



2004 Fall Newsletter

Early Childhood Centre, UNB Fredericton

UNB Preschool

This newsletter communicates our goals, and provides an important home-school connection summarizing and highlighting accomplishments of our classroom community - the children, parents, teachers, student-teachers, and professors.

Since September, our primary focus has been the "social curriculum". We started by getting to know the children's distinct skills, knowledge and dispositions and expanded the curriculum to provide opportunities for significant and substantial input from them. Anne Haas Dyson refers to this process as the "co-construction of curriculum".

"Me, a name I call myself..."
(With apologies to Julie Andrews!)

Our first unit was called "All About Me". We started with this unit because our focus is to work with a program that has a child sensitive curriculum. We consider it important for the children to get to know themselves as individuals. Also, children develop an understanding of their world by considering themselves in relation to their environment and to others. The unit included a number of strands to encourage self-awareness. The children used mirrors to create self-portraits, and created "all about me" books at the art & writing centres. We also observed individual characteristics on a class wide scale, discussing and charting such personal differences as eye colour, height and weight, as one of the parents volunteered a scale for the exercise (you'll notice Glenn didn't get anywhere near that scale!). We also discussed different types of emotions and charted them, and began to integrate how the children were feeling into their words and interactions. In the gymnasium, we expanded our understanding of the 'scale of ourselves' by learning how to create our own "body bubbles", and exploring aspects of how we could manipulate our own size, seeing how small or large we could become; how quickly or slowly we could move; or moving on planes of 'high and low'.

Part of our exploration revolved around the five senses. To that end, we provided the children with a number of opportunities to explore and reflect. They had access to 'taste' and 'smelling' tables. One of our terrific parents brought in 'touch (but don't see)' boxes, where children could guess what might be in a box, or simply explore textures and sensations. Greg, from the Learning Centre (just down the hall) came in to discuss his challenges with blindness. We cultivated phonological awareness by learning new songs and rhythms, picking out high and low pitches, or just performing songs, as impromptu bands would perform with Martin! In one case, the tones and pitches from hollow pumpkins were used to organise, or simply seriate the pumpkins.

Creating community is a critical aspect of social development and social curriculum. A greater understanding of, and sympathy with, each other's background came as the class celebrated aspects of ourselves. The class charted significant days, and brought in baby pictures to create the "Guess Who I Am?" board. We created portraits from geometric shapes, either of ourselves, or of people important to us. Children often brought in objects of significance to be considered by the class as a whole. On an ongoing basis, we celebrate days or events that represented some of the varying cultures of our preschool students (we are nothing without a memory of who we are, and from whence we have come...).

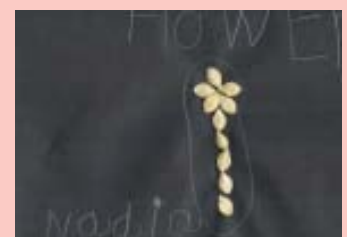
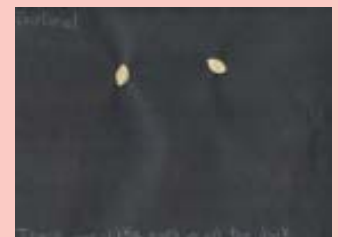
With all of our senses engaged, we could feel the changes going on all around - the weather, the colours, and the scent in the air - as autumn became a focus for our class.

"Autumn is a second spring where every leaf is a flower" - Albert Camus.

It is beautiful in N.B. in the fall, and for many, fall means apples. For this reason, the apple harvest in this locale and in other places was a natural place to start a fall project. Perhaps most important to this part of the program was the field trip to Doucette's apple orchard in Douglas. Field trips are an important curriculum component, as they offer a real world connection to the exploration and discussion we do in the preschool. For many of the children, it was the first time any of them had ever taken a ride on a big yellow school bus! Needless to say, the trip was an exciting one for everyone involved, and you must admit - food just tastes better when it's eaten on the back of a tractor.

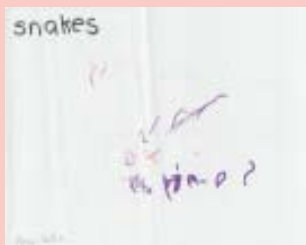
The efforts and generosity of the preschool children and parents were much appreciated in organizing and staffing the bake sale that helped fund the field trip. It was such a rousing success, it has become a permanent part of this year's program! The children are exposed to the 'wide world of commerce' through this venture, and seem to be natural sales people (or at least very appealing to prospective teachers in our faculty). Learning about money, incidentally, will be more explicitly addressed in our upcoming 'post office'.

Posing problems for the children is a constant in our classroom, and one problem arose out of the field trip for the children to solve: what to do with all those apples? The problem was addressed by involving the children in all things 'apple'. We dissected apples, explored their insides and made them the materials by which we produced art (apple prints). The children baked a variety of seasonal favourites, and used very interesting kitchen tools to complete their tasks, which brought to them a consistent introduction to measurement, and an exploration of how a (not so) simple machine (manually operated apple peeler) can work. The children also made sure there was 'turn taking', a further development in their social curriculum. Invariably, the harvesting of one type of fruit led to another, and pumpkins became our focus (having some in our very own garden didn't hurt a bit!). Again, exploring a topic usually means getting right in there and digging around, or in this case, hollowing out! Children estimated, counted, made art with and were given the opportunity to taste, pumpkin seeds (the latter after baking those seeds, of course). At every turn (not just involving seeds), math skills - cardinal and ordinal numbers, addition, subtraction, estimation, and grouping of objects into sets, to name but a few - have been one of our priorities. The class took the opportunity to compare pumpkin seeds to other types of seeds that were being produced by various other plants, and in the end, avocado seeds were planted, with the hope we will grow our very own avocado seedling. The leaves of various trees (quite naturally) also became a focus of investigation, as students classified and discussed leaves, as well as using them as art materials, or for further study.





The subject of trees and leaves, the power of nature and the sheer fun of different areas of science came home to roost in our second field trip – a trip to Science East in downtown Fredericton. Again, for many, the trip on a City of Fredericton bus was quite a thrill. Aside from Michael's (our host at Science East) informative discussion about tree aging and "how to build a 'helicopter' (a paper construct that fell as some seedlings fall), the children also experienced a pulley system that gave one person the strength of five, the "tornado maker" (a project soon adapted to our classroom) and the "shadow room" (a room that featured a wall covered with photosensitive paint), among other exhibits. Again, this trip was paid for (in part) by the bake sale held by the children to raise money.



My Favorite Part Was...



...the mirrors



...seeing the fish



...the shadow room



...the shadow wall



...the long rope



...the whirlpool

What else can happen in the fall? For the children, it seemed like a perfect time to take advantage of the last of the great weather, and go "camping". The children relished the roles of campers, hikers and mountain climbers, and became familiar with "life in the great outdoors". Park rangers (well, Glenn actually) would occasionally show up to be a ready guide, and one of the wonderful tents gave everyone the chance to experience and discuss the effects of static electricity (a hair raising discussion for sure...). Life in the great outdoors does have its hazards, however, and one had to be on the lookout for bears.

The children's idea of having a bear cave in the classroom (an example of the child-sensitive curriculum) led to an exploration of hibernation during play, but certainly didn't end there. Songs about the types of animals and creatures that hibernate (such as "Five Little Speckled Frogs" and "Little Brown Bear"), classifying animals that hibernate (and those that migrate or stay active) and activities such as "mud painting" that spoke to the environments in which animals hibernate, all gave the children an opportunity to form better ideas on the subject of hibernation.

Hibernating creatures were not the only ones with which we had to contend. From day one, our block centre has become the setting (through some incredibly imaginative building) for all sorts of conversation about and adventure by...dinosaurs! This extreme interest in the prehistoric creatures spilled from the block corner to the outdoor playground, where the very sand surrounding the outdoor play equipment became the fiery nemesis of both dinosaurs and boot soles. Since this interest rested in the minds of some of the children, and exposure to as many malleable materials as possible is essential to the motor skills of young children, A plaster of paris volcano soon became a fixture in the classroom, as many students put their efforts into mixing and applying the plaster, placing rocks in the plaster and painting it to create a realistic looking volcano.

In any group, there are diverse heritages among the children, and, in the case of late October and early November, the cultural heritages of members of the class were acknowledged. The children were given a chance to participate in these special days. The class celebrated Hallowe'en, "Dia de los Muertos" (Day of the Dead) and Guy Fawkes Day, which represented some of the varying cultures of the children. "The Ghost of John" became a spooky favourite, and the children enjoyed the opportunity to show their costumes to the many admiring staff around the UNB campus. The Day of the Dead is a celebration of remembrance, and the altar created that is part and parcel of the celebration of this held the memories and thoughts of people special to the children. Finally, Guy Fawkes Day gave us an opportunity to look at some geography of the Northern hemisphere, and to build our very own "scarecrow". The children made sure he was stuffed to the limit!

It has been the aim of everyone involved with the UNB Preschool to attempt to expand the opportunities for its young students. Thanks to the generosity of the parents, volunteers, and staff, those opportunities have been expanded. The Puppet theatre, the water play table, a variety of new math and alphabet based games and puzzles, the introduction of plasticine and a table devoted exclusively to writing are examples of the means through which the children can more readily explore play in all its facets, and at the same time, learn in the most pleasurable of ways!



A special **thank-you** to all of the wonderful contributions our parents, parent volunteers and education program students have made to the classroom and to the various fundraising efforts over the last few months.

