

Rossana and Elisa's Group

First / Second Grade

2008-2009 Curriculum Report

Group Teacher: **Rossana Admana Zapf**

Assistant Teacher: **Elisa Rosenwinkel**

Reflection

It is unfathomable to believe that an entire school year has passed before our very eyes. The concept of transformation resonates for this group in particular. The ways in which the children have grown since the beginning of the year are remarkable and miraculous. Each of us grew as students and teachers and we often shared these roles respectively. Our experienced readers and writers modeled for the emerging readers and writers; the environmentalists and scientists shared their passions and knowledge; the artists basked in the creative atmosphere of our classroom and the creativity became contagious; the social activists taught us to see the world from multiple perspectives and question the inequities that abound. The student-led reflective and critical dialogue so central to our classroom discourse helped foster the intellectual community we grew to be. The questions, interests, pontifications and discoveries of the children helped to shape and reshape our curriculum, a curriculum grounded in the lives of the children. We learned not by simply accumulating information but rather through the shared process of building upon, analyzing and reconstructing what we already knew.

Thematic Studies

We kicked off the school year by identifying our hopes and dreams for the year and how

we could help one another accomplish our goals. Drawing from our hopes (and the creed from Nursery and Kindergarten) we decided that we would: Take care of ourselves, one another and the environment.

Every morning we gathered as a whole group for our Morning Meeting ritual. Morning meeting was a revered time in our day when we would come together as a group and feel validated and heard. At this time we greeted each other by name, shared announcements (and questioned or commented on what was shared), played a community building game, and read our 'morning message' together. The children were expected to greet one another in a friendly and respectful way while giving eye contact, to attentively listen and thoughtfully respond to the person who made an announcement and to practice a myriad of literacy skills in the morning message. The different games and activities throughout morning meeting helped to cultivate both social and academic skills.

A hallmark of this group was the myriad of questions they asked, pondered upon and discussed. Taking an inquiry stance, we began the year with the question, "Who am I?" which led to a rich multidisciplinary study of our individual and collective identities. Our unit of study evolved organically, expanding into areas of social studies, reading, writing, art, math and science.

Throughout this process of investigating our unique strengths and differences, the children learned about one another's interests, backgrounds, hopes and values. We thought deeply about who we are as individuals and how we became who we are. We learned that there are other ways of looking at the world, to appreciate new and alternative ideas, to develop awareness and empathy, and to question the inequities embedded within our society. Activities included: a critical analysis of the way toy catalogs perpetuate gender stereotypes, papier mache self-portraits, mixing of paint colors to represent our individual and unique skin colors, torn collage self-portraits, decorating our name plates for our cubbies, cooperative body tracings that integrated measurement, acrostic poems of our names, an exploration of the history of our individual names, "Who am I?" riddles, among many, many others.

Later in the winter we transitioned to an interdisciplinary study about bread around the world. We began by sharing, sorting and categorizing, and, of course, tasting the different breads we enjoy at home. We made many different kinds of bread together and explored the differences and similarities among the varieties. Our definition of bread expanded as we made akarra (from West Africa), cheese bread (from Brazil), beignets (from New Orleans) and coconut rice balls (from Cambodia). With bread, nutrition and how food arrives at our tables in mind, we visited three markets: Giant, Assi Supermarket and The Reading Terminal. Again, we compared and contrasted the differences and similarities among the markets.

From April until June, the children participated in a study of Poetry. Together we read and discussed so much poetry, poetry that was serious or humorous, or

simply beautiful. We talked about the differences between 'poetic' language and 'scientific' language. We became astute observers as we learned to look at everyday objects through the lens of a poet. We explored the use of line breaks. We practiced visualizing images as we read and listened to a variety of poetry. In groups we developed our fluency by reciting poems and we held a mini-reader's theater of poems that the children selected. Our Poetry Anthology reflects the myriad of poems we read, wrote and reflected upon. And, as our class poem so aptly captured, we discovered how poetry is alive at Miquon.

Language Arts

Our language arts program was distinctively rich and comprehensive encompassing a variety of structures and activities. Literacy in its broadest sense (reading, writing, speaking, listening and *thinking*) is the foundation of learning. For all of the children but in varied ways we focused on comprehensions skills, word attack skills, fluency, high frequency words, vocabulary, word families, phonics, the writing process and handwriting. We participated in a multitude of literacy activities: daily read alouds accompanied by critical and reflective discussions, independent reading time (IRT) and reading workshop, which provided children with the opportunity to practice reading self-selected books at their 'just right' level, our Reading Buddies partnership with Fern and Mark's group, small flexible reading groups, writing workshop (as informed by Lucy Calkins and Columbia University Teachers College), a pen pal exchange with the 1/2 class from GSFS, various artistic responses to readings, the assorted class-made books, and of course, the multiple literacy work stations that encouraged the development of very specific reading and writing skills.

To say that we read a lot of books this year is a severe understatement. We read and discussed so much together using varied genres of fiction, non-fiction, historical fiction, maps, cookbooks, toy catalogs, on-line news and poetry. Since the beginning of the year we dedicated ourselves to using texts that would encourage discussions about identity and culture and proactively engage all of us in a commitment to understanding our unique differences and areas of intersection.

The children learned to listen attentively not only to the author's words but to the varied interpretations and the emerging understandings of classmates. Oftentimes the children questioned the author and each other and helped broaden one another's initial ideas. Comments during our read aloud began with, "I wonder...", "Maybe the writer is saying...", "I want to add on to what was said..", "I agree with ... because..." or "What do you mean by...?" and "I disagree with because...". Our read alouds were a far cry from quiet with story time resembling an intellectual collegiate debate. Our conversations, at times unpredictable yet incredibly rich, validated the interpretive trajectories of the children rather than follow the teachers' predetermined purposes. Elisa and I learned from and with the children.

To list the books which we read as a whole group would be an almost impossible task. Yet there are clearly many books which have left a lasting impression. We began September by articulating our hopes and dreams for the school year and read and discussed *Willy the Dreamer* by Anthony Browne, *Imagine* by John Lennon and *The Peace Book* by Todd Parr. Each child named, wrote and illustrated her/his hope for the year. From these drawings we created beautiful prints, which adorned our walls all year long as a reminder of what we hoped

the school year would be. These books led to the enjoyment of several Todd Parr and Anthony Browne books. As the children became more familiar with an author they learned to recognize particular hallmarks. For example, Todd Parr's illustrations have a distinctive style of cartoon-like characters in bright colors outlined with bold black lines and Anthony Browne's illustrative style tends to be more realistic with famous paintings embedded in his pictures. Following the children's interests, we also read several *Froggy Books* by Frank Remkiewicz and became quite familiar with the formulaic storyline, as evidenced in the children's predictions.

Very early in the year we read and discussed *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown. We talked about how oftentimes authors of picture books use patterns in their writing. Feeling inspired we decided to borrow the pattern of "The important thing about ..." to create our own unique version of this story. Each child interviewed a partner and made discoveries about one another. Through this collaborative activity, the children got to know one other, while also taking the time to think deeply about themselves.

Another memorable read aloud was *We are all alike We are all Different*, a text that makes explicit the differences and similarities among a diverse group of children. During this reading, the children challenged the text in response to the line, "We are all alike. We all live somewhere." By taking a critical stance, the children questioned the truth to this statement as they explained how many people are actually homeless. This led us to read and discuss *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting, a poignant story about a homeless father and son who live at an airport.

As part of a text set on identity the children read and discussed, *Skin Again* by bell hooks, *Whoever You are* by Mem Fox, *black is brown is tan* by Arnold Adoff and *All the Colors We Are: The story of How we Get Our Skin Color*, *Todos los Colores de Nuestra Piel*, *La Historia de por que tenemos diferentes colores de piel* by Katie Kissinger. The discussions were rich, layered with previously held assumptions and new and emerging understandings.

We also read *The Princess Knight*, *The Paperbag Princess* and *William Wants a Doll*. Our discussions around these books focused on gender stereotypes. The idea of what's considered 'boyish' and 'girlish' was challenged by many members of our classroom community. Throughout our conversations we critically examined how the media and society perpetuate these ideas and how this might affect the choices we make and more importantly, what we can do about it! Tying into baseball, gender issues and civil rights, we also read and discussed *Just Like Josh Gibson*, an inspiring book written by Angela Johnson, which pays tribute to the legendary Negro League baseball player and tells the story of a young girl who wants to play baseball. One of the most exciting lessons we worked on this year was an investigation of different toy catalog companies. We began by reading the beautiful picturebook *Amazing Grace*, which is about a girl who wants to be Peter Pan in her school play but is discouraged by classmates because she is a girl and because she is Black. In spite of the discouragement, Grace hands down wins the part of Peter Pan. The lesson we took from this book as so eloquently stated by one of the children is "[that] you can be anything you want to be." After reading this story we wondered how anyone could limit what girls and boys do, leading us to critically examine the different ways that toy companies market to boys and

girls. Throughout the year, we often returned to the ideas of equity.

At the end of most days we concluded our afternoons by reading aloud a chapter book which included: *Sideways Stories at Wayside School* by Louis Sachar, *The BFG* by Roald Dahl and *Dominic* by William Steig. We intentionally chose these books because of its rich use of language, which naturally lent itself to several mini-vocabulary lessons. Also, throughout the read alouds, the children were incessantly predicting, visualizing, summarizing and connecting to their prior experiences, other texts and the world beyond.

Central to the very complex process of reading is the construction of meaning. Keeping this in mind, when we learned to decode new and unfamiliar words we first and foremost emphasized *what makes sense*. By repeatedly playing the game, "Guess the Covered Word" the children practiced how to attend to the shape of the word, the initial letter, known word families and letter patterns and the context clues. Our hope was for the children to use these strategies flexibly and concurrently, moving beyond the pervasive 'sound it out' approach. In this way, the children were building on 'knowns.'

Throughout the year the children met in small reading groups facilitated by me or Elisa. The groups frequently changed depending on the particular goals or strategies we were working on. At times reading groups were held during reading workshop and later in the year we used two half group times per week to have reading groups. During our small reading groups, the children read books at their instructional reading level (in other words, books that with teacher assistance and modeling, the children could read), participated in 'Making Words' activities, developed sight word

vocabulary, practiced phonics skills, responded to readings in writing and/or in conversations with one another, learned new vocabulary, made connections, raised questions and provided evidence from the text for their interpretations.

Two to three times per week after independent journal writing each child participated in a literacy work station. The work stations were designed to meet the different literacy goals for each child. At any one time, 10-12 work stations were in place with children working alone or in groups with up to 4 participants. These stations included various games and activities such as: Word Wahoo (a game in which children practiced blending onsets and rimes), sight word Stars (manipulatives that helped build high frequency word knowledge), Big books, word family sort, Word Wall Detective, Apples to Apples (development of vocabulary), Word Wizards, (children illustrated challenging words that were identified during reading workshop and reading groups), handwriting activities (e.g. using shaving cream to practice printing the letters, their names and the high frequency words), Listening Center (develop word recognition, comprehension and fluency), Poetry Centers, Twister with vowels, word families and letter patterns, Yoga station (reading and following directions), among many others. The children, depending upon their specific needs, rotated among the different stations. For example, while some children needed to work on short vowels, others needed to practice blending sounds together to make words.

For many children Writing Workshop was the climax of the day. At the very essence of writing workshop is the belief that we are all creative and capable writers with different interests, strengths and needs. During Writing Workshop we often revisited books

to use as 'mentor texts' for our own writing. For example, we looked at the different ways some of our favorite children's authors (e.g. Mo Willems and Charlotte Zolotow) create a beginning that hooks the reader. We looked at the way Cynthia Rylant captures a small moment in *When the Relatives Came*. In our explicit examination of the ways in which professional authors craft their writing, the children learned to develop their own unique writing voices.

All of our learners experienced the complex multi-step process of publishing stories. The children's individual books as well as our class-made books were prominently displayed in our classroom in order to give the children an opportunity to read one another's work and to understand that we write with an audience in mind. The stories that the children published reflect how much we honor the different stages of writing and that 'kid writing' is indeed real and valid. By validating their work the children were free to write creatively without feeling self-conscious. It is also important to understand how spelling is developmental and that the children's encoding represents what they know about words. In the publishing process we held children accountable for word wall words and particular word families. While they participated in the process of revising and editing, the focus was on creating and nurturing their individual writing identities. Writing pieces ranged from scientific facts, stories about friendship, mysteries, poems, recipes, 'How-to' books, adventures of superheroes, memories, spins on stories read to various fictitious tales. The pieces were unique to the different writing identities of each child. Heartfelt thanks to Nicole Prum, Betsy Hocking, Angela Driscoll, Fran Sugarman, Amy Friedman and Mindy Maslin who volunteered to assist us during this special time.

Math

Our math program followed the Miquon Mathematics Scope and Sequence.

Throughout the year we practiced skills in the following areas: patterns, number sense, geometry, addition and subtraction, money, time, measurement and collecting, recording and interpreting data. We practiced skip counting, place value, and greater than/less than. Our primary focus throughout the year was number sense. We tried to think of numbers conceptually, moving beyond numbers as numerals. Our intention was to help children think critically and analytically and to see math in real and applicable ways. We privileged the how and why of our thinking over simply providing the ‘correct answer.’

We began most mornings by asking the children to graph their response to a question written on the board. The year began with simple questions such as, “Are you ordering pizza today?” and then shifted to more complex questions such as, “How many hours of sleep did you get last night?” The children needed to graph their response as either <8 , >8 but <10 , 10 or more. As they approached the question the children naturally conversed, making predictions about which category might have the most and least, while also explaining the reasoning behind their thinking.

The last few months of school the children wrote a response to questions that pertained to the day of the month. For example, the question read: “Today is the 4th day of June. 4 is the number of sides on a square. What else is 4?” Some responses included: $2+2=4$, $14-10=4$, 4 is the number of legs on a dog, 4 is the double of 2 or 4 is the square root of 16. This activity is just one example of how we differentiated our math program to meet the varying needs of our learners.

For the first half of the year the children met in quarter groups facilitated by either Elisa or me. We played a variety of games that helped us learn to think strategically and develop our understanding of 10 and place value, concepts crucial to solving more complex math problems. The children’s conceptualization of numeracy was grounded in the concrete use of different manipulatives such as dominoes, unifix cubes, base-10 blocks, the hundreds chart, number tiles, Venn diagrams and number grids.

Toward the second half of the year, we mixed our group with Rich and Katie’s group, and rotated quarter groups among the four teachers. All 8 groups were consistent in the concepts covered but approached them according to the strengths and needs of the varying groups. For example, while we all focused on subtraction at the same time, one group may have been worked with single digit numbers using teddy bear counters, while another group focused on subtraction of double digit numbers with regrouping. The collaboration among the teachers and the ability to see the children through multiple lenses were invaluable.

In addition to our small math groups 2x per week, we also participated in math work stations 2x per week. These work stations included various math games for 2-5 participants. Examples of work stations included: dominoes to help with addition facts, *Set* for categorizing and patterns, pattern blocks, clock concentration, Tens Go Fish, Tenner, counting coins game and block building.

Another favorite activity was the ‘Marcy Cook’ Math work stations. Using number tiles from 0-9 the children practiced math skills in addition, subtraction, time, money and fact families. In addition to honing

basic Math skills, these activities helped the children to think strategically through trial and error and using known information to solve unknown information. We found the math work stations incredibly stimulating and engaging for the children, - a wonderful example of learning as a social process.

Each child took turns practicing some of the math skills when s/he held one of the two calendar jobs. Together the calendar helpers were responsible for keeping track of the day of week and the day of school (e.g. 100th day!) with straws and coins, notating the day of school on a class number line, describing the weather and keeping track of the temperature. Part of their responsibility also included reporting the calendar and weather to the group. The children held each job for one week thus providing everyone with the opportunity to practice these skills.

On the 100th Day of School we spent the entire day engaged in fun and meaningful 100th Day activities, which we called “The 100th Day Challenge.” The challenge included: writing 100 words that they knew, building a 100 piece puzzle, building with 100 Legos or 100 blocks, decorating a hat with 100 stickers, creating a design with 100 pattern blocks, and collaborating to make a ‘gorp’ snack of 100 food items with goldfish, cheerios, raisins, sunflower seeds and chocolate chips and creating a design with 100 pattern blocks. The 100th Day was a most festive and engaging celebration for all.

Parent Involvement

We were quite fortunate to have so many parents willing and able to enrich our program. Like the range of experts we have among our students, we also have so many talented parents! Mindy Maslin shared her

expertise, leading us in Environmental Jeopardy, in caring for the tree she helped us plant, and in playing relay races about caring for plants. Around election time, Mindy (accompanied by Samuel’s grandmother) spoke to us about the democratic process of voting, giving each child an opportunity to participate in a mock election. Many of the children came to understand the complexity involved when we exercise our right to vote in favor of a candidate or issue. Sid Ozer shared his knowledge of Benjamin Franklin. Jane Piecuch, Amy Friedman and Celia Cruz shared poetry. Anne Bower delighted us in exploring animal tracks. Chris Kaiser led a wonderful hands-on project enabling all of the children to prepare delicious sushi wraps. Sue Kimbel brought in her skeletal friend, Henry, and gave us a terrific anatomy lesson. We practiced ‘Story Yoga’ led by Dan Moscow. Karen Lefkovitz shared her bookmaking and bookbinding expertise, helping the children create beautiful accordion books about themselves. Karen also helped us make matzo. Fran Sugarman read a story about Hanukah, led us in playing the dreidel game and helped us make latkes. Nicole Prum shared the traditions of Cambodian New Year, bringing with her books, photographs, music and beautiful traditional Cambodian clothes for women. Nicole also helped us create individual terrariums.

Throughout the year we had many parent volunteers assist with classroom projects and accompany us on field trips. We are so grateful for the enthusiasm, commitment and support we received from all of our families.

In Closing

Much gratitude goes to our very special specialist teachers, Diane, Bill, Karen, Tony and Anne, for all their efforts in supporting our curriculum and for enriching our lives

with stories, creativity, song, dance, movement, exercise, teamwork, discovery and art. Thanks also to the administrative staff for cough drops, band aids, and extra words of kindness. The children (and teachers) were cared for wholly and attentively.

Like the monarch butterflies from the very beginning of the year, we transformed. With stretched out wings we hope that we will all continue to soar to new and unimaginable heights - like the grandmother from *Abuela*, and the little girl from *Tar Beach*, and like the determined unbeatable protagonist from *Amazing Grace*, to be “anything that we want to be.”

Have an incredible summer!