



King Street  
Cooperative  
Preschool

F E B R U A R Y

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## Child's Play

By Teacher Lisa

When we deny young children play, we are denying them the right to understand the world. By the time they get to college, we will have denied them the opportunity to fix the world too.” (*Want Your Kids to Get into College? Let Them Play*, Erika Christakis and Nicholas Christakis, 2010).



The expression “child’s play” is often used to refer to something easy and trivial, frivolous and fun, a pursuit without purpose, effort, or merit. In reality, play provides the very foundation for learning. It is through play that children explore concepts, tackle big questions, learn about themselves and others, develop skills – both academic and otherwise, and create understanding.

In order to illustrate the variety and depth of learning our children are engaged in, I have chosen several scenes from the classroom to explore in more depth.

Valentina has been very interested in exploring balance. She enjoys walking across the red balance beam in the gym, walking the perimeter of the outdoor play area balanced on the railroad ties, and, her new challenge, balancing on top of the cube climber and walking from one side to the other across the tunnel. Balancing helps develop a healthy vestibular system, encourages sensory integration, and develops the bodily control necessary for



learning motor balanced reading ally, by and taking she is developing the self-esteem necessary to face life’s challenges.

Recently Zach helped a frustrated classmate by making a sign for the barn, “Please keep animals in the barn.” He is exploring written language- the sounds that written letters make and how to combine them to create meaning. Writing encourages the development and use of phonemic awareness (an understanding that language is broken up into individual sounds and an ability to discriminate those sounds) and sound-symbol correspondence (figuring out which letter, or letters, represents each sound).

By making the sign to help solve his friend’s problem, he is also developing and practicing empathy and the power of the written word.



Stella informed me last week that she is no longer interested in dinosaurs. Instead, she now prefers prehistoric beasts and mythical creatures. When I asked her to tell me about some of the prehistoric beasts she likes, she began describing a Giant Sloth. How big was it? Bigger than the climber...not as big as the whole school. She is working with comparative measurement – how big/long/tall is something in comparison to something else. An understanding of comparative measurement makes it easier for children to learn and understand the standard measures that are used in the adult world (feet, inches, meters, kilometers, etc.).

Wolf sat down on the puzzle rug, dumped out all of the pieces to the clock puzzle and then carefully put each of the twelve shapes back in their places. He then moved on to the animal puzzle with the peg handles on each piece. He is exploring shape and other geometric concepts as he performs flips, turns, and rotations to fit the pieces in place. He is also developing the fine motor control necessary for holding a pencil and writing. The peg puzzles in particular are designed

to encourage the development of the pincer grasp as children use three fingers to grasp the peg. In this case, Wolf was also practicing perseverance, staying with a task until complete and pushing through frustration.

In the art room, Henry told me we needed more water in the sensory table. Why? Because the water wasn't covering the head of his seahorse. He noticed that the other sea creatures in the table had sunk to the bottom, but the seahorse's head floated just above the surface. We added one bucket of water and saw that there was no change. After a second bucket was added and there was still no change, he realized something fishy was going on. Henry is learning that some objects sink and others float in liquids. He is also engaging in the scientific process - establishing a hypothesis, testing it, adjusting his hypothesis, and developing a theory.

Earlier this year Lorelei and some other children were building a fort out of the large, soft blocks and hollow cardboard blocks. After rebuilding the broken structure several times, they decided to make signs to protect it. Lorelei laid out a series of blocks in a line, and, pointing to each block individually as she proceeded, she "read" her message: "Do not knock our fort down." She "read" each time using the same blocks to represent the same words. Lorelei's work showed that she was exploring symbolic representation (the idea that you can represent an object with something else unrelated. In this case, a block represented a word). This is an important concept to grasp before children can fully understand written language - reading and writing - which is a symbolic representation of the spoken word.



Darian and Nolan carried baskets of play food up into the loft to have dinner at their "office." I wasn't comfortable with some of the heavy, wooden food being taken up there, so they brought their baskets down and together we sorted out the food that was light enough to use. Through this experience they are focusing on a particular attribute of a group of objects - weight - and sorting the objects into categories based on that attribute. Sorting and classifying play an important role in both mathematics and science. In the process they were confronted with some large objects that were relatively light and some small objects that were relatively heavy, challenging their current understanding of the concept of weight and thus expanding their thinking.



Gabriel made a birthday cake for himself out of blocks. He piled a few long blocks together on the rug and then carefully chose narrow rectangular blocks to place along the block cake, "candles," he announced. In making his cake Gabriel is not only exploring symbolic representation ("cake" and "candles"), but is also working with balance as he carefully places each candle block so that it will remain upright. He is identifying and discriminating shapes as he chooses the narrow blocks he wants to use for the candles from the large pile of blocks surrounding him.



Maya, Layelle, and Ian played with the moon sand - picking up animals with chopsticks, molding it into shape with various containers, and sifting through it to find treasures. While they enjoy the texture and sensation of the sand on their fingertips, the experience is supporting sensory integration. The small muscles that they are utilizing to manipulate the chopsticks are strengthening, allowing them the fine motor control that they will require to hold a pencil and to write. The sand shapes that the various molds create give them new perspective on 3 dimensional shapes - cubes, cones, and cylinders.

Amaya, Anna, and Henry made ponds in the dirt digging area outside. They dug large holes in the dirt and filled them with buckets of water. They noticed that the water level dropped quickly and worked to keep adding more water. After a while they dug out a small canal between the two ponds, connecting them. As they played they wondered about where the water was going - scientific inquiry about the proper ties of water as they watched it flow into the spaces that they dug out.



These few scenes are just a brief glimpse into the many moments that fill our children's days, but I think they illustrate beautifully how hard at work they are while engrossed in mere "child's play." As author and pediatrician Dr. Benjamin Spock put it, "A child loves his play, not because it's easy, but because it's hard."



# Valentine's Day Cake for Breakfast

- from Amanda (Azurez's Mom)

V-Day phooey! Live every day to love like it was the last. And eat cake for breakfast!

BAKED OAT CAKE (recipe based on original @ mommypotamus.com)

2 1/2 C rolled oats

1/4 C flour (rye, spelt, wheat etc. or buckwheat for GF)

1 3/4 C cultured milk (raw, buttermilk, kefir, or 1/2 yogurt + 1/2 milk of choice)

1/2 C butter or coconut oil

4 eggs

1/2 C sweetener (honey, maple syrup, coconut sugar or other)

1 tsp baking powder

1/2 tsp sea salt

2-3 tsp cinnamon

1-2 tsp vanilla

2 C chopped apples, pears, or either sauced

1 C red berries (can use any dried fruit or nuts here)

opt: chocolate chips or cacao nibs for a special treat

Mix first 3 ingredients together in a 9x13 glass dish and cover it. Set on counter top for 24 hours. (Soaking is for optimal nutrients and digestibility. Skip it if you wish to.) I do this two nights before I plan to eat it so the morning of there's nothing to do but pop it in the oven. Easy peasy!

After soaking 24 hours, mix the wet ingredients together, add the dry ingredients and beat some more, then mix it into the oats and stir to combine. Mix in the fruit & chocolate, cover it, and put it in the fridge over night (or it can be cooked at this point).

Straight into the oven! No preheating necessary! Bake@ 350 for 30-40 min until knife comes out clean and not mushy...just the way love should be.



# Valentine Puppy Craft

-courtesy of <http://www.sassydealz.com>



1. Cut 2 large hearts from construction paper.
2. Cut 1 of the hearts in half to form floppy ears.
3. Cut a smaller black heart for a nose, and two small hearts for eyes.

4. Glue pieces together.

5. Add a small pink oval for a tongue, and decorate!



# For the PURR-Fect Valentine

-courtesy of <http://www.sassydealz.com>

1. Cut 1 large heart from construction paper.

2. Cut 2 smaller hearts for ears, and one slightly smaller heart for a nose.

3. Glue together, add some eyes and you have a purr-fectly wonderful Kitty!

