

Rich and Katie's Group

First / Second Grade

Curriculum Report 2008-2009

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THEMATIC STUDIES and SPECIAL HAPPENINGS

This year, the main question we asked in our room was HOW? How do we . . . was a starter for most of our discussions. We discussed many of the expectations and procedures for our group in this context. Some included *How do we be a friend?*, *How do we use an alpha smart?*, *How do we convene at the circle?*, and *How do we play on the wood chip field?* Through this format, we arrived at how we as a group wanted to run our classroom, and the children took ownership of our classroom practices, tools, and equipment.

Classroom Community

We started our year discussing our classroom community and building our community. The children enjoyed the stories we read to illustrate community building, which included How to be a Friend, where the children in the story had to work together to be friends because it did not always just happen; In My Yellow Shirt, after which we made t-shirts illustrating things about ourselves that make us special; I'm Gonna Like Me, a story about how we should and can continue to like ourselves even when we are not at our best; Today I Feel, after which we acted out feelings while playing Feelings Charades; It's Okay to be Different, where we learned how our differences can be celebrated; and -ish, a story that illustrates that even though we cannot do some things perfectly, they can be done in an -ish kind of way.

A wonderful book we read was called Cookies, which was a story illustrating how we can get along with each other with the back drop of sharing cookies. As a follow up to this book, we cut out and decorated "cookies", and each of us wrote on our cookie what was an important life skill we took from the book, such as sharing, respect, and love. We kept these on our tray in the room for several months.

Through the year we built up our repertoire of community building games like Detective_(a.k.a. Coseeki), Punchinella, Name Game, Hide the Button and Rainstorm; songs such as The Continents Song,

The Ocean Names Song, The Months of the Year, The Days of the Week, and The Writing Workshop Song; and following each other's original moves while dancing to music.

Community Circle time is also an opportunity for pondering some of life's deeper questions and big ideas together, such as getting along with people, why communities use rules, how we are each different and the same, what it means to be responsible to ourselves, the classroom, the campus, nature, and on and on. The conversations and interactions of Community Circle time sparked countless moments of spontaneous creative group play. In such moments, we have truly seen how the children have been connecting and integrating their social, academic, and kinesthetic learning in exciting and impressive ways!

We also shared Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day, and talked about how sometimes we can just be having a bad day, and sometimes we just need some time for ourselves. We have an area of our classroom called Australia, since Alexander always wanted to go to Australia, where children can go for a few minutes on their own if they need some time to regroup or just get themselves together.

To help resolve any disagreements in the classroom, we tried Debugging. While in class, or out at choice, if someone was "bugging" you, just take these steps: (1) Ignore it, (2) Ask kindly for the person to stop, (3) Ask firmly for the person to stop, (4) Move away, and (5) Go and see an adult. We tried role playing to illustrate the steps, and it worked out great. Another tool we used to problem-solve was the Peace Wheel. This is an eight step process where children are either #1 or #2. Each child gets to speak, each child repeats what the other said, and they brainstorm solutions, choose one and look each other in the eye and shake hands. We have had a lot of success with both of these tools. We are there to help as needed and to support the process, and we encourage the children to work together to resolve issues.

Around the World in Eighty Days (AW80)

For eighty days beginning in January, we had travelled the world in search of fascinating places, interesting cultural traditions, things to eat, dances to dance, and songs to sing. We travelled virtually around the world from our classroom, and we learned a lot along the way. We kept a map of the world in class to follow our travels, to know where we had been. As part of our study Katie taught us the Continents Song and the Oceans Song. Below are the lyrics for the two songs.

The Continents Song

Tell me the continents, tell me the continents, tell me if you can.
There's North America, South America, Africa, Europe, and Asia.
Don't forget Oceania, don't forget Antarctica.
Tell me the continents, tell me the continents, tell me if you can.

The Oceans Song

Tell me the ocean names, tell me the ocean names, tell me if you can.
Atlantic, Pacific, Indian, and Arctic.
The water is connected,
All over the world.

One of our first stops was Hawaii. We learned a lot about volcanoes in Hawaii. We also learned about different fruits that come from Hawaii, and sampled some pineapple and coconut. We discussed what islands were, and what defines an island chain. We talked about the Hawaiian alphabet, and how it has only twelve letters.

We travelled to Vermont in the winter and learned about Wilson Bentley and how he spent his life photographing snowflakes. In all the pictures he took, he never saw two snowflakes that were alike. We were lucky on one day as it snowed and we had the chance to capture some snowflakes, and observe them fleetingly for a few seconds.

Then off to Washington, D.C., where we witnessed the inauguration of President Obama. We read If I Were President, in which various children share their ideas on what it is to be President, and The Great White House Breakout, about a boy whose Mom is president, and who would like to take a tour on his own through Washington, D.C., as part of our visit. We broke down the oath of office and explained some of the vocabulary, and then recited it ourselves.

Then we left the United States and were off to Asia, where we visited China and Vietnam. We learned about some of the traditions of the Chinese New Year, including cleaning the house, decorating, and preparing food. All of the children helped clean the room so we could get ready for the New Year. A special event while we were studying Vietnam was when Carolyn Haynes (Kai's Mom) came in to teach us about the culture and traditions of Vietnam, especially those around the celebration of Tet, the Vietnamese New

Year. We enjoyed making spring rolls, tasting candied ginger and other sweets, and trying an interesting fruit called a pomelo, which was much like a grapefruit, but huge. We learned that the Chinese and Vietnamese Zodiac signs were similar, and that 2009 is the year of the Ox.

We spent quite a bit of time studying the Arctic and Antarctic regions. We looked at which animals in these regions would never meet, such as penguins and polar bears. We discussed how there were no permanent human settlements in Antarctica, except for science research stations. We also talked about what a pole is, and how the earth revolves around its pole. As part of this study we learned much about the Iditarod dog sled race, which is run annually between Anchorage and Nome, Alaska. The race commemorates a race against time to get medicine to sick children in Nome in 1926, and what a great value dog sleds were in the history of Alaska. Musher's and their team of around sixteen dogs cover the 1,100 miles in about two weeks, and must carry everything with them, from dog food and booties for the dogs, to clothing and lanterns.

Jane Lafata, substitute teaching for me in April, spent a week with our group and taught us much about the customs, traditions, and food of her native Brazil. The big highlight of Brazil was making brigadeiros, a delicious chocolate confection with a chocolate fudgy center and chocolate sprinkles all around.

One afternoon, Tanalisa Fuller (Jaden's mom), came in to talk with us about Jamaica. The national bird, a form of hummingbird, is called the Doctor Bird. The national flower is the Hibiscus. The national dish is Akee (a fruit) and Salt Fish. And the national motto is "Out of Many, One People". We had a chance to sample fried Jamaican dumplings with salt fish, which was very tasty.

The culminating event for our Around the World in Eighty Days travels was Passport Night. In preparation for Passport Night, each of the children completed a project related to an area we had learned about in our travels. The children researched their topic, and created a poster, project, or demonstration to show what they knew for the parents. The children also created t-shirts for the event, which include an ironed on AW80 logo and colorful illustrations by the children about some of the things they had learned in the study. There were children erupting volcanoes, a summer roll wrapping demonstration, a play about Hawaiian foods, a model of an Iditarod dog sled with equipment, and a mock hands-on demonstration of painting the Sistine Chapel. The evening and the entire unit was a huge success.

Pen Pals

This year we had a spring project where we wrote letters back and forth to our pen pals. We wrote letters to a 2nd grade classroom taught by Ms. Janice Arellano at Belmont Charter School in Philadelphia. Ms. Arellano is working through Teach for America at Belmont. Anne got us together as she and Janice knew each other through a Mount Holyoke reunion. As a part of this activity we learned what parts made up a friendly letter – heading, greeting, body, closing, and signature. We even had a song and movement to illustrate this. We were able to write back and forth two times during this spring, and we were able to visit them in person at their school. On the visit we got to see their school, and we got a chance to walk in hallways. We also played on the sidewalk for recess. The children from Belmont Charter came to Miquon as well. We had a great time hiking down to the bamboo forest, playing soccer on the wood chip field, racing around on the big toy, and digging in the sandbox. We had a very nice time with our pen pals, and the children enjoyed meeting each other in person.

Mini-mini Courses

During the school year, the bigger kids have mini-courses, where teachers, parents, and students have the opportunity to teach something of interest to them. Students sign up for the mini-course of their choice. The first and second graders participate during the spring.

The first and second grade teachers got together and decided to have mini-mini courses on Friday afternoons. Each of the four primary teachers chose something of interest and made presentations to students about the course. The students chose what mini-mini course they would like to participate in, and off we went. This year, in the fall, we offered Eric Carle Book Making, String Games, Doll Making, and Chess. In the early winter, we offered Marble Games, Cooking, and Chess. In the late winter, we offered Yoga, Paper Crafts, Marble Runs, and Paper Airplane Design. The children enjoyed these mini-mini courses immensely, and we all looked forward to Fridays.

Holiday Traditions

This year, near winter break, we devoted three days to understanding each of the three winter holiday traditions of the world – Kwanzaa, Hannukah, and Christmas. Kwanzaa is a celebration of unity and kindness and is celebrated over seven nights. Handmade gifts are given and are a Kwanzaa ideal. One candle is lit for each night and represents one of the principles of Kwanzaa – Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and

Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), Imani (Faith). We read the stories Together for Kwanzaa, which illustrated the importance of being together for the holiday, and The Kwanzaa Story, to give a brief history of the traditions of Kwanzaa.

Sue Rochman (Scott's Mom) shared some Hannukah traditions with us. We learned about the Hannukah menorah and the story of how the Macabees had fuel for one day which burned for eight. We played the dreidel game, and we sampled some delicious potato latkes. The menorahs Sue shared with us were especially beautiful alight!

We also learned about the way several ancient winter solstice celebrations, the Roman Saturnalia and Juvenalia and the Norse Yule, combined with the Feast of the Nativity in the fourth century to give rise to the contemporary Christmas. In France, the ancient yule log still exists in the form of a cake, the Bûche de Noël, and we made our own miniature versions of the traditional log cake in beautiful detail.

Science Day

On a cold winter's day, Kersten Forsthoefel (Annika's Mom) came in to conduct some science experiment demonstrations with the children revolving around ice. Our first experiment was Ice Cream in a Bag. The children learned how the addition of salt can lower the temperature of the ice and release more cold for the freezing process. After several minutes of kneading, squeezing, and rolling, we had ice cream. The second demonstration showed us how dry ice works. Dry ice can vaporize at room temperature and creates a steam effect which moves along a horizontal surface. The third experiment was warming a spoon and laying it on dry ice. The temperature difference between dry ice and a warm spoon was enough to create a crackling, almost vibrating sound. The children had fun trying that experiment.

Grandparents' Day

This year, we had a good turnout for Grandparents' Day. This was a chance for the children to show off to their grandparents a lot of what we do in the classroom. We set up several centers in the room to allow our grandparents to experience, at least a little bit, what their grandchildren do during the day. The children also took their grandparents for a tour around the room and showed them points of interest to them. The grandparents and the children had a wonderful time.

Economics Project

We ended the year with an economics unit about creating a new product. For this project, the children were to brainstorm ideas for a new product or ideas for improving on an existing product. First, the children completed a product planning sheet in order to outline what they needed to gather for their product, and to set up a timeline for them. The children were to create a print advertisement for advertising their product. They were to write and present in class a commercial to go with their product. They also completed a catalog information sheet including product name, description, and pricing. The products were displayed in class and ranged from food items to new toys and very practical products. We were able to sample all of the food products. Each of the children had a chance to perform their commercial in front of a “studio” audience at the Rich and Katie’s Group New Products Trade Show. After the commercial, the children answered questions from the audience about their product.

THE SCHOOL DAY

Our typical school day started with the children writing a page in their daily journal, after which the children completed their jobs. Most jobs were done in pairs and included messenger, calendar set up, weather, librarians, greeters, and the swing (fills in for anyone who is absent). Then the children had shelf choice, where they could choose an activity from the shelves to work on. Next we had writing workshop, which is explained more fully below, and then snack and choice time, a favorite part of the day. After choice was community circle, where we discussed issues from choice, learned a new song, read a great story, or just chatted. Then we moved on to guided reading, where we completed a working with words activity and worked on leveled reading activities. After lunch and choice, we settled down with some independent reading time. Then we had our math lesson for the day or math centers. We ended each day with Today We Learned... where we listed the many things we had learned about that day. Learning for our various themes was interwoven into all parts of the day.

Language Arts

This year, the Reading program followed a framework called the Four Blocks Method. The four areas of the program were Guided Reading, Working with Words, Independent Reading Time (IRT), and Writing Workshop. Whole group activities were IRT and Writing Workshop. Guided Reading instruction and Working with Words were completed mostly during our half group time in the morning. Students worked in

both half groups (10-11 children) and quarter groups (5-6 children), depending on the activity. The four blocks framework permitted much flexibility in groupings based on needs, interests, or specific skills being taught.

Guided Reading consisted of using leveled reading materials to teach particular reading skills, which included both phonics skills (word attack and decoding of words) and comprehension skills (deriving meaning from what is being read). We practiced the phonics skills we learned during the Working With Words component to help with analyzing and decoding new words we encountered in text. Using a word family to find a similar word, using sound symbol relationships to sound out a word, and using high frequency words from memory all contributed to the development of our reading skills.

We also learned comprehension skills to help us gain knowledge of what we were reading about. Comprehension skills include retelling a story; finding the main idea from a story; sequencing the events in a story; comparing and contrasting stories, characters, and settings; connecting a story to an experience, another story, or another character; answering factual recall question directly from the story; and answering inferential questions where the information is not directly stated in the story.

We used a variety of books from several reading series, including *Little Red Readers*, *Sunshine Books*, *Rhyme World Series*, *The Wild Weather Series*, and *Scholastic Books*. We also used a variety of trade books in our guided reading, which included *Mister Putter and Tabby* by Cynthia Rylant, *The Frog and Toad Series* by Arnold Lobel, *Catwings* by Ursula Le Guin, *The Stories Julian Tells* by Ann Cameron, *The Littles Collection* by John Peterson, *Nate the Great* by Marjorie Sharmat, and informational books such as *Golden Eagles*, *Iditarod*, *Different Kinds of Bread*, and biographies about many famous people.

A typical reading lesson would take place with a small group of four to five children. We would introduce the story to be read, supplying some background information about the subject, the characters we would meet, or some situations in which the characters would find themselves involved. We would introduce vocabulary words that the children would be seeing in the story, usually through a process called RIVET, where we draw lines for each letter in the word, place letters on the lines one at a time and the children try to figure out the word based on the letters. Next, we would complete a picture walk and predict what the story will be about. Then we read the story with a partner, alternating sentences so both children need to read along with the story. Then we would complete a comprehension activity related to the story, which may include a story map (characters, setting,

beginning, middle, and end), a character study, or factual recall questions about the story. Depending on the book being read, we would complete a project related to the story. For example, we were studying water systems, and the children built a model of the water system described in their book. We might also produce a readers' theatre for a book being read, which gave us the opportunity to reread a story several times as we prepared for the play. Making simple costumes, and figuring out staging added to the interest in the story we were reading.

Working With Words consisted of activities that helped us to practice our word decoding and phonics skills. Some of the activities we did in class were word wall detective (the children guessed the word wall word based on four clues given by the teacher), rounding up the rhymes (we listed rhyming words from a story and developed a word family for the rhyme), word wall train (we started with a word, and the ending sound for the word became the beginning sound of the next word), cheer for the word (we made up a chant and motion to go with a given word as it is spelled), and silly sentences (we listed words from a word family and used as many of the words as possible in a sentence). We varied the activities from day to day so different learning styles could be accommodated, and to keep our Working With Words interesting for the children.

Independent Reading Time (IRT) was a time during the school day when students had the opportunity to choose their own book and read quietly for pleasure. Some days any book would do, but other days we chose just right books, those books that the children could read independently. Students chose an area of the room where they could read quietly and without interruptions. We had bins of books to select from which included leveled books, catalogs, informational books, back copies of the Miquon Grass, and books on a variety of subjects. Teachers checked in with students during a reading conference to read with them and to discuss the book they chose. We usually ended our day with Independent Reading Time, as it provided a wonderful calming closure to the day.

Writing Workshop included writing in journals and writing responses to given prompts, as well as specific lessons on writing mechanics (capitals and end marks) and writing style (using descriptive words). Besides writing in journals and specific responses, we wrote in varied formats including friendly letters, comic strips, written manuscripts, and postcards. We also published stories on the computer, which were then illustrated and kept in a binder as their author's anthology. The anthology was added to throughout the year. Students were encouraged to use

the word wall and word family charts hanging in the room to find words for their writing.

Our writing process consisted of six steps, which included *brainstorming* a new idea (creating a story web or picture from which a story is developed), writing a *rough draft* for the story, *editing with a peer* (the children choose who they would like to edit their work), *editing/revising with a teacher or parent helper* (we had many parents come in to help with writing workshop, some regularly, and others occasionally), *publishing* the story (this was done either on the computer or in some final form determined by the children, like a bound book), and *illustrating* the story. At any point in the process, teachers could assist students with their particular needs in a given area, such as developing story ideas, punctuation and capitalization, and writing sentences.

During the school year we also practiced our lowercase print handwriting with the *Handwriting Without Tears* curriculum. Using *HWT*, we combine guided practice in letter and number formation with a plethora of mnemonic, tactile, and movement strategies to help kids master this key tool for their expressive voice: handwriting! We had posters in the room to highlight letter groups such as the magic c letters (**a, d, g, o, and q**) which start with a lowercase c) and the "diver letters" (**b, m, n, p, r, and h**), which begin at the top, go down, and come back up. The songs (and dances!) we do with the *HWT Rock, Rap, Tap and Learn* CD have become quick favorites! Through the week we alternate large group activities and lessons with individual and small group practice.

Mathematics

Our mathematics program this year followed the Miquon School Mathematics Scope and Sequence, and we focused our overall learning this year on number sense. We also supplemented where necessary with materials and lessons from *SRA RealMath*, *Houghton-Mifflin Math*, and *Everyday Mathematics*, as well as materials we made in the classroom. This year, we combined the two 1 – 2 classrooms for math lessons. Math lessons were taught on Monday and Tuesday mornings during half-group time, and were usually taught with 5 – 6 children in each group. The half group time worked well as we could teach our math lessons with much smaller groups of students.

Usually one day each week we would have math centers choice to practice the skills we had already learned, and to insure that these skills were not learned only once and then not regularly reinforced. Children could partner with another child or work on their own in choosing and working at a math center.

Math centers consisted of games and activities related to various skills. Examples included *Wake Up Giants* for practicing basic math facts, *Clock Concentration* for practicing time, *Pattern Block Puzzles* for practicing special relationships and geometry, *Build a Number* for practicing place value, and Geometric Cover Tasks for practicing spatial relationships using pattern block to cover a larger shape using the constraints noted for each task. Another set of math centers included the use of number tiles 0 – 9. The children had a series of cards related to addition, subtraction, time, money, and fact families. The children needed to use each tile only once on a card to make the entire card work. Besides the basic math skills, children were learning logic skills including trial and error and using known information to figure out unknown information. Another math choice activity we developed this year was called Take Two, where the children chose two math tools or manipulatives from the shelf and created a mathematical relationship between them. Students then explained to Katie or me what that relationship was, and how they came up with the idea. Sometimes the children would share their findings with the rest of the group.

We taught number sense skills in the following areas: Comparison, Skip Counting, Place Value, Money, Fractions, Addition and Subtraction, Geometry, Measurement, Multiplication, Data and very early algebra concepts.

Number sense skills included reading and writing numbers, ordering and comparing numbers, place value, skip counting by 2's, 5's and 10's, and determining whether a number is even or odd. Money skills included recognizing coin values, making change, and calculating money amounts. Fraction skills include identifying fractions and comparing two or more fractions. We created fraction bars to help us compare fractions. Addition and subtraction skills include knowing basic facts, two digit addition and subtraction, addition of three single digit numbers, and fact families. Many of our math centers were related to addition and subtraction. Geometry skills include recognizing symmetry and knowing the names and shapes of various polygons. We went outside for a shape search around the campus. Measurement skills include measuring using rulers and other objects, time on an analog clock, and calendar information – days, weeks, and months. Our main skill for multiplication was to learn visually what multiplication was all about. We worked with area problems as our introduction to multiplication.

The 100th Day of School is always a favorite day for the children, and a great milestone in the school year. We completed many activities related to 100. We wrote a list of 100 words we knew, or that we could

find around the room. We read the story 100th Day Worries, about a girl named Jessica who could not figure out what collection to bring for the 100th day of school, but gets help from her family to collect a hodgepodge of objects, which turn out to be 100 bits of love. We made 100th Day Trail Mix, where each of us counted out 100 pieces of snack and put them together for our snack for the day. We used fruity cereal to create necklaces using groups of ten in various colors. We ran the annual obstacle course set up by Sherry. We also started to put together one hundred piece puzzles – the children worked together in small groups to help each other put the puzzles together.

The focus of our math curriculum is for math lessons to be interesting, hands on with lots of manipulatives being used, and to be meaningful for the children. Our goal is that the children have a good sense of number by the end of their time with us to carry forward to their future math work.

IN CLOSING

What a wonderful year this has been. It has gone much too fast. Even one of the children mentioned to me that they thought it went by really quickly. We have accomplished a lot this year, and had some many good times along the way. Katie and I felt a palpable sense of joy in our room this year. We can thank the children for that.

We would like to thank our class parents, Kersten Forsthoefel and Ed Ehrlacher (Annika's Mom and Dad) and Tine and Brian Hansen-Turton (Nikolaj's Mom and Dad), for their help during the year.

We would also like to thank Sue Rochman (Scott's Mom), Stephen Seplow (Gabe's Grandpa), Susan Farber (Jonah's Grandma), Marcea Driscoll (Natalie's Mom), Evan Seplow (Gabe's Dad), and Alice Chan (Aidan's Mom) for being a part of Writing Workshop week after week. We were so much more productive this year because of your help.

We had several parents come in to teach us a little about other cultures and traditions during the year. Thank you to Sue Rochman (Scott's Mom) for sharing Hannukah with us, Carolyn Haynes (Kai's Mom) for teaching us about Vietnam, Tanalisa Fuller (Jaden's Mom) for teaching us about Jamaica, Kersten Forsthoefel (Annika's Mom) for showing us some very "cool" science experiments, and Jane Lafata, my substitute while I was in Italy and Atlanta, for bringing us a part of Brazil.

We greatly appreciate our field trip chaperones for helping to take care of us on our trip downtown. We would like to thank Alice Chan (Aidan's Mom), Robin Cohen (Scott's Mom), Marcea Driscoll (Natalie's Mom), Carolyn Seplow (Gabe's Mom), and Catherine Panzarella (Kendra's Mom).

I would especially like to thank all of you for your kind thoughts and prayers during the very difficult time my family experienced in April. My entire family was deeply touched by the expression of support from the Miquon community. I love working here and being a part of something very special.

Finally, we especially would like to thank the children, whose sense of humor, infectious laughter, hard work, curiosity, and enthusiasm made this year truly a year to remember.