



2018-2019 Curriculum Report

Marisa Campbell and Cassandra Orr

Community and Daily Routines

In the Nursery, we follow 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 dynamically to meet the interests and the needs of the children both individually and as a group. Our days were structured to allow ample time for independent play, as well as times to gather together to share stories, play games, and explore ideas in greater depth. During choice time children learned how to choose what they'd like to do, become engaged in work and play, and extend that play. In doing so, they developed self-regulation and discovered how they learn best, including choices about whether to work inside or outside, for how long, and when to stop to have snack. During inquiry, half of the group explored an idea or concept of interest in greater depth, in a focused and hands-on manner, while the other half of the group was learning with one of our specialists.

These elements remained central to our days in the nursery, and mid-year we shifted how these pieces fit together. We created a new schedule based on research and our experience of many years working with

nursery students that featured an extended time outdoors to start the day, time where children are invited to make a single choice and supported in extending their work over a period of time, opportunities to revisit the same materials over multiple days, and fewer transitions. Since shifting to this schedule, we noticed that our learners are more thoughtful, more inclusive, more centered, more flexible and open to trying new things, and more engaged in their work and play.

While below you will see that we describe our social emotional, literacy, and math learning in isolation, they most frequently happened 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 began with morning meeting, a chance to come together and talk and explore. As Tom Hobson (2017) says, we have meetings "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, which is chosen and started by one child, and each child practices making eye contact and saying hello to his or her neighbors. During meeting we also play games, sing, and share news. Some of our favorite games and songs this year were: One Potato/Two Potato, Sleeping Bunnies, Sleeping Fawn, Sleeping Bear, Two Little Blackbirds, Bubblegum, There Was an Old Woman, There Once Was a Ghost, Baby in the High Chair, Let Us Plant Them in The Way That We Do, and Laying in My Sleeping Bag. The simple things that happen at meeting help us learn how to be part of a group, a collaborator in a learning community, and an exciting and unique one at that.

Creating a caring community of three, four, and five year olds is slow, steady, intentional, and reflective work. We used stories, puppet shows, plays, partnered play, and modeling to help the children learn how to collaborate, negotiate materials and space, and solve problems. Stories that helped us think about how to care for each other included:

- *Be Gentle* by Virginia Miller
- *Blocks* by Irene Dickson
- *The Rabbit Listened* by Cori Doerrfeld
- *Thank You, Octopus* by Darren Farrell
- *A Sick Day for Amos McGee* by Philip C. Stead, illustrated by Erin E. Stead
- *May We Sleep Here Tonight?* by Tan Koide, illustrated by Yasuko Koide
- *Little Elliot, Big City* by Mike Curato
- *The Lonely Mailman* by Susanna Isern

This year we began the practice of using persona dolls to tell stories using the four-square model, in which characters are described as taking on the roles of ouch feeler, mistake maker, bystander, and upstander. The persona dolls are wooden blocks with photographs of a child on the front. When we introduced each doll, we gave background information including: name, age, pronouns, who they live

with, how they talk about their skin color and race, favorite hobbies, and the languages they speak. These dolls were used to tell stories about social interactions often with an eye toward problem solving, and in each story, we worked to think about who was the mistake maker(s), the ouch feeler(s), the bystander, or the upstander.

This practice gave children experience with the language to acknowledge and talk about difference. We intentionally introduced these facets of identity so that the children are aware they exist and are just another way of being human, even if they are not found in their immediate social circle. The stories invited children to practice taking perspective and understanding how another person might feel. They learned to view themselves as problem solvers, as they helped the dolls work through their problems. Finally, in the model of storytelling that we often use, they understand that the roles are not static, that the character who made the mistake can also be an "ouch feeler," and that the "ouch feeler" can be an "upstander" and advocate for themselves.

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. Over the year, new questions, ideas, challenges, and perspectives arose, and the children grappled with the ideas of how to include each other, whether we should be able to say scary things to each other, and whether it felt good or bad to use the word "besties."

Because of the democratic process through which these rules were suggested, discussed, and adopted, the children demonstrated ownership of the rules they made. These agreements informed our process of conflict resolution, in which children learned to ask and answer each other about what they need to feel better, and give and receive apologies of action. The children worked daily to draw pictures of apology, practice do-overs, give hugs and high fives, get cool towels, and simply check on each other. This work, of solving problems, caring for each other, and recovering from difficult experiences was at the heart of our social and emotional curriculum. It built empathy, and empowered children to advocate for themselves and be active participants in making things better.

We were so lucky to have returning children in the nursery this year who started asking us almost immediately, "What about the kindnesses? We need to do the kindnesses." And so, recalling the ways we recorded and reflected on kindness last year, the returning children taught the new children all about nursery kindnesses. Once more, we all adjusted our focus to be on the lookout for times that other children were kind, and to recognize these fleeting moments, we cut strips of paper to write them down, and then formed them into a chain. In the 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 there were 155.

Math

Math is a way of seeing the world, of observing particular qualities of the things around you and trying to make sense of them. With this year's theme of Noticing and Wondering, the invitation to observe and

describe the world through the lens of mathematics, of cause and effect, change, attributes, etc., was even more powerful. While mathematical thinking is woven into all of our thematic studies, we wanted to highlight some specific examples of our work from this year.

We practiced counting with one-to-one correspondence to figure out how many spoonfuls of raisins to take at snack, gather ten ingredients for our potions, and count how many days until the night party. The children explored pattern by noticing and extending color patterns in our morning messages, and by making increasingly long movement patterns... We once got up to eight movements! We compared quantities using representative marks and graphing, for example, children voted using cubes to select our half-group names, and examined our daily sign-in chart, which was structured like a line plot. Block play allowed children to describe and compare attributes, explore symmetry, balance, and shape. Every day, children composed and decomposed shapes with Magna Tiles, and used a variety of blocks and shapes to learn more about the attributes of shapes and their possible combinations. The children explored measurement through cooking all manner of delicious things, from apple muffins to garlic mustard pesto to lizard bread.

Literacy

Our literacy curriculum derives from a collection of best practices in emergent reading and writing that are used in the context of the emergent curriculum. Our philosophy of literacy remained 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 provided authentic opportunities to use these skills in work and play, and we modeled multiple ways to do so. Our approach to literature invited learners to delight in stories while developing critical literacy skills. Children saw their own ability to question the texts and authors, and explore intertextual relationships.

During daily picture book read-alouds we interpreted stories, made predictions and comparisons, immersed ourselves in story language, noticed the parts of books, and simply fell in love with stories. 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 happened through study of our names. Students searched for their own name in many parts of the classroom, helped sort the names by starting letters, looked at each other's names and discovered similar letters, and made connections between letters and sounds. Steadily, they worked to develop the powerful understanding that what you say can be written. This knowledge was developed through reading and adding to the morning message, writing during twice weekly journal time, and through making stories. We supported the children in writing by helping them notice, isolate and record the sounds in words, and by taking dictation. Daily opportunities to write and draw were available at the art table, in rest journals, at the easels, in booklets, and in clipboards that could go anywhere. Learners were encouraged and supported to use writing in their play, especially in naming colors, describing potions, and in making receipts for our magic store. Later in the year we began the ritual of reading a chapter book during rest. Some of our favorites were: *Monsters and*

Mold by Asia Citro, *Finn Family Moomintroll* by Tove Jansson, all of the Pippi stories by Astrid Lindgren, and *The Witches* by Roald Dahl.

Thematic Inquiry

Color Study

The children's play and questions propel our inquiries, 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. This year we began with an exploration of color, inviting children to wonder: *What do you notice about color? What is important about colors? How can you make colors? How might you name colors? How can colors change?*

We explored these questions in many ways. We took a color hike, in which the children matched objects in the natural world to paint chips we brought along. We mixed colors, first with primary colors, and then with a plethora of colors both with liquid watercolors and with opaque tempera paint. As we mixed, we introduced the process of making a swatch of color to decide if it feels finished, or if it still needs mixing. The children created theories of color, for example, wondering if the color mixed would be the same if you added red then blue, or blue then red. We used transparent colored shapes with our projector to see how colors would mix and how it would feel to dance in the colors after reading *Color Dance*. The children experimented with adding black and white paint to their palettes, observing how they transformed the other colors. Over many days of mixing, they created new colors for each other and taught their grandparents how to mix. Even at the end of the year, children were still eager to get out pipettes and liquid watercolors and see what they could create.

Texts that supported this inquiry included:

- *Little Blue and Little Yellow* by Leo Lionni
- *Press Here* by Hervé Tullet
- *Mixed* by Aree Chung
- *Red: A Crayon's Story* by Michael Hall
- *Mouse Paint* by Ellen Stoll Walsh
- *Color Dance* by Ann Jonas
- *I am Blop!* By Hervé Tullet
- *Oh Were They Ever Happy* by Peter Spier
- *Red, Yellow, Blue (and a Dash of White, Too)* by C.G. Esperanza



Mr. Nobody

After hearing curious tales of Mr. Nobody over many, responsible for all kinds of nursery shenanigans, we decided to investigate further just who this mysterious being could be. The children started with what they know so well: themselves. They drew self-portraits using

mirrors, and considered the things they would want to know about someone by reading selections from *This is How We Do It* by Matt LaMothe. Reading the poem Mr. Nobody by Anonymous, and using the song Aiken Drum, they began to write all about Mr. Nobody. The learners traced each other's bodies and then used the tracings to draw and describe their own Mr. Nobody which they then presented to the class. The children drew and built homes designed for Mr. Nobody, and then built their own nobodies using beautiful materials. Mr. Nobody continued to pop up in the nursery from time to time through the end of the year, and their presence will be around long into the future...

Kindness and *The Lonely Mailman*

Building on the work of the children in their color study, our self-portraits, and our exploration of kindnesses, we headed to the Philadelphia Museum of Art for a field trip to learn about portraits in the collection through the story *A Sick Day for Amos McGee*. The children made two mixed media portraits during our visit, and were captivated by the idea that people and animals could be depicted with things that were important about them, for example, a person holding their guitar. This visit dovetailed with our above mentioned work around kindness. Back at school we read



the book *The Lonely Mailman*, in which the mailman secretly helped the forest animals around him solve their problems, and how the animals thanked him when they found out. The children connected deeply with this book, asked to act it out, and through their continued interest, we decided to make it into a play. The children identified and selected roles, made costumes, sets, and props, and rehearsed until it felt just right. With a forest on the walls, a pond on the floor, animals houses made of blocks, and hand typed letters (which the children made using our typewriter), the nursery children performed their play for their families and friends one afternoon.



Identity

Over the first four months of the year, we noticed that the children returned often to questions of identity. Threaded through our introductions to each other, our study of color, our persona doll stories, noticing our different skin, hair and eye colors, and our conversations about Mr. Nobody were ideas about who we are, and how we are the same and how we are different. From the start of the year we were attentive to the openings for conversations about diversity and identity initiated by the children. Hoping this was a direction our learning would take, at the start of the year we asked families to share how they talk about identity and diversity at home so we could support learners and understand the foundation they were learning from.

Our study of identity was rooted in and guided by Anti-Bias Education. The four goals of Anti-Bias Education, from *Anti-Bias Education for Young Children and Ourselves* (2010), are:

1. Each child will demonstrate self-awareness, confidence, family pride, and positive social identities.
2. Each child will express comfort and joy with human diversity; accurate language for human differences; and deep, caring human connections.
3. Each child will increasingly recognize unfairness, have language to describe unfairness, and understand that unfairness hurts.
4. Each child will demonstrate empowerment and the skills to act, with others or alone, against prejudice and/or discriminatory actions.

We created a text set that would support our examination of external and internal aspects of identity including: skin color, race, our faces, hair color and texture and care, gender expression, preferences, things that are important and valuable about me, homes, and family.

The texts used included:

- *Let's Talk About Race* by Julius Lester, illustrated by Karen Barbour
- *This is How We Do It* by Matt LaMothe
- *We Are All Alike, We Are All Different*, by the Cheltenham Elementary Kindergarteners
- *Shades of People* by Sheila M. Kelly
- *All the Colors that We Are: The Story of how We Get Our Skin Color* by Kate Kissinger
- *Faces* by Barbara Brenner, with photographs by George Ancona
- *Looking Like Me* by Walter Dean Myers, illustrated by Christopher Myers
- *Does a Yak Get a Haircut?* By Fred Ehrlich
- *Superhair-o and the Barber of Doom* by John Rocco
- *Don't Touch My Hair* by Sharee Miller
- *Jacob's New Dress* by Sarah and Ian Hoffman
- *They, She, We, He: Free to Be* by Maya Christina Gonzalez
- *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown
- *Home* by Carson Ellis
- *In Front of My House* by Marianne Dubuc



We started our study by thinking about the many facets of our identity, and how our identity is like a story using *We Are All Alike*, *We Are All Different* and *Let's Talk About Race*. We talked about skin color, families, homes, and the ways that our stories started. In partnership with Rossana, we compared objects in shades of tan to our skin, noticing the similarities and differences between the shades of our skin and those of cinnamon, cayenne, wood, pearls, leather, brass, coral, bone, and mustard seeds. Using tempera paints, we mixed our shades of skin, swatching them on our arms, and noticing how adding red, blue and yellow changed the colors we were mixing. After reading *Faces*, which helped us notice the details of the parts of our own faces, we used mirrors and oil pastels to draw self-portraits. Learners were again invited to swatch and mix the pastels to find their own shade, acknowledging that the colors in the box were just a starting point for our unique shades. We created silhouettes of each child, and the learners drew images to place inside the silhouettes to show important things about them that we can't see. As we explored different elements of identity, we returned to *This is How We Do It* to learn about the lives of other real children from around the world.

Hair and fibers were a central part of this inquiry. To learn about them, we started by noticing and wondering about our own hair and what we know about hair. We examined many different types of sheep's wool and plant fibers. Ames's mother Katie came to teach us how to felt with wool, and Courtney Kelley of Kelbourne Woolens invited us to explore a variety of fibers from silk made by worms to yak wool. Many parents and community members joined us in the classroom to help us learn about hair and



identity. We learned about how people care for their hair, how to ask before touching, how different hair feels, and we even got to watch and help give a haircut and a beard trim. During choice, we explored using a variety of styling tools and accessories.

We considered clothes and their relationship to identity by trying on a variety of clothes, emphasizing that your clothes should make you feel good, and that you're the one who is in charge of

that decision. We took photographic portraits of our favorite outfits. We read *Jacob's New Dress* to help us think more deeply about people can wear what they want to, and how it should not be limited because of their gender. Building on our conversations about pronouns started with our persona doll stories, we read *They, She, We, He: Free to Be* which helped us understand how people can dress and express themselves the way they prefer, and it does not determine their gender.

Reading *The Important Book* we each drew and wrote about the important things about us. Drawing on all of our work we created



our own dolls, with skin color we mixed, hair, eye, and lip color we swatched and added, and dressed them in outfits made from fabrics and sequins and jewels. We learned about different types of homes, talked about our homes and what it means to have a home, discussed different types of toilets, drew our favorite places in our homes, and eventually built homes for our dolls to inhabit.

At this point we noticed the children's interests shifting once more, leaning toward zombie tag, haunted houses, daily reading from *Frankenstein Makes a Sandwich*, magic potions made with sand and water, and poison brewed with mud and wood chips. Listening to their interests, we decided to explore...

Magic and Creepy Things

We were curious what would happen if we investigated magic, ghosts, witches, potions, haunted houses, and monsters based in imagination and fantasy. As we worked with the children around these themes that are emerging in their play, we were intentionally listening to the questions and theories underneath their play. Drawing on the work of Vivian Gussin Paley and Jane Katch, among others, we understood that one of the most significant tasks for young children is the process of making distinctions between reality and fantasy. We used this as an opportunity to help children strengthen their ability to make distinctions between fantasy and reality, between real and pretend, helping them develop a sense of their own power and control over potions and powers, and creepy things.

We gathered a text set that would help them think more deeply about these ideas, and create their own working definitions for things like magic and potions and powers.

- *Bone Soup* by Cambria Evans
- *The Witches' Supermarket* by Susan Meddaugh
- *Spells* by Emily Gravett
- *Possum Magic* by Mem Fox
- *Gorky Rises* by William Steig
- *Ghosts in the House* by Kazuno Kohara
- *The Hungry Thing* by Jan Slepian and Ann Seidler
- *The Ghost's Dinner* by Jacques Duquennoy
- *Superbat* by Matt Carr
- *Slightly Invisible* by Lauren Child
- *I'm not Afraid of This Haunted House* by Laurie Friedman
- *Haunted House* by Jan Pientkowski
- *I Want To Be in a Scary Story* by Sean Taylor
- *Rotten Island* by William Steig



Inspired by *Bone Soup* we ventured out to the playground to collect ingredients and used them to make our own magical mixtures. After reading *The Witches' Supermarket* we thought about what "grocery

items” we might find in a magical market and how we could find (or make) a version of some of these things ourselves.



With our magical grocery lists we set out to mix, grind, trim, paint and create the other things we need to create a magical market. We mixed water and red dye to make blood, we ground rice and beans, we cut ribbon and paper, painted pebbles purple and covered them with glitter, sculpted with play dough and armature wire, and gathered and sorted dried flower petals. Children suggested names for our store, and after several votes, we landed on *Tidrf Lubjpmn Njaia Magic Store*. The children then built the store, and worked to stock the shelves, make money and credit cards, and shop in the store.

We engaged in a great deal of writing and drawing during this study. We were inspired by *I Want To Be in a Scary Story* to write our own scary stories for *Miquon Grass*. With Rossana we worked to write and illustrate our own version of the song *I Was Laying in My Sleeping Bag*. We wrote in our journals about potions and the powers we would want a tea to have after our own tisane making and tasting.



Knowing that a perennial interest of young children is exploring what happens when different substances are mixed together we created multiple opportunities for them to explore mixing different substances. In this process, they were constantly engaging in the scientific work of wondering what will happen, conducting the experiment, making observations, and continuing to change the variables, and drawing conclusions.

We experimented with the properties of many combinations of ingredients, including: water and cornstarch, vinegar and water, oil and water and alka seltzer, seltzer with raisins, polymer cubes and water, pudding mix and milk, jello and water, cabbage juice and vinegar and baking soda, glue, saline solution and baking soda, lemon balm leaves and hot water, watercolor paint and oil pastels, and of course, sand and water and dirt.

Concurrently, we explored a number of ingredients, ordinary and extraordinary through mindful tasting, including jello, bee pollen, crickets, mealworms, grasshoppers, lemon sorrel, and lemon balm and anise hyssop tisanes. Emphasizing the process of --look, smell, touch, taste, and hear-- and taking time with each step to share our observations when we try these new foods allowed us all to participate in “mindful tasting” to the degree that we were comfortable. It was surprising how many children who first declared “I’m not going to taste it” are willing to actually taste it once they’ve done the work of looking, smelling, and touching the food.

With the end of the year approaching, the children worked together to plan a celebration of our work, the night party. Deciding it should be creepy and magical, they jumped into planning headlong and made all the decisions about the decorations, food, experiences, and sounds. To prepare, they created invitations for all of their families, painted paper to make “bloody walls and floors,” used newspaper and beautiful materials to create a variety of sculptures, made new haunted forest and night sky murals, repurposed our forest mural from our play of *The Lonely Mailman* and transformed it into a creepy forest, built the store, made signs, created the menu, decided we should all wear costumes, and invented a signature treat: bloodsicles, made with strawberries, cherries, and raspberries. When the night arrived, it was magical, the children saw all of their ideas come to life, they shared their work with their families, and we ended the night by making potions with our families.



The Last Week



With our night party celebration over, the children shifted their gaze to the end of the year. As is tradition, we invited each child to choose something they would like to do before the year was over. Their choices ranged from having a picnic lunch to rereading *Gorky Rises*, to playing with our marble runs. These choices point to what was significant to the children about our year, both the magic of our thematic studies, and the delight in ordinary days with familiar and beloved materials, and good friends. We are so grateful to have spent this time

together, to have created a community of learners who know each other so well, and who truly know how to make their own fun.