with them. Thanks Jen!

Mathematics

Our math program is based on the belief that children will learn best by creating their own understanding of mathematical concepts.

They do this by identifying, solving, and developing mathematics problems relating to their environment. To meet this goal for our five and six year-olds, we used concrete manipulatives extensively as the basis for formal instruction.

Materials such as unifix cubes, tiles, Cuisenaire rods, dominoes, marbles, pattern blocks, geoboards, and number boards were used to actively involve the children in making discoveries. We also dealt with quantities of buttons, pumpkin seeds, goldfish crackers, cups, napkins, and other objects in daily use. The children used these items in their studies of relationships. We sorted and classified groups of objects and looked at the relationships between groups.

We worked to develop a clear concept of one-to-one correspondence as we counted things at every opportunity. We introduced the idea of place value as we worked with quantities and learned to write numerals to represent numbers.

We estimated larger quantities in our estimating jar, recording everyone's estimate of the number of objects before we spilled out the contents of the jar to count the wood cubes, Crayola markers, teddy bear counters, etc. contained within. The children's estimates became increasingly more accurate as the year progressed. They were able to base their guesses on the information accumulated from previous counts.

Continuing their numeral work, the children made monthly calendars. In the fall, they pasted prepared numeral cards on their calendar blanks, concentrating on matching the correct sequence of the numbers on the grid. As the year progressed, their speed and accuracy in doing so revealed their growing numeral recognition skills and further understanding of how a calendar works.

The children also became quite proficient at making and detecting patterns. Patterns allow us to see relationships and develop generalizations. When children explore and learn about patterns, they are building important foundations for later number and algebraic work.

Creating, extending, naming, and talking about patterns prepares children for learning complex number concepts and mathematical operations.

We used beads, unifix cubes, tiles, pattern blocks, geoboards, and our calendars in our studies. We looked for patterns in the natural world. The children created beautiful patterns in their artwork. Their weavings and their god's eyes were exceptional examples of their proficiency with pattern. We spent quite a bit of time examining and exploring patterns as we studied Mexico. We marveled at the intricate designs created in traditional textiles, as well as yarn paintings, bark paintings, beadwork, and Oaxacan wood carvings.

At the early childhood level, children can identify, solve, and create math problems relating to their environment. We found plenty of real life situations that gave us practice with problem solving:

- The Panthers and the Bumble Bees (quarter groups) are in this half group. How many children should be on the rug?
- There are 100 goldfish crackers in the bowl. There are five of us. How many goldfish do

- each of us get if we share the total amount equally?
- We have 17 children. Two are absent today. How many cots will we need to set out for Rest Time?
- We read *Rooster's Off to See the World* by Eric Carle. He invited other animals to join him on his journey. How many animals went off to see the world?

The children collected data for their questions (and many others), created graphs to record their results, and read/explored the information gleaned from their graphs. Throughout the year, many children chose to conduct surveys to generate data, asking questions such as, When is your birthday? What is your favorite dish at Thanksgiving dinner? How many people are in your family? They recorded responses to their questions and independently organized their information.

Game playing was also a cornerstone of our math program. Games support children's developing number sense, including place value and computational skills. As they repeatedly played games, children recognized number relationships created by the visual models. Games also provided time to rehearse and develop strategies, opportunities for social interaction and feedback from peers.

Much of our math work is integrated into our literacy/social studies/science explorations. Our study of apples provided our kindergartners with some interesting mathematical opportunities. They picked 180 pounds of apples at Solebury Orchard. Once back in the classroom, they counted and recorded the actual number of apples picked - 449.

They participated in a taste test of four varieties of apples; Jonathan, Honeycrisp, Gala and Granny Smith. They compared the four types and described their attributes before sketching the apple which they preferred. They used their sketches to create a pictograph in response to the question - *Which apple do you prefer?* This is what they noticed when they took a look at their apple graph.

- More people liked Gala.
- Less people liked Granny Smith and Honeycrisp.
- So many people liked Gala that the apple drawings went off the chart.
- Four people preferred Jonathan.
- Ten people preferred Gala.
- Two people preferred Honeycrisp and two people preferred Granny Smith.

They also compared and contrasted a Honeycrisp apple and a banana. They recorded their results on a venn diagram.

apple:

- It grows on trees.
- The inside is yellowish - white.
- It has a sticker on it.
- You can eat the peel.
- The stem is short.
- It makes a crunchy sound when you bite it.
- It has red on the peel.
- The stem is brown.
- It's round.

banana:

- It has a brown end.
- The stem is long.
- The stem is yellow.
- You can't eat the peel.
- The inside is yellowish.
- It grows on a bush.
- When you bite it, it makes a soft sound.

- It's a crescent.

apple and banana:

- They have seeds.
- They are fruit.
- They have two colors.
- They have a peel.
- They smell sweet.
- They have stems.
- They taste good.
- They change color as they ripen.
- They are curved.

Of course, the kindergartners followed many directions and measured many ingredients as we cooked our way through our huge supply of apples. They made applesauce, apple butter and english muffin bread, apple pie, apple crisp, baked apple donuts, apple tart, and apple cider.

The kindergartners thought carefully about the steps they had taken to make applesauce and created their own recipe to share with their families.

- Wash an apple.
- Peel the skin.
- Cut the apple into pieces.
- Put the pieces in the pot.
- Put the pot on the hotplate.
- Turn the hotplate on.
- Add some apple juice to the apples in the pot.
- Mix the apples.
- Add a little bit of sugar.
- Mix the apples again and again and again ...
- Cook for four hours.
- Turn off the hotplate.
- Spoon applesauce into cups.
- Add cinnamon if you want it.
- Then the best, best, best part - eat! Yum!

SCIENCE/SOCIAL STUDIES

Looking through my Window

“All the windows of my heart (and mind) I open to the day.”

John Greenleaf Whittier

Five and six year olds are incredibly curious about their world. They have so many questions! They are eager to investigate, make hypotheses, and experiment with their ideas. They have a captivating interest in interacting with others and creating strong interpersonal connections. Given ample opportunity to observe and wonder, work and play, they are engaged and responsible advocates for their own learning.

As our kindergartners “looked through their windows” (both actual and metaphorical), they experienced their world through these lenses: the natural world, our kindergarten community, me and my family, and the country and people of Mexico – an exploration of a different cultural community.

In the fall, we totally immersed ourselves in one particular facet of our study – an exploration of the natural world

beyond our classroom windows. The Miquon campus provided our kindergartners with endless opportunities to discover, imagine, dream and create.

What did the kindergartners discover? They turned over rocks and logs to find pillbugs, spiders, earwigs, snails, velvet mites, beetles, millipedes, slugs, daddy long legs, ants and newts. They spotted a garter snake sunning itself on a grassy stretch of our playground. They searched for caterpillars on the underside of leaves. They delighted in watching the goldfinches, chickadees, sparrows, tufted titmice, mourning doves, cardinals and woodpeckers that routinely visited our feeders. They were thrilled to occasionally sight a chipmunk scurrying among the rocks.

They climbed our evergreen tree and nestled in its springy branches. They planted milkweed seeds in our garden. They learned about stinging nettle and its antidote jewelweed. They gathered goldenrod to produce a natural dye for wool yarn. They made snow angels, built snow forts, and went snow tubing. They discovered and followed animal tracks. They strung popcorn, Cheerios, raisins, apples and cranberries for hungry critters.

They listened for the call of the red winged blackbird. They watched for the first signs of spring. They cared for our butterfly garden. They sipped sweet honeysuckle nectar. Our group looked closely at the variety of insects they had captured on the playground. They sat quietly by the pond observing the goldfish, frogs, and toads. They built dams in the creek. They scattered wildflower seeds in our raised beds. They also created mud pies, sand structures and delicate fairy homes.

To complement the children's many outdoor investigations, we also brought Miquon's natural environment into our classroom. We began the year by observing the many insects that have taken up residence on our science shelf - monarch and painted lady caterpillars, imperial and hawk moth caterpillars, ants, ladybugs, and of course, the ever changing collection of visiting insects which were captured on the playground by our quick-handed kindergartners.

Insect Study

In September, as the children entered the classroom each morning, they would pause at the red shelf to check on the progress of our monarch caterpillars. The children marveled at the quantity of milkweed leaves the caterpillars consumed. They were amazed by the caterpillars' rapid growth. They watched as the caterpillars prepared to form their chrysalides by hanging upside down from a twig in the characteristic "J" formation. The children waited impatiently for the monarchs to emerge from the smooth green chrysalides dotted with gold. Finally two of the chrysalides split open and the butterflies slipped out. Everyone watched intently as each butterfly unfurled its wings (pumping fluid into the wing veins and making them expand to their full extent). It was a wonderful sight! After observing and enjoying our adult monarchs for a day or so, we released them to the exuberant chant of "Gotta go, gotta go, gotta go to Mexico!" We were very fortunate this year to actually release 15 monarchs.

We read *The Travels of Monarch X*, the story of a monarch butterfly's experience as it made its way from Canada to Mexico. We charted its route on a map of North America as we read of its adventures. In response to this reading, the children created Monarch Butterfly Journals. They first described the four stages of the metamorphosis of our monarchs. Then they imagined and recorded the experiences our monarchs might have as they made their way to Mexico.

We also participated in Journey South/Journey North – an educational website that engages students in a global study of wildlife migration and seasonal change. As citizen scientists, our kindergartners shared their own field observations with classmates across North America. Our group tracked the migration of our monarch butterflies. We reported the release of our monarchs as well as a few monarch sightings (specific to the Conshohocken area).

As part of our Journey South/Journey North work, we also joined the "Symbolic Monarch Butterfly Migration" with students across North America. We created 18 life-sized symbolic monarch butterflies and sent them to Mexico for the winter. At the monarch sanctuaries in Mexico, children protected the butterflies and sent them north again in the spring. Our kindergartners were very excited to receive a packet of 18 monarch butterflies created by children throughout the United States, Canada and Mexico.

We also kept a group journal of the painted ladies' metamorphosis. Each day two children dictated their observations of the caterpillars' development. They also drew detailed illustrations to complement their story of the painted ladies. Release day was very exciting. The children were amazingly patient as they watched and waited for the first painted lady to take wing. They jumped and danced about as they enjoyed the sight of one butterfly after another making its first attempt at flight.

Bees/Apples

The beehive in the Library sparked a great interest in honey bees. The children never tired of watching the busy bees as they went about their work. They were especially interested in pollination and the bees' role in this process - hence our interest in apple trees. On a lovely morning in mid September, we visited Solebury Orchards to pick apples. After learning the proper method of picking an apple, we began our work. In what seemed like a very short time, our baskets were full and we returned to the weighing station. Believe it or not, the kindergartners had picked 180 pounds of apples!

We counted them the following day - 449 apples. Well ... We held a taste test to determine which variety of apple was each child's favorite. We graphed the results. We munched on apples for snack for days on end. We shared a basket of apples with our reading buddies. We made delicious applesauce, a delectable applet tart, and tasty apple donuts. We baked the most scrumptious apple crisp as well as a luscious apple pie. We shared apples with the local wildlife. We compared apples to bananas and recorded our results as Venn diagrams. We made spicy apple butter and homemade English muffin bread for Grandparents' and Special Friends' Day. Our guests gobbled it up! We pressed the remainder of the apples to produce three pitchers of fresh cider (YUM!). And believe it or not - we never tired of apples!

The kindergartners investigated symmetry, camouflage, insect adaptations and habitats as we explored the world of insects. They also enjoyed the many insect related games and activities in the classroom such as matching games, sorting and graphing activities with insect models, jigsaw and sequencing puzzles, etc.

Dyeing Wool

In early fall, we hiked throughout the Miquon campus to gather pokeberries and goldenrod to make natural dyes. We also tried turmeric, marigold, and carrot tops. Upon returning to the classroom, we dyed wool yarn which we then used for weaving. Weaving was such a popular activity with this group that we could barely keep up with the demand for newly strung looms. The children created breathtaking patterns with the subtle shades produced by the natural dyes and the brighter hues of our store bought yarn.

Woodland Habitat

The children were quite interested in Creek Wood Hollow, the wooded area on the other side of our creek. They were eager to explore this hillside which stretched just beyond the boundaries of our playground. They were particularly interested in the creatures which inhabited this place.

We read a wonderful book - *In the Woods: Who's Been Here?* as an introduction to our study of the woodland habitat. The kindergartners enjoyed piecing together the clues on each page to guess the animals featured in the story. We were inspired to conduct a bit of research on our own. What did we want to know about the woodland critters that inhabit Miquon? We brainstormed a list of questions to focus our research. Each quarter group chose one woodland animal to study - opossum, raccoon, bat, or skunk. With teacher support, the quarter groups gathered information on their animal's physical characteristics, its home, food preferences, adaptations etc. Based on Joy Cowley's book *What's for Lunch?*, the quarter groups then wrote and illustrated their particular animal's stories using information gleaned from their research.

Bird Watching

Over the course of the year, our group became quite proficient at recognizing the bird species that nested in the trees just beyond our classroom and regularly visited the feeders hanging just outside our classroom windows. They watched the feeders intently, eagerly sharing their observations as birds alighted. I loved to hear a child exclaim, "I just saw a tufted titmouse!" or "Toni, we need to fill the feeders again. The birds will be hungry, if we don't."

Through their daily experiences, the kindergartners became more aware of the world around them. They were in touch with the earth; its natural rhythms, its beauty and mystery. They built personal memories and stories that they will cherish for years to come. Hopefully, their experiences have also nourished a beginning understanding of their place in our dynamic, interconnected world.

Our Community Story

In September, as we began our year-long study based on the theme “looking through the window”, we also set our gaze inward focusing on our newly formed kindergarten community. Of course, we spent a great deal of time and energy getting to know one another and Miquon. We shared information about ourselves through self-portraits, games, interviews, surveys and graphs, class books, and lots of conversation. We learned to read each other’s names. We examined and celebrated our differences as well as our similarities. The fall and winter holidays provided opportunities to share and enjoy each other’s family traditions and celebrations.

We began the process of building a strong and safe community by creating class guidelines that we all agreed to live by. We continued to work on these guidelines – examining and refining our ideas as our joint experiences dictated. Always, we strove to maintain our sense of community as we worked and played together. The children certainly grew in their ability to be flexible, inclusive and safe in their play.

Our Family Study

In late winter, we continued self-explorations through our family study. The children made new and exciting discoveries about themselves and their families as they peered through their “home windows”. We began our investigations by thinking carefully about what makes a family. As we learned more about families, we added our new discoveries to our list.

Pearl: Grandparents are in a family.

Leo: Every family has a house.

Aaron: Every family has parents.

Alex: Every family has cousins.

Luca: Families sometimes don’t have houses.

Gus: Sometimes there are brothers.

Lyndon: Sometimes families like steak.

Genevieve: Some families don’t know their cousins.

Harvey: Some families don’t have parents.

Bell: Some families don’t have grandparents.

Eden: Sometimes there are sisters.

Stella: Some families like to go on bike rides.

Cy: Some families have step-parents.

Elsa: Some families have little sisters and big sisters.

Ziae: Some families are big and some are small.

Naveh: Some families give hugs.

Xavier: Some families don’t have cousins.

Genevieve: Some families don’t have moms because the mom died and some families don’t have dads because the dad died.

Genevieve: Some families only have one child.

Eden: Some parents are divorced and some parents are not.

Alex: Some families don’t have children.

Alex: Some families are omnivores.

Genevieve: Some families are vegetarians.

Eden: If you have a little sister or a little brother you could be jealous because your mom or dad is paying more attention to them.

Leo: Some families have two moms and some families have two dads. And some families have one mom or one dad.

Genevieve: Some families have children that are adopted.

Leo: Some families' houses are messy and some are clean.

Genevieve: Some families like to garden and some families don't.

Genevieve: Some families live with their grandparents to help them get around.

Eden: Some families live far away and they miss the other part of their family because they can't see them that often.

Leo: Some families have pets and some don't.

Leo: Some families like to go to the movies.

Alex: Some families have two houses.

Alex: Families eat together.

Eden: All families get together on special occasions sometimes and they eat together.

Lyndon: All families eat together, but not all families eat the same stuff.

Xavier: Some families like to build with Legos or play basketball.

Stella: Sometimes families get mad at each other.

Bell: Some families don't have washing machines.

Stella: Some families celebrate different holidays.

Stella : Some families live with their aunts or uncles.

Lyndon: Some families have step-brothers, some families have step-sisters and some families have both.

Some families call their parents different names like: mama, mom, mommy, ma, dada, dad, daddy, papa or pa.

Xavier: Some families are married and some families are not married even though they are still families.

Harvey: Some families don't have everything they need. They might not have enough food or money. If you don't have that much money, you can't buy what you need to survive.

Elsa: Some people don't have money to buy clothing and houses.

Aaron: Some families like to be outside together. They might like to play catch. They might ride bikes together.

Elsa: Some children like to play with their siblings.

Harvey: Some children like to play basketball with their families.

Aaron: All families are special.

Harvey: Some people don't have that many people in their family.

Elsa: Some people only have two or three people in their family.

Elsa: It was sort of fun to have a new baby in the family. I liked to hold Luisa.

Pearl: Some families have two moms or two dads.

Some children live with their grandparents.

Naveh: Some families adopt children.

Gus: Some families have two dads.

Cy: some families have great grandmas and great grandpas.

Gus: some families live in apartment buildings.

Cy: They can live in a trailer or a house. They might even live in a castle.

Pearl: Some kids go to school and some are home schooled.

Gus: Some dads and moms go to the same work.

Elsa: Some don't. They have different work. Some parents have the same job but they work at different places.

My parents are both teachers.

Pearl: Some kids in families have chores like washing the dishes or sweeping the floor.

Some people believe their pets are members of their family.

Some families have special traditions for birthdays and holidays.

Eden declared: "Family members can have different hair, eye, and skin colors."

Genevieve: There are lots of ways people can make a family. Sometimes there are two dads. Sometimes there are

two moms. Sometimes there is a mom and a dad. You don't know how many children you will get. Some people don't have any.

Stella: Sometimes you can have one dad or one mom.

Bell: A mom gets a baby and another baby and another baby. That's how you can make a family.

Pearl: People that live together and help you are family. Grandparents are in your family. They don't always live with you but sometimes they do.

We read a wonderful book entitled *When Jo Louis Won the Title*. It is the story of a small girl who is uncomfortable with her unusual name. When her grandfather tells her the history of her name, however, not only does she learn about the famous boxer Joe Louis, but a whole lot more about her family's past. Inspired by Jo Louis' story, the kindergartners gathered information from their parents about the unique stories behind their names. The children were quite excited to share the origins of their names. They were also very curious to learn the story of each other's name.

Each child also made a blank book, titled *When I Was Your Age*, to bring home to his/her family. Any family member who was older than the child (parents, grandparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins) was invited to write down memories of his/her 5th or 6th year. The kindergartners listened with great interest to these family anecdotes. They enjoyed comparing their family stories to themselves – "My nana played hopscotch too – just like me." or to each other's stories – "Your daddy grew up on a farm and so did my mom."

Each child created a companion piece to *When I Was Your Age*. With kid-writing and detailed illustrations, each kindergartner described herself/himself in an *All about Me* book.

We read *When I Was Young in the Mountains*. This book is based on Cynthia Rylant's memories of her childhood spent in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia. Each child also told the story of a favorite family memory and illustrated it with care. The children created a beautiful paper quilt of their family stories.

Mexico

In order to understand the complexities of another culture, a child must start with him/herself and work outwards. Each child comes to kindergarten with different experiences, background, and information. S/he must examine what it is that makes him/her unique, and what s/he shares in common with those around him/her.

Cynthia Adams – former Miquon kindergarten teacher

By spring, having spent much of the year in self exploration and community building, the kindergartners were ready to look outward. They were eager to learn about life in Mexico. What would a Mexican child see as s/he looked through a window?

The official beginning of our study began shortly after our return from spring break. However, we had really been thinking and talking about Mexico since early fall. Our first introduction to Mexico coincided with our study of the annual migration of the monarch butterflies. We learned that the eastern-central population of North American monarch butterflies flies south into the mountains of Central Mexico. In the mountains, the monarchs congregate by the millions in forests, where they hang in huge orange clusters on the branches of sheltered conifer trees.

In early November, the kindergartners baked "dead bread" in celebration of el Dia de los Muertos. Meaning Day of the Dead, the holiday honors deceased loved ones. The Day of the Dead is one of Mexico's many holidays and fiestas that celebrate its rich cultural heritage. It is not a time of sadness, but a day to rejoice.

As we poured over our large collection of fiction and non-fiction books about Mexico, the kindergartners thought carefully about the many similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of Mexican children. They wondered about what kinds of things Mexican children like to do. They were curious about what kinds of food they eat, what kind of clothing they wear, what are their homes like, where do they live. They wondered what school is like. They were interested in researching their questions and were delighted to find many similarities and connections to their own lives.

We read many, many folktales. The children were especially fond of the tricksters Coyote and Rabbit. They also got a glimpse of the great Mayan and Aztec cultures through their creation myths and legends.

They learned to play a few games that Mexican children enjoy. Loteria, a game that is very similar to Bingo was great fun! On Loteria boards, there are pictures of everyday objects with labels in Spanish. Rather than calling out the actual name for the chosen object, the caller must give a clue. In preparation for playing Loteria, the kindergartners devised clues for the given objects and designed their Loteria boards. They enjoyed solving each other's clues in order to cover the pictures on their boards.

They also enjoyed playing La Estrella - a strategy game. The board consists of a star with 10 holes. Nine marbles are placed in the holes. Players need to eliminate as many marbles as possible by jumping over them. The kindergartners tried a variety of strategies in order to finish the game with just one marble left on the board. Another favorite game was Toma Todo. It is very much like Dreidel. All the players put a token in the middle. A player spins the pirinola (top). When the top falls, (s)he follows the instructions on the side facing up. Then the player takes or puts down the number of tokens indicated on the pirinola: *Pon 1* (place 1), *Pon 2* (place 2), *Toma 1* (take 1), *Toma 2* (take 2), *Toma todo* (take everything). At the end of the game, the player who has the most tokens wins.

Each child constructed his/her own balero, a traditional (and favorite) toy of Mexican children. It is a very simple toy consisting of a stick and cup which are connected by a string. The object of the toy is to catch the cup-like part on the end of the stick. We found the authentic balero from our collection to be quite a challenge (for older children and adults too!). While the kindergartners' version with a larger cup opening was still challenging, with practice it was actually doable and quite a bit of fun.

Esperanza was a special highlight of our studies. A cuddly stuffed replica of a young armadillo, Esperanza spent time with each child both at home and school. Each child and his/her family recorded the day's events in Esperanza's travel journal (as requested by Mama who eagerly awaited her return to Mexico).

The kindergartners delved into a study of traditional Mexican arts/crafts. They learned about the artistic techniques for many different art forms and perhaps more importantly, they learned the stories, beliefs, and traditions which fuel the artistic expression.

The Huichol people of Mexico live a life of magic and sacred mythology. They believe themselves to be that part of creation which entertains the gods. The Huichols express these feelings through their art. They are known world-wide for their yarn paintings. They melt beeswax in the sun and spread it over a piece of wood. Then they push brightly colored yarn into the wax to create images. We looked carefully at a few traditional Huichol yarn paintings. We wondered about the dream stories of the artist who created them. The kindergartners experimented with their own version of yarn painting using glue, cardstock and various colors and thicknesses of yarn. They created then shared the stories of their yarn paintings with each other.

The Huichol Indians consider the Ojo de Dios or god's eye to be a talisman associated with the sun, rain and food. Fathers dedicate god's eyes to the gods on behalf of their children. Traditionally, just the "eye" or center is made when the child is born. Then with each successive birthday (up to age five), a section of yarn in a different color is added – a beautiful reminder of each year's celebration. The kindergartners quickly mastered the skills needed to create their own Ojo de Dios.

They also returned to their weavings with renewed fervor after listening to *Beneath the Stone*, the story of Leo, a young Zapotec child who learns to weave. Leo's weavings are sold at the market to help support his family. Many of the kindergartners' weavings became treasured gifts for family members and friends.

The children tried their hands at papel picado (pierced paper) – colorful banners made from cut tissue paper. They actually used metallic paper which was easier to handle. They made tissue paper flowers too. In art class, the children worked with Nicole to create four brightly colored papier mache piñatas - in the shape of paletas (popsicles). We used these beautiful decorations for our fiesta.

We discovered the delightful story *Dream Carver* by Diana Cohn. *Like his father and his father's father before him, Mateo carves juguetes, the small wooden toys his family sells at fiestas. But secretly, Mateo dreams of magnificent goats as pink as bougainvillea with cactus green speckles, jackrabbits in orange capes with red and white flames and purple cats with corn yellow spots. When he tells his father how he wants to carve, his father disapproves. This is not the tradition Mateo had been taught. But Mateo cannot stop dreaming. And on the day of the next fiesta, Mateo brings his dreams to life for all to see.* Inspired by the story of Oaxacan wood carver Manuel Jimenez, *Dream Carver* offers a simple message: follow your dreams.

We remembered a passage in *Dream Carver* which intrigued us. *When Mateo imagined a white-polka-dotted squirrel or an orange-striped gazelle gazing at the stars or a black and yellow-spotted frog bracing to spring, he could carve them all just like that! But what Mateo loved best of all was when he had no idea what to carve. He would sit and look at his woodpile until he sensed an animal waiting there for him.* So - we went searching throughout Creek Wood Hollow and our playgrounds for “the animals waiting there for us”. From our collection of branches, twigs, bark, and rocks, we created our own animal figures. They came alive with a little tempera and a lot of imagination! We hung them in the trees and bushes to dance in the breeze. They were a happy reminder to us to always follow our dreams!

We read *Frida* by Jonah Winter. *Frida enters the world. For little Frida, that world is Mexico. Her house is a blue house. It is in the town of Coyoacan.* So begins the story of Frida Kahlo's childhood and how it influenced her art. The kindergartners were quite taken with Frida's fierce determination and palpable artistic talent. They felt connected to her through the self-portrait studies they had completed earlier in the year. After looking carefully at a number of Kahlo's self-portraits, they enthusiastically began work on their third and final kindergarten self-portraits.

We were curious about the Pura Belpre award. We had found the gold medal on the front covers of some of the picture books in our collection of children's literature about Mexico. We learned that the award is a recognition presented to a Latino or Latina writer and illustrator whose work best portrays the Latino cultural experience in a work of literature for children or youth. As we looked at our collection of books that had received the award, we discovered Yuyi Morales. *Born in Mexico and raised among giant grandmothers, mossy house walls, and rampaging feral gardens, Yuyi Morales fostered a strong bond with the magical stories that ran in her family. Since having immigrated to the USA in 1994, she has drawn from her family's legacy and her heritage to create some of the most celebrated Latino works for children's books.* We read as many of her books as we could find! We were especially taken with *Dreamers* - the story of her immigration to the United States with her infant son. *She left behind nearly everything she owned, but she didn't come empty-handed. She brought her strength, her work, her passion, her hopes and dreams. . . and her stories.*

Cooking and eating Mexican cuisine was a favorite activity in the kindergarten this spring. Some of the foods we prepared were “dead bread”, Mexican hot chocolate, guacamole, salsa, mole poblano, Mexican wedding balls, and flan.

We celebrated El dia de los ninos (Children's Day) with games, stories, music, and Mexican hot chocolate. A few weeks later, parents joined us for our fiesta. Together the children and their parents prepared a memorable meal, amid our festive decorations. Once preparations were completed, everyone joined Diego to enjoy some traditional songs and dances. Lunch followed – an authentic and delicious meal. Finally, it was time to break the piñatas - a joyous ending to a wonderful celebration.

Los Pollitos, one of our favorite traditional Mexican songs tells the story of a mother hen who takes good care of her baby chicks. Eager to take on the exciting responsibility of incubating a clutch of chicken eggs, we contacted Quiver Farm. Farmer April introduced us to Will (a rooster) and Grace (one of her most docile hens). The children were amazed by their soft sleek feathers. Farmer April also taught us all we needed to know in order to be good mother hens. She set us up with an incubator and one dozen eggs.

It was very exciting to anticipate the chicks' arrival into the world. The kindergartners were incredibly responsible “mother hens” turning the eggs three times a day, adding water to the trough when necessary, and periodically

checking the thermometer. When we arrived at school on Monday morning, we discovered two wet, exhausted chicks resting quietly in the incubator. Over the course of the day, eight more chicks hatched. The kindergartners welcomed them into the world with numerous rounds of *Los Pollitos*. When we arrived at school on Tuesday morning, we were greeted by eleven fluffy, yellow, peeping chicks! Toni transferred them to the brooder box. She taught them how to drink from the water dispenser and how to eat from the food bowl. Once the newly hatched chicks were fully rested, the children carefully held them. A few of the chicks were so comfortable that they fell asleep in their hands.

We enjoyed the enchanting folktale, *How Nanita Learned to Make Flan* and actually followed Nanita's recipe to make the traditional Mexican dessert. We all agreed that Nanita's flan was magically delicious! Luckily, the recipe called for eighteen eggs - almost the exact number of eggshells needed to create a cascarone for each kindergartner.

Making cascarones is a springtime tradition in Mexico. The kindergartners made their cascarones by filling empty eggshells with confetti, sealing the ends with tissue paper, and painting the eggs with dabs of brightly colored tempera. During our final Morning Gathering, the kindergartners came together in a circle. On the count of three, they gently cracked their eggs on each other's heads releasing a shower of confetti, a burst of good luck, and many wishes for a very happy summer.

Endings

Amazingly, the end of the year was upon us. We enjoyed our last days together, finishing projects, caring for our chicks, swimming in the pool, laughing and joking. We cleaned out cubbies, joined the Nursery for our end of year sing-along, and after saying our goodbyes, headed down the driveway for the beginning of summer vacation.

Not only have I enjoyed working with this remarkable group of children, I have also had the pleasure of working closely with the parents in our group. They came and worked in the classroom, accompanied us on field trips, kept the lines of communication open, and, most importantly, provided at-home support for their children's interests and endeavors. Your efforts enriched us immensely. I extend a heartfelt thank you to all of you!

As always, our Miqon specialists enriched our learning and our lives. Half group times were often the highlight of our kindergartners' days thanks to their amazing creativity and skill. Thank you Diego, Sarah, Kate, Lisa and Nicole for a terrific year.

I have felt truly blessed to have Sherry and Elisa as my teaching partners. Their boundless creativity and experience made for lively, productive, joyful kindergarten days. They created loving relationships with our kindergartners. They enthusiastically shared their passions and happily embraced the children's passions. I am grateful for their deep wisdom, their positive energy, and their unwavering kindness.

I am so delighted (and thankful) that Elisa agreed to join our kindergarten group this year. She took on the huge responsibility of learning all the ins and outs of a new position. She was willing to jump into the unknown with us - knowing full well that we might be facing great loss and sadness. She was steadfast in her support of our children and their parents as we tried to pick up the pieces after Sherry's death. She was also a tremendous support to me - I can't even begin to enumerate the many ways that she quietly went about the business of caring for our kindergarten community. Thank you Elisa!

This group of kindergarten children developed into a real community. They chose to play, explore, and learn together. They truly enjoyed one another. I am pleased and proud to have worked with such a joyful, loving group of children. I will always remember their endearing manner, their irresistible exuberance, and their fun-loving approach to everything.