



Grace Neighborhood Nursery School

Winter 2017

The Director's Corner: Notes from Barb

Happy March! When the month of March arrives I always feel a shift in my energy. I know longer days, warmer temperatures, and green things are just around the corner! With the publication of this newsletter, we are officially putting "winter" behind us! Now we can enjoy reading and reflecting on what all of the classrooms have been working on over the winter months and marvel at how much growth and learning has occurred in such a short time. In a few weeks it will be parent conference time here at Grace. This is an important opportunity for you to talk with your child's teacher and get detailed information about how your child is progressing. Please be sure to sign up for a conference time that works for you.

As you read this issue of the Grace Newsletter we are probably on the brink of getting together for our Annual Silent Auction Gala which supports our scholarship fund. As you must know this event takes a huge amount of time and energy for the group of committed volunteers and staff who have put it together. I am amazed and delighted by people's generosity and willingness to help maintain our scholarship program. We sincerely hope that we will be able to continue to offer tuition assistance to families who request it for many years to come.

While I won't be able to report on the results of the Silent Auction fund raiser for a month or more, I can report on the success of our Annual Fund Drive, which has just wrapped up. This year we will be using the funds raised to develop the front yard of the church into a "Nature Play Yard." To date we have raised more than \$11,000 to begin Phase 1 of this project. Grace parents, Rachel Baudler and Jonathan Blaseg (Otto's parents from the Harriet Room) are landscape architects who will donate their expertise to draft a plan that we can use to hire a contractor to begin the process of installation. They will be meeting with teachers this spring to gather their ideas to use as the basis for their plans. We hope that all of you handy humans will lend us your skills as they are needed to complete the Play Yard in time for next fall!

I am also very happy to report on our progress with the Parent Aware Rating process. The "Grow With Grace" Curriculum manual that I created has been accepted as a state approved curriculum. This means we are recognized as having a strong, research based curriculum which is educationally sound and rigorous in preparing children for kindergarten. Of course I like to say that Grace is preparing children not just for "kindergarten" (which is a very narrow goal) but we are preparing them for life.

We are in our final month of the rating process, with 8 hours of "refresher" training on developing and implementing our curriculum on March 29, and submission of our Quality Documentation Portfolio by March 31. The final step will be when an observer from the University of Minnesota comes in May to observe and rate the quality of teacher/child interactions in one of the classrooms. They will use a tool called the CLASS, which looks at the sensitivity of the teacher, the positive climate in the classroom, the level of productivity and types of teaching strategies used. The staff is in full agreement that the end of this school year will truly be one to celebrate! Let's begin the celebration this Saturday, March 11, at our Silent Auction Gala! I hope to see many of you there!! - Barb 



Upcoming at Grace

- Mar 11** Annual Silent Auction Gala
- Mar 29** No School: Teacher Training
- Mar 29** 4PM: Parent Conferences Begin
- Mar 30 - Mar 31** No School: Parent Conferences
- Apr 03 - Apr 07** No School: Spring Break
- Apr 10** School Re-Opens
- May 18** End of Year School Picnic at Kenwood Park
- May 26** Last Day of Regular School Year (No Friday Add-A-Day)

Advocating for Children

Contributed by Cassy

This school year I have had the opportunity to participate in the CARE Fellowship program (Child Care Advocates Ready to Emerge).

Once a month I spend the day with others in the field of Early Childhood Education - teachers, directors, in-home care providers, and administrators - learning how to become effective advocates for children. While we are naturally all advocates for children in our day-to-day jobs, the CARE fellowship asks us to go beyond the day-to-day and engage with policymakers at all levels of government.

What does it mean to be an effective advocate for children? The answer to that question depends in part on what one believes is essential for children to thrive in our schools and communities. It is something that I have been pondering as I prepare to meet with my state legislators next month, a culminating event in the fellowship.

While discussing this idea with teachers and colleagues, I realized the importance of including the voices of parents of young children.

To that end I would like to invite you to answer this question for yourself and your family:

What is essential for children to thrive: in our homes, in our schools, and in our communities?



I welcome your thoughts and ideas, both simple and profound, and I will share them with my legislators in the form of postcards, which I will collect and give to them. The postcards are located outside the Calhoun room. You may include your name or not, as you like. The focus will be your thoughts and ideas. You are welcome to email me your ideas as well if you need more room to think and respond: ccgut@mac.com.

Thank you for your participation in this advocacy effort to improve the lives of all children and families in our homes, classrooms and communities.



- Q.** What is brown and sticky?
A. A stick!
- Q.** What has a thumb and four fingers but is not alive?
A. A glove.
- Q.** Everyone has one and no one can lose it, what is it?
A. A shadow.
- Q.** What has to be broken before you can use it?
A. An egg.



2017 Grow with Grace Silent & Live Auction

Saturday March 11
6:00-9:00 pm
St. Mary's Greek Orthodox Church
3450 Irving Avenue South

*to benefit the Scholarship fund for the
children of Grace Neighborhood Nursery School*



The Importance of Fine Motor Skill Development*

A new and disturbing phenomenon is rising on the educational horizon.

Many children are arriving at kindergarten lacking the basic fine motor skills needed to hold a pencil and write. This lack of dexterity in their fingers and hands can be attributed to the increased use of touch screen technology and decreased use of crayons, paints, pencils, scissors, clay, and other manipulatives in their daily lives.

Along with self-regulation, social-emotional skills and curiosity, fine motor skills are among the priority readiness skills for kindergarten. If children arrive at school lacking the fine motor control and finger strength necessary to hold a pencil, they will struggle to master other requirements in kindergarten. This is a huge problem because today's kindergarten demands so much more writing and desk work than ten years ago.

This predicament cannot be remedied over-night. Like large motor skills, fine motor skills develop gradually over time with much practice and repetition. Perhaps we are more aware of the more visible and exciting large motor achievements: A child first holds her head up, rolls over, then sits, crawls, pulls to a stand, walks, then runs. Fine motor development starts with grasping objects (mommy's finger, a rattle, a toy), holding a bottle, picking up food to eat, manipulating a spoon, using hands for purposeful reasons like block building and play dough, buttoning and zipping, using art tools to draw and write, and only then using a pencil or pen to write a name or copy words. While these two progressive developmental sequences are normal in child development, if the sequence is impeded along the way, the child will not develop as she should. We are seeing this with fine motor development in today's five-year-olds who, from infancy, are spending too much time "swiping and tapping" on screens and not playing with a large range of manipulatives.

Technology is not going away, so it is up to adults to limit its use and ensure that young children have rich childhood play experiences.

Advertising often convinces parents that children are learning from the two-dimensional computer games and applications they use. Children, however, live in a three-dimensional world and need to be learning from interactions with real objects or people. For example, the way children learn what "three" means is to hold three objects, eat three grapes, build with three blocks, see how many sets of three are in a little box of raisins, make a triangle with three pretzel sticks. Children learn by doing and experiencing, not by passively watching.

The classic materials of childhood are time-tested to provide practice in fine-motor skills, strengthening all the little hand muscles. Adults should ensure that children have access to these materials both at home and at school:

- crayons, markers, chalk, paints, pencils, scissors
- blocks, Legos, other manipulatives
- dolls and stuffed animals for dressing and undressing
- play dough, finger paint, clay, mud
- finger games like Itsy Bitsy Spider and Where is Thumbkin

The Gesell Developmental Observation-Revised (GDO-R) assessment evaluates many kindergarten readiness skills. In recent years though, teachers have commented that low scores in fine motor skills pulled down the children's overall developmental age. Some teachers asked if they could ignore the fine motor section of the assessment. The answer is no! Fine motor skills are a very important part of whole child development and are essential for academic success. There are so many wonderful and playful activities that adults can do with children with to help build fine motor skills.

At-Home Activities for Building Fine Motor Skills

Try incorporating these activities into the daily routine with your child:

Kitchen projects: Making home-made play dough strengthens muscles in the hands and fingers. Roll snakes and balls of all sizes; build with the balls and snakes. Your child can play with play dough at the counter or table while you make dinner. Make peanut butter or sugar cookies that require the dough to be rolled into balls and smashed with a fork. Meatballs are fun and yummy, too.

Playing Grocery Store: Keep your canned goods on a bottom shelf. Allow your child to play grocery store—take out and rearrange the cans, sort by size, color, or content. This is a math readiness skill, too.

Sorting silverware or setting the table: Sorting silverware into its proper holder is a math skill; as is the patterning your child will do by laying the napkin, knife, fork, and spoon in order at each place-setting.

Eating with chop sticks/using tongs: This is a more advanced fine motor skill, but not impossible to teach. Children in Asian countries learn quite young. Use chopsticks and tongs to pick up cotton balls, round cereal, or other small objects.

Folding clothes: Start with folding washcloths or towels. Fold in half, then fold again to make a quarter.

Stringing things: Make bracelets and necklaces by threading pasta, Fruit Loops, or beads onto pipe cleaners or thick strings. Add a pattern and you add math!

Playing dress-up: Putting on coats and gloves, zipping up, snapping, buttoning, and tying shoes all help with building fine motor strength. Dressing a doll or stuffed animals is just as good, too!

Practicing with scissors: Start with safety scissors and a 4" strip of paper to snip, snip, snip with and make fringe. Later, draw a path on the paper to cut along. Make confetti by cutting little snips of various colored, textured, and shiny wrapping paper. Cut pictures out of magazines and

The Importance of Fine Motor Skill Development*

Continued from page 3

make a collage. Play dough is an excellent soft material for beginners to practice scissor skills on. Roll snakes and cut them into pieces.

Coloring and drawing: Encourage creativity by providing a variety of art mediums. Color with hard pressure, color with soft pressure. Outline the object hard, color soft inside. Instead of coloring, have

the child fill the space with little controlled circles—pointillism—a captivating art technique.

Limiting technology: Put away the electronics. Don't rely on cell phones and iPads to entertain babies, toddlers and preschoolers. Pack a bag with paper, crayons, and books to bring along on outings where there may be some wait time.

*Adapted from an article by Marcy Guddemi, PhD, MBA, National Consultant, is widely recognized as an expert in early education, learning through play, and developmental assessment. Dr. Guddemi is a former Executive Director of Gesell Institute of Child Development at Yale and an active member and officer of the American Branch of the International Play Association.

Add-A-Day Enrichment Program

Contributed by Claire

Add-a-Day is a unique enrichment program that offers children the opportunity to expand their preschool learning experience.

Offered on Monday and Friday afternoons, children who attend Grace on Monday or Friday mornings have the option of extending their school day, and children attending classes at other times, can extend their school week. The program is flexible to accommodate your family's scheduling needs – your child can participate on a regular basis, or can attend Add-A-Day on a drop-in basis, space permitting.



Our Monday afternoon program gives children the opportunity to think globally as we learn about a different country every month. We examine cultures around the world, through learning experiences that will create a deep impression on a young child's mind: we taste traditional food from the country, read stories and folktales, and make art that reflects the culture. During the month of February, we have learned about China, in correlation with the Chinese New Year. We have read some wonderful legends about the history of dragons, sampled rice and Chinese dumplings, and created a paper maché dragon mask. Our study of China will culminate with a dragon parade through the school. It is never too early to start becoming a global citizen, and it is a joy to watch the children share their worldly knowledge with their families.

Our Friday field trip program, allows children to act locally, as we take the Grace school bus to explore the far corners of our remarkable community. The scope of places we visit ranges from indoor spaces, such as art and science museums to outdoor places, such as apple orchards and nature reserves.



We have an excursion to stir up enthusiasm in every child: whether it is a gymnastics class especially created for preschoolers, or a private tour of our neighborhood fire station. The school year begins with outdoor adventures, to make the most of the spectacular fall weather. As the cooler weather arrives, we head indoors but continue to learn in the best possible way: through active investigation of the world around us! Their increased awareness shows as the children recount their favorite part of the field trip on the bus ride back to school.

To register your child for Add-A-Day, please contact Barb at director@gracenns.com or 612-872-8131. You will continue to receive emails with details about the specific Add-a-Day activities on a monthly basis.

Please Note: Due to the enthusiastic response to Add-a-Day, we often have a waiting list. If your child attends regularly, please try to let Barb know in advance if your child will not be attending, so that we can give the spot to a child on the waiting list. Thank you!

Harriet Room News

Contributed by Shannon



Hello! I hope you are all keeping warm and healthy! The Harriet Room had many great activities to warm everyone's heart and spirit during the month of February!

We began our month by discussing all the ways the people in our lives make us feel special and loved. We also talked about the ways we can show the people we love how we feel about them, specifically using our good manners, being patient and sharing. We worked on making cards and artwork that reflect our love for others. We also worked together to make special snacks for our class.



Our resident poet, Julia Singer, joined our classroom this month to discuss poetry. She has been helping us create poetry of our own and will help us create our own class poetry books near the end of the month. The poetry books will be filled with the children's words, as well as some of the works of art they create during this very special month of love. Julia has been working with Grace for many years and is really great at getting the children to use their words to describe what they are doing, how they feel, and to tell stories from their imagination. It is truly a treat to have Julia with us for the month of February.

February is also the busy month when we prepare for the annual Grace Silent Auction, which occurs in the beginning of March. Each classroom representative, in collaboration with other parents, came in during class time to help the children create a class project for the auction. It has been so fun to work on these very special (and precious) items during the month. **Please look for them at the Auction!**



The conclusion of our month was a focus on the Gingerbread Man and all of his many friends! This is a wonderful and traditional focus in the Harriet Room! There were many activities planned, as well as many different versions of this fairytale classic shared. Many songs and games were included as part of this focus, followed by the Main Event: Making our very own Gingerbread man!! (We hoped he wouldn't run away!) Thank you to all of the parents who came in to help with this event. It was a lot of fun to see this Gingerbread Adventure unfold and a true highlight of the Harriet Room year!



Calhoun Room News

Contributed by Karen and Cassy

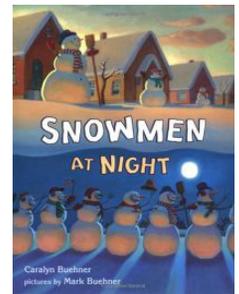


In January we started a focus on “Working With Wood in the Workshop,” which is a very popular activity for some children in our classroom. You can most likely hear our work from the hallway: tap, tap, tap; zzztt, zzztt, zzztt; swish, swish, swish; wrrrr, wrrrr, wrrrr. Old MacDonald Had A Workshop is a fun book to read and/or sing while also practicing our new skills!

In our woodworking workshop we introduced the safe use of real hammers and nails and other woodworking tools such as a hand saw; hand drill; C-clamps; sanding blocks; a tape measure; carpenter pencils; a level; and, of course, lots of wood glue. We also have nuts, bolts, wrenches, screws and screwdrivers to try. Woodworking provides many opportunities to interact with peers including taking turns and sharing space as well as develop negotiating and problem solving skills. Woodworking also helps to build small and large muscle strength, increase vocabulary, and is a creative outlet. We love working with wood and real tools!



Some of our favorite stories this season were about snowmen and mittens - a reflection of the cold and snowy weather we had in January. They included: Snowmen At Night; The Missing Mitten Mystery; the nursery rhyme The Three Little Kittens, and the Ukrainian folktale, The Mitten. We enjoyed acting out



The Mitten story and poem. Ask us about “Funky Snowman”, he loves to dance! In addition to building language, story telling, and sequencing skills, exploring these stories and poems also creates an awareness of math concepts such as counting, sorting, creating pairs, matching, and patterning.



In February, we continued to talk about being a friend, expanding our ideas about friendship, and how we can show other people we care and think about them. We created many valentines for family, friends, and classmates. A Post Office in dramatic play became a bustling area for all of our valentine activities. This play offers opportunities for developing many social and emotional skills, small motor skills, and creative expression.

“...Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning.... They have to play with what they know to be true in order to find out more, and then they can use what they learn in new forms of play.”

-Fred Rogers of Mister Rogers' Neighborhood 🌸



Cedar Room News

Contributed by Monta and Sharon



In the Cedar Classroom we had lots of fun exploring the big idea of “boxes”. We gathered an amazing collection of boxes. We discussed types of boxes. The children primarily classified boxes by what they hold. They recognized pictures and symbols on boxes and were “reading” them. A few children recognized

words or asked us to read the words on the boxes. We had several sets of nesting boxes, graduated by size, for the children to explore. The biggest fun has been hiding in large boxes. “How many children can fit in this box?” “This is a three children box.” “This is a one child box.”

We read many books about using our imagination to transform large boxes into places to play: *The Big Brown Box* by Marisabina Russo (about sharing a box and not excluding others); *Not a Box* by Antoinette Portis; and *Christina Katerina and the Box* by Patricia Lee Gauch, to name a few. The children were very interested in climbing into boxes and transforming the boxes into imaginative play structures. Several children decided the largest box would be a puppet theater. It became many other things, depending on who was playing, such as a police helicopter, a fort, and a tunnel. Children took play tools from the tool box into the theater box to fix it.

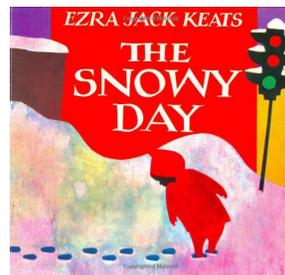


The Gift of Nothing



• PATRICK McDONNELL •

We read *The Button Box* by Margarete S. Reid. Sharon brought in her button box and the children had the opportunity to explore and organize the buttons. Hiding toys in boxes and giving them to others was a big interest of the children. We read *The Gift of Nothing* by Patrick McDonnell. The children had the opportunity to box a “gift” (art project) and wrap it, providing practical application of fine motor skills of cutting, folding and taping. We listened to Tom Hunter’s song “I Have a Box” about a box that holds his favorite things. We had discussions about our favorite thing that we would put in our box.



We also explored winter. We read *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats, *Snow* by Uri Shulevits and *The Biggest Best Snowman* by Margery Cuyler among other books. Thanks to donations of holiday cards the children had the opportunity

to make winter snow scene collages. We made paper circles and materials available to make snow people. Making snow people builds on our earlier exploration of faces. We also provided white play dough with buttons and sticks to make snow people. When it snowed we brought in real snow for two days then experimented with ice and salt and watercolors in the sensory bin.



POETRY CORNER

Our Poet in Residence, Julia Klatt Singer, spent a month in the Cedar and Calhoun Classrooms this winter. Their Poetry Books are titled: Naps and Knees, The Happy Machine, All The Colors of the Rainbow, Doodle De De, and Stars and Moon Poems. Here are a few excerpts:

Come to Breakfast by June

We are having pizza
And after, ice cream.
Would you like some tea?
What color would you like
Your tea to be?
Would you like some pink
In it?

My Robot by Oliver

My robot
Likes to dance
To music.
Doo doop-a-doop
Dance
Dance
Dance

Turtles by Amelia

It is almost winter.
Turtle is going back home
To his shell,
To start sleeping.
He will wake up
When summer comes.
Birds never hibernate,
They only fly away

What About by Clara

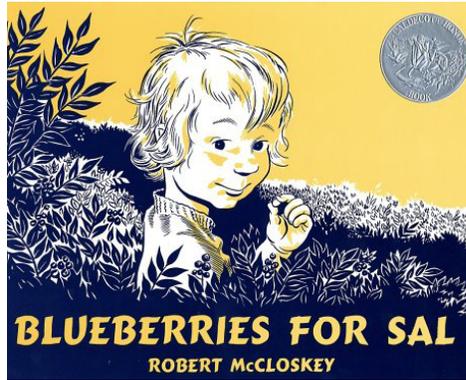
What about birdy curdy?
What about ribbon kibbon?
What about dinidin kibidin?
What about din bin?
What about fin din?
What about pencil mencil?
What about tickle Madey
Pickle Sadie?

It's a Miserable Machine by Sonny

It's a miserable machine.
You put it together and then
Nah nah nah
Now are you miserable?

News from the Isles Room

Contributed by Claire and Carla



In the Isles classroom, we continued to reflect outdoor seasonal changes inside our classroom. During the month of December, we studied how animals prepare for winter, and learned that some animals hibernate, some migrate, and some adapt. The children created hibernation boxes for their stuffed animals, changed the brown fur of a hare into white through the use of cotton balls and we read stories revealing the transition from fall into winter, such as Chipmunk Song, Goodbye Geese and Blueberries for Sal. After we read The Mitten by Jan Brett, the children deepened the weaving skills they used to make Thanksgiving placemats, and wove yarn around a paper mitten, which they filled with woodland animals. This activity synthesized our study of animal behavior in winter with an exercise in fine motor dexterity.

The approach of the Winter Solstice provided the opportunity to discuss the concept of light and dark, and the phenomenon of shorter days and longer nights. We also read stories about the most common winter celebrations, and the importance of light in these celebrations. Since returning from winter break, we have discussed the sun and the moon in terms of the folk tales and legends that attempted to explain the mystery of their presence to ancient cultures, and continued the light and dark theme in our dramatic play area with a shadow puppet theater. We brought the frozen landscape into our classroom with ice sculptures in our sensory bin, which became a science experiment of what happens to ice when you add salt and drops of color. Winter art projects have ranged from coffee filter snowflakes to paper snowmen.

Here is a story of how the most ordinary of everyday objects (a clean, empty salad dressing jar) can become an extraordinary learning tool that develops scientific investigation skills, pre-math skills, and pre-reading skills. In the fall, we use the jar to perform a chemistry experiment: after pouring cream into it, the children shake the jar and discover that you can transform a liquid into a solid (butter.) In January, it becomes our classroom estimation jar, and is used to build math skills while encouraging the use of intuition: each day we fill the jar with objects from the room, and the children have a chance to guess how many items are in the jar before we count together to determine the actual number. The idea is to nurture an intuitive sense of quantity and reinforce the point that there isn't always just one correct answer, but sometimes there are several. This month, our estimation jar will transform into an alphabet jar and, when we identify objects in the jar that begin with a certain letter, the children will develop pre-reading and pre-writing skills as we write down the names of the objects in the jar and then read the words together. The best part is that this sound academic foundation within each child is developing in a natural, unforced way, and in a context of play. It doesn't get more fun than that!

Family Resource Corner

Contributed by Barb

I frequently get requests from families for information or articles about parenting and child development topics. There is so much information about these topics available at our fingertips; otherwise known as “searching the web”. Unfortunately not all information you can find on the web is equally credible. A new feature in our quarterly school newsletter will be a “Family Resource Corner” where I will share links to websites and articles on topics of interest for parents that I have found particularly helpful. Please let me know if there are topics you would be interested in reading about in the future.

Talking to Children About Death

When a family member or even a family pet dies, it can bring up big emotions and questions that are difficult for young children to articulate. Parents are often unsure how to broach the subject and what words to use that children will understand. Here are two solid resources that offer some wisdom.

 <http://www.fredrogers.org/parents/special-challenges/death.php>

 <http://www.hospicenet.org/html/talking.html>

Kid's Matter: Learning Positive Friendship Skills

Kids Matter is an awesome Australian mental health and wellbeing initiative that is set in the primary schools and early childhood centers and schools in Australia. It's unique because it focuses on sharing sound, research-based advice and aims to bring together all the most important people in a child's life - especially families! This website has lots of good advice about how to support children's social and emotional development. This article is particularly helpful in understanding how children form and sustain friendships.

<http://www.kidsmatter.edu.au/mental-health-matters/social-and-emotional-learning/social-development/learning-positive-friendship> 

Community Connect: What Happened to Fine Motor Skills

Community Playthings Blog is a highly respected blog geared to early childhood educators, but many of their articles are also relevant for parents. This article struck a chord with some of the staff. It is a call to action for educators and parents to return to the time-tested play materials of childhood—blocks, play dough, stringing beads, and crayons—to best prepare our children for school. The author of the article states that “in recent years a growing number of children are arriving at school lacking in basic fine motor skills.” This is a huge problem because if a child does not have the finger strength and coordination to hold a pencil, for example, they will struggle to master current kindergarten requirements. Read on if you would like ideas for how to support your child's fine motor skill development.

<http://www.communityplaythings.com/resources/articles/2016/fine-motor-skills> 

Our Diligent Parking Patrol • *Contributed by Barb*



Several of our parents have gotten parking tickets recently for not feeding the meters. One of our afternoon parents has an idea that if our parents signed a petition we may be able to get a window of “grace” for our parents who are dropping off or picking up their children. If anyone has any thoughts about that idea or has any knowledge about how to go about working with the police to get these kinds of waivers please let me know.

In the meantime, please know that the parking patrol is coming around on a daily basis checking the meters. If you haven't heard, there is an app you can download that will allow you to pay for a meter on your phone, eliminating the need to go to the pay box on the corner. On the downside there is a \$.25 fee every time you use it.

Here is the link if you want to check it out:

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/mpls-parking/id1009365391?mt=8> 

