

Toni and Sherry's Group Kindergarten Curriculum Report 2008-2009

Group Teacher: **Toni McDonnell**
Assistant Teacher: **Sherry Moman**

OUR GROUP

Freud was once asked what he thought was necessary to lead a happy and productive life. He replied, "Lieben und Arbeiten," loving and working. With all due respect to Freud, I believe he should have included "Spielen," playing. Love, work, and play are three inborn drives that power human thought and action throughout the life cycle.

David Elkind

Our kindergarten group traveled to the Kimmel Center twice this year. We felt so fortunate to experience two exceptional performances, Sound All Around hosted by storyteller Charlotte Blake Alston and some weeks later, the internationally renowned dance company Philadanco. The kindergartners enjoyed both programs immensely. They loved the music, the story, the energy, the precision. They responded enthusiastically to the skill and passion and joy that radiated from the musicians and dancers.

Perhaps our exuberant kindergartners recognized kindred spirits in the performers they experienced at the Kimmel Center. Young children intuitively know that play, love and work are essential to healthy development. I like to think that our five and six year olds understood at some level that the adults on stage had achieved what they as children do so naturally - the ability to appreciate play, love, and work as a single, joyful experience.

Sherry and I have truly enjoyed the privilege and challenge of working with this extraordinary group of kindergartners. Our group was a dynamic mix of eleven girls and nine boys: nine were newcomers to Miquon, and eleven moved on from the Miquon Nursery.

Clearly, the large group of children moving on from Beth and Celia's group 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, Sherry, and I worked hard to build a sense of community within our group. Our goal

was to create a safe, supportive environment for each child. We consistently worked within the framework of our class guidelines that the children had developed: We take care of ourselves. We take care of each other. We take care of our environment. 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.

This group loved to play together and we were pleased to see a great deal of inclusive friendly play. Communal play, ever changing combinations of children, and a general feeling of social success seemed to permeate the lives of the kindergartners each day.

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 promoted cognitive, social and physical development, both indoors and out.

Each morning began with a short period of "checking in" time followed by Morning Circle. During Circle we 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 Circle Time was the Mystery Bag. Each day 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 Circle. 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 Circles were devoted to math games and explorations. We frequently played games (Twenty Questions, I'm Thinking of a Number 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 marketplace, a castle fit for royalty, a puppet theater, trains, airplanes, a Mexican restaurant, and a neighborhood of snug homes. 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 for dramatic play, origami, informative signs, colorful weavings, gifts, 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.

Lego, pattern blocks, sorting collections, puzzles, geoboards, board games, 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 pig, Snowflake was the recipient of much love and attention. A few children would spend great chunks of their choice time observing, handling and caring for our many pets.

For many of our children, Choice Time was synonymous with the outdoors. The creek, sandbox, “twirly slide”, tree house and other play equipment were frequent play destinations. Many of the children enjoyed fast paced chase games such as Tag, Beeca (baby panda game), House, Crimson Pirates, Circus and Star Wars were also favorite choice time games. Tree climbing was a popular activity, as well as timed races and marathon games of hopscotch. Many performances were held on our kindergarten playbarn. Sherry and I were frequently invited to view plays (such as Camelot), lots of song and dance numbers, gymnastic routines, and impromptu dramatic play.

Constructing the town of Penguinville in the sandbox was the activity of choice for many children throughout the year. Children worked tirelessly to sculpt roads and waterways, bridges and houses. The Penguinville volcanoes which erupted quite frequently created plentiful opportunities for redeveloping the town.

Children designed and built signs, bird houses and planes at the workbench. They also spent a great deal of time observing caterpillars and other insects, salamanders and crayfish, frogs and toads. 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 PE, Music, Science, Art and Library. 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 Sherry and I worked with each half-group in turn on social studies, 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 folktales 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, sewing or weaving, doing puzzles, or playing with any of our math manipulatives. They also listened to story tapes or a teacher-read chapter book such as *My Father’s Dragon*, *the School Mouse*, or *Poppy*.

Definitely one of the most exciting developments in our classroom this year was our relationship with Sarah and Diana’s group as Reading Buddies. Each kindergartner was matched with a third grade child who was his/her buddy for the entire school year. On Wednesday afternoons just as Rest Time ended, each third grade 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.

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. 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 good-bye 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’ Circle, children constantly developed and refined their facility with the various components of language.

Our Language Arts program was based on a language rich environment. 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. 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 Miquon Grass stories, walking books, and chick journals) were also highly sought after.

In our room, there were many opportunities for children to create written language for themselves. There were ink stamp letters, 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 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). 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 upper case 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, 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 directions.

The children always looked forward to our weekly visits from Tammy Davis, our Reading and Writing Specialist. They loved the marvelous stories she dramatically read to them. They especially enjoyed the opportunity to retell a story, poem or nursery rhyme by acting it out. They also appreciated the wonderful variety of listening and reading readiness activities Tammy shared with them. Thanks, Tammy!

MATHEMATICS

Our math program is based on the belief that children will learn best by creating their own understanding of mathematical concepts. They need to identify, solve, and develop 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 shells, 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, the students began to write their own numerals.

The children also became quite proficient at making and detecting patterns. 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.

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 Bluebirds and the Snakes (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

we each get if we share the total amount equally?

- We have twenty children. Two are absent today. How many cots do we need to set up?

When is your birthday? What is your favorite dish at Thanksgiving dinner? How many people are in your family? The children enjoyed collecting data for these questions (and many others), building graphs to record their results, and reading/explaining the information gleaned from their graphs. Throughout the year, many children chose to conduct surveys to generate data. 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.

SCIENCE/SOCIAL STUDIES

Looking Through the Window

We're looking through the window
To watch the world around us
We're looking through the window
To see what we can see

Golden egg on the milkweed
Stripy caterpillar munching
Chrysalis like a jewel
Monarch in the sky

Tufted titmouse on a branch
Singing peter, peter, peter
Swooping down to our feeders
To nibble sunflower seeds.

Chattering chipmunks frisk about
To gather nuts and seeds
They scoot into their burrows
To sleep the winter away

We're looking through the window
To watch the world around us
We're looking through the window
To see what we can see

The song *Looking through the Window* was composed by the kindergarten group for our Winter

Assembly performance. It represents one facet of our yearlong thematic study – an exploration of the natural world beyond our classroom windows.

Five and six year olds are incredibly curious about their world. They have many questions. They are eager to investigate, make hypotheses, and experiment with their ideas. The Miquon campus provided our kindergartners with endless opportunities to observe and wonder and play.

What did the kindergartners discover? They turned over rocks and logs to find pill bugs, spiders, earwigs, velvet mites, beetles, ants, newts and garter snakes. They sat quietly at the Japanese pond watching the frogs that live there. They caught salamanders and crayfish in the creek. They searched for caterpillars on the underside of leaves. The kindergartners delighted in watching the goldfinches, cardinals, chickadees, sparrows, tufted titmice, mourning doves and woodpeckers that routinely visited our feeders. They were thrilled to occasionally sight a chipmunk scurrying among the rocks.

They sorted fall leaves and tried to identify them. They made leaf rubbings. They collected seeds of all kinds. They climbed trees and rested in their leafy branches. They planted milkweed seeds in our garden. They built dams in the creek. They learned about stinging nettle and its antidote jewelweed. They made snow angels and built snowmen. 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 also planted a flower garden with their reading buddies. Our group looked closely at the variety of insects they captured on the playground. They planted a sugar maple on the grassy spot behind our swings. They sipped sweet honeysuckle nectar. They 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 had taken up residence on our science shelf. Monarch and painted lady caterpillars, ladybugs, ants and preying mantises lived in various containers. We also had an ever changing collection of visiting insects which had been captured on the playground by our quick-handed kindergartners.

In September, as the children entered the classroom each morning, they would pause at the red shelf to check on the progress of our two monarch caterpillars. (We had discovered them on the

milkweed growing right outside our window!) The children marveled at the quantity of milkweed leaves the caterpillars had 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 two smooth green chrysalides dotted with gold. Finally 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!

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 the experiences our monarchs might have as they made their way to Mexico.

We planted more milkweed in our garden with the hope that it will attract monarch butterflies. Perhaps many monarch caterpillars will be happily munching on its leaves when we return to school in September.

We also kept a group journal of the painted ladies' metamorphosis. Each day two children would dictate their observations of the caterpillars' development. They also drew detailed illustrations to complement their story of the painted ladies.

Release day was very exciting. We sat in a circle in the grass and placed the butterfly habitat in the center. We sang numerous songs to pass the time as we waited for the thirty seven painted ladies to take wing. Finally our patience was rewarded. The children jumped and danced about as they enjoyed the sight of one butterfly after another making its first attempt at flight.

The beehive in the Library sparked great interest in honey bees. The children never tired of watching the busy bees as they went about their work. In early October, we visited Peace Valley Orchards to learn about apples. We were especially interested in pollination and the bees' role in this process.

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 kindergarten had picked 165 pounds of apples!

Well ... We counted the actual number of apples that we picked – 562. We held a taste test to determine which variety of apple was our favorite. We graphed the results. We munched on apples for snack for days on end. We made delicious apple sauce. We shared a basket of apples

with the Nursery. We ate apples with honey. We baked the most scrumptious apple crisp. And we still had apples!

We sent a basket of apples to the staff room. We baked an apple cake. We made spicy apple butter and home made English muffin bread. We cored apples, filled them with dried fruit, seeds and brown sugar and baked them. Finally, we were down to one basket of apples – enough to make two luscious apple pies.

In early fall, we also hiked with Tony to gather walnuts, pokeberries and goldenrod to make natural dyes. 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.

The children were quite interested in Monkeyland, 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.

We read a wonderful book – *In the Woods: Who's Been Here?* to introduce 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. 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?* each quarter group then created and illustrated their particular animal's story using information gleaned from their research.

In late winter, we learned about tapping maple trees and making maple syrup. We read Native American legends that explained how sweet maple sap was discovered and maple syrup produced. We also read picture books and non-fiction books to round out our maple sap to syrup know-how.

We tapped the two sugar maples that border our parking lot. The kindergartners were thrilled to see the large quantity of sap we had collected within a week's time. They helped to strain the sap to ready it for sugaring off. It was incredibly exciting to watch the sap boiling down and slowly changing to syrup.

We compared our pure maple syrup with a store bought version (Log Cabin). The children compared

their samples noting the differences in color, aroma and taste.

We whipped up a batch of scrumptious buttermilk pancakes. We all helped to make the huge stack of pancakes sweetened with our pure maple syrup quickly disappear ... YUM!

Over the course of the year, our group became quite proficient at recognizing the bird species that regularly visited the three feeders hanging just outside our classroom windows. One of my favorite memories of this year was the morning that we turned our block area into a bird blind. In half groups, the children spread out on the floor with their nature journals and drawing supplies. They watched the feeders intently whispering quietly to each other as birds alighted. They carefully sketched each bird, working to capture its salient characteristics.

We set up tally sheets under our windows so the kindergartners could keep track of the various birds that visited our feeders. I loved to hear a child exclaim, "I just saw a tufted titmouse!" as he/she ran to add a tally mark to our chart.

The kindergartners took on the important job of filling the feeders at the bird blind on a weekly basis. Each Thursday one quarter group would hike down to the blind to check on the feeders. Afterwards they enjoyed the opportunity to sit quietly to watch for birds. This was a favorite kindergarten job!

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. 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 worked to build a strong and safe community by creating class guidelines that we agreed to live by. We examined and celebrated our differences as well as our similarities. The fall and winter holidays provided opportunities to learn and enjoy each other's personal ways of celebrating.

In early spring, 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 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.

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.

The children also created a family memory paper quilt. Each child told the story of a favorite family memory and illustrated it with care.

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

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?

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.

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 took great pleasure in teaching Loteria to their grandparents on Grandparents' Day.

La Vibora de la Mar (the Serpent of the Sea) is similar to London Bridge Is Falling Down. Two children held hands to form the bridge. The rest of the group formed a line with each person holding the waist of the person in front. As they sang the sea serpent song, they wove around the room and under the bridge. On the last line of the song, the children forming the bridge dropped their arms and captured a child.

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 children worked diligently on their Milagros. In Oaxaca, artists make magical charms by impressing designs into thin sheets of tin with a blunt tool. They add vibrant color to the raised areas. The children created frames for small mirrors using this method.

The Huichol people of Mexico 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 in 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.

With Sherry's guidance, 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. We used these beautiful decorations for our fiesta. In art class, the children worked with Anne to create four whimsical papier mache piñatas.

We celebrated Cinco de Mayo with games, stories, music, dancing and quesadillas. A few weeks later, parents joined us for our fiesta.

Together the children and their parents prepared a memorable meal, mid our festive decorations. After a quick change into their Mexican clothing, everyone joined Karen to enjoy some traditional songs and dances. Lunch followed – an authentic and delicious meal. Due to inclement weather, we saved the piñatas for the next day – a delayed but still 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 Abby taught us all we needed to know in order to be good mother hens and left us 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 twice a day, adding water to the trough when necessary, and periodically checking the thermometer. When we arrived at school on Monday morning, we discovered four wet, exhausted chicks resting quietly in the incubator. Over the course of the day six more chicks hatched. The kindergartners welcomed them into the world with numerous rounds of Los Pollitos.

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, fideo soup, quesadillas, arroz con leche, Mexican wedding balls and flan.

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 nineteen eggs – 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.

We had originally planned to send the cascarones home intact, but decided instead to enjoy them as part of our final Good-bye Circle. The kindergartners gathered in a circle and on a count of three 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, signing each other's autograph books, finishing projects, swimming in the pool, laughing and joking. We joined the Nursery for our end of year picnic, cleaned out those cubbies, and after saying our good-byes 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, shared family traditions and artifacts, made Mexican costumes, kept the lines of communication open, but 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 Miquon specialists enriched our learning and our lives. Half group times were often the highlights of our kindergartners' days thanks to their amazing creativity and skill. Thank you, Bill, Karen, Tony, Anne and Diane for a terrific year!

This has been a full and exciting year. As always! - I have felt truly blessed to have Sherry as my teaching partner. Her energy, creativity, and gentle spirit have been such a gift to our group. I am so glad that we will be working together again next year!

This group of kindergarten children grew 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, caring group of children.