



Dartmouth College Child Care Center Newsletter

Winter/Spring 2024

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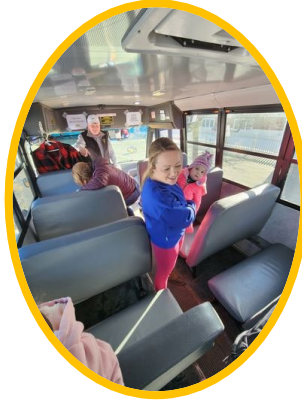
Office: Sunnie McPhetres,
Abby Plummer, Dawn
Cote, Karen Small

Floating Team

Liz Harrington, Brendita
Barnes, Janny Gao,
Chelsea Lamarche

The Big Yellow Bus February 8, 2024







From the Director

Being away from the center for the month of January gave me a whole different perspective on life at D4C. Seeing the children every day, I lose track of how much they grow and change. Not seeing them from before Winter Break until the beginning of February reminded me how quickly children under five grow and change! Children who were crawling before I left, are now running around the Chickadee Rooms. Children who had very few words can now hold a conversation with me! Children who panicked when they were asked to put on their outside clothing now do it without reminders. Children who were not even interested in putting a marker to paper are now draw elaborate scenes that have a story. Children who were not interested in books are now sitting and “reading” books to their stuffies or friends.

One thing that did not change is the relationship between children and teachers. I still see children looking for teachers for a quick snuggle before going off to play. I see children and adults sharing stories about things that they have done outside of D4C. I see teachers giving children time to solve their problems, whether trouble with a puzzle or trouble with a friend. I also see teachers poised and ready to help with those problems if needed. I still hear the everyday laughter and loud voices and cries and giggles. These are some themes that you might notice throughout this newsletter.

I was reminded that our staff notice these changes every day and that they change their curriculum in their classrooms to meet the ever-changing needs and interests of the children. The curriculum changes as children get older. The structure of the curriculum and programs is progressively more structured. However, everywhere I look children are playing. The play looks different in the Chickadee Rooms than in the Black Bear room and everywhere in between, but everyone is playing, at their own pace, in their own way in a wide variety of materials. At the end of this newsletter, I have attached an article from the National Association for the Education of Young Children about open ended materials – give it a glance!

Our Teaching Line Up

We have been adding staff members recently and we couldn't be more excited! You can find pictures and biographies of our staff at <https://www.dartmouth.edu/dcccc/staff/> . New biographies will be added as we receive them.

We are very happy to welcome:

Ashley Ricard – Chickadee One Lead Teacher started March 4, 2024.

Janny Gao – Assistant Teacher, Floating, has been substituting and is now a permanent member of our staff.

Alejandra Gomez – Otter Assistant Teacher starts March 11, 2024

Chelsea Lamarche – Assistant Teacher, Floating starts March 11, 2024

Porsha Reynolds – Badger Associate Teacher starts June 17, 2024

We still have a couple of positions to fill, but we are thrilled to have some amazing new staff members joining us.

Here's the run-down of the entire staff at this point!

Chickadees One

Ashley Ricard
Margaret Fraser
Prajna Mohapatra

Chickadees Too

Teresa Hahn
Michelle Ackerman
VACANT

Owls

Moya Stevens
Maya Lopez-Bowlin
Jyanna Vaughan

Hedgehogs

VACANT
Jenn Boudro
Emily Courtemanche

Otters

Josie Byam
Megan Widli
Alejandra Gomez (starts
March 18, 2024)

Badgers

Cat Kaschak (on leave)
Elizabeth Darragh
Porsha Reynolds (starts
June 17, 2024)
Brendita Barnes (float)
covering for Cat's leave

Black Bears

Viviana Martinez
Anna Blair
Hannah Rowland

Float Team

Liz Harrington
Brendita Barnes
Janny Gao
Chelsea Lamarche (starting
March 18, 2024)

ANNOUNCEMENTS

DCCCC Will Be Closed On The Following Days:

- Wednesday, March 20, 2024 - Professional Development**
- Monday, May 27, 2024 - Memorial Day**
- Thursday, July 4, 2024 - Independence Day**
- Monday, August 26, 2024 - Transition Day**
- Tuesday, August 27, 2024 - Transition Day**
- Monday, September 2, 2024 - Labor Day**
- Thursday, November 28, 2024 - Thanksgiving Day**
- Friday, November 29, 2024 - Day After Thanksgiving**
- December 11, 2024 - Professional Development**
- Tuesday, December 24, 2024 -Day Before Christmas Day**
- Wednesday, December 25, 2024 - Christmas Day**

Visit These Sites for Information on Upcoming Events for Families

Montshire Museum of Science: <https://www.montshire.org/calendar>

Billings Farm: <https://billingsfarm.org/special-events/>

The Children's Art Studio Norwich: <https://www.childrensartstudionorwich.com/>

The Howe Library: <https://www.thehowe.org/events/events-programs/>

News from the Chickadee Ones

Ashley Ricard
Lead Teacher

Margaret Fraser

Prajna Mohapatra

Working in an infant classroom is quite busy. We change diapers, fulfill feeding needs, complete cleaning tasks, put down for naps, and well...play.

If you take a step back and observe these 8 children on a typical playing day, this is what you will see:

Bash putting on adult size shoes on his feet and walking around. “Abby shoe” and smiling.



Rhett cleaning our classroom using various toys and objects around him, “Vvvvvm”

Cecilia running back and forth between the bookshelf and a teacher with a book in hand. Her favorite lately is, “Good Dog, Carl” by Alexandra Day. “DOG, DOG, DOG”



Pippa holding two baby dolls, rocking, and feeding them. She will often tell stories about their day, “Baby fall and need ice and teether”

Emilio smiling as his spins around and around in circles in front of the mirror.



Eloise riding a bike with a phone in her hand or going down the slide with a teacup. She will stop her play to name all the friends around the room, then resume what she was doing.

Max pulling up on tables and letting go to see how long she can stand for (or how many accident reports she can accrue in a day).



Alice independently playing by the toy shelf. She has been pulling to stand and exploring the toys on the top shelf!

We welcome Ashley Ricard to the Chickadee One team as the new Lead Teacher. She joins Margaret, Prajna and the chickadees as they begin their Spring adventures. As the temperature increases outside, so do the mud puddles on our playground. We do love playing in puddles, so please remember to replenish clothing in cubbies.

News from the Chickadee Toos

Teresa Hahn
Lead Teacher

Michelle Ackerman

What a great year we are having in the Chickadee rooms. Everyone is growing and changing so much, it is hard to believe we are only halfway through the school year. We had Margot join us at the beginning of 2024, and what a fabulous addition to our group! Michelle and I are still hoping to fill the third teacher position, but thus far have no prospects. I am extremely grateful that Liz has been with us. She offers so much love and care to our little ones. She is so creative and offers so many activities and experiences that enhance the development, physically, mentally and emotionally, of each child. Thanks Liz!

Morgan is moving all over the place these days. He crawls, cruises and is climbing up on the couch, the futon and the climber. He loves to go up he steps of the climber and pull to standing to watch all the activity in the multi.

Artie is also a man on the go. He loves to go up in the climber and come down the slide headfirst with his arms out in front to catch himself. We try to encourage feet first, but I guess he doesn't find that exciting enough. He enjoys all the messy art and science activities he is offered.

Margot is now an accomplished walker, although sometimes still enjoys crawling fast. She has her teachers laughing at her antics and especially her variety of facial expressions. She has come to love outdoor play as she is so much more mobile now.

Lulu has started to walk but is still preferring crawling most of the time. She has been doing a lot of 'talking' and is not afraid to tell her friends NO. She has been very into books and being read to. She will bring several over to a teacher and listen attentively. She also 'reads' them to herself.



Sarah is really developing her verbal skills. She says all her teachers' and classmates' names as well as the Chick 1 kids. She loves to point to and name various body parts, especially facial features. She is learning animal names and sounds, as well as the names of various vehicles.



Silas is the smiliest guy around. He lights up the room with his infectious grin and warms our hearts with his hugs. He is picking up lots of words as well and starting to name his friends. He enjoys big body play and can often be found rolling around on the futon, pillows and mats with his buddies.



Laila is a bundle of energy. She loves to run, run, run and then come into a lap for cuddles. She has lots of words and is beginning to show us just how many. She enjoys playing outside and loves to do any sort of art project. She is definitely not afraid to get messy with paint or cooking activities.



Ivy is the class comedian; she loves to be silly and make her teachers laugh at her antics. She also is gaining lots of words and likes practicing her friends' names. She has become very interested in reading books, both by herself and with a teacher. She loves to demonstrate her extraordinary climbing and acrobatic skills.



Teddy is talking up a storm. He started saying every ones' names, but has moved on to naming all sorts of objects and stringing together words. His favorite thing to do is sing Wheels On The Bus and do the hand movements. He points to the Alexa and asks for it. He also loves to be read to and will ask for specific books.

Our big excitement was the bus making and the visit from the big bus...thanks again to Liz for making it all happen! We will be talking about that for a long time.

I have a few reminders for parents, please check the supplies needed part of the daily sheets to make sure your child has diapers and formula on hand. It also would be very helpful to go through your child's cubby to make sure they have weather and size appropriate clothing for inside and outside. Please remember that your child should be picked up, signed out and out the door by 5:00. Thanks!

I am looking forward to all the growth and change to come in the next 6 months!

Happy almost Spring, Teresa



News from the Owls

Moya Stevens
Lead Teacher

Maya Lopez

Jyanna Vaughan

Hello, Winter! Good-bye Winter! Hello, Winter! What fun the Owls have had, enjoying sledding, eating snow, learning how to dress one's self in this weather, and more! There is so much about Winter we love, but as January ends and February begins, so does the realization come to our bodies that we have not had much Vitamin D intake, and our need to get up and have fun can emerge or run into a wall. Your toddler may be experiencing this, and with the arrival or approaching of their 24-month mark, things may get a little hairy.



There are so many instances in the day, when we have to take a breath. These moments in the day can be handled well by some, but for others, they may find themselves focusing on trying not to let the stress get to them, or getting angry because there is no true solution to the small problem. If we, as adults, have difficulty dealing with all of these emotions, consider a little child, who is experiencing all of these overwhelming feelings for the first time!

I'm sure if we allowed ourselves, we'd get down on the floor and have the tantrums we know we could have when something drastic happens in our lives. If we allow ourselves to jump or dance when happy, why can't we do the same with sadness or anger? It may be because we've always been told to hold back, that it was all "okay", or that "you're too old to cry." Haven't we learned that bottling up our feelings can lead to an explosion of emotions? No, the "drastic" moments in our toddler's lives may not always make sense to us - like a banana cut the wrong way, or wanting to wear the now dirty pink dress for the 8th time - but to them in their world, it means a lot. We can see these moments as opportunities to help our child navigate through their emotions. If we seek self-help books, Instagram short videos about life lessons,

even wise words said from an older family member, then we can be sure our young, inexperienced toddlers surely will appreciate all the help that we can offer.

A few tactics we use include what to do before, during, and after a tantrum.

The best tactic is to avoid the tantrum all-together. For example, getting enough sleep, eating well, even getting some play time to get energy out are all so important. Planning ahead, as you very well know, is key, but not always feasible. Communicate to your child strategies you both may have to use. For example, before a playdate you may say on the ride over, “I would like to just let you know that Max may want to play with your car, so we may want to offer him a turn while you play with one of his toys.” In this situation, avoiding a tantrum could be as easy as taking 2+ cars. Sometimes a tantrum may come on because the child is surrounded by so many choices, so if you see your child getting overwhelmed, narrowing it down to lessen the stress can help.



Being ready for tantrums is the best strategy to practice. No, not all of them can be prevented, but experiencing anger, then sadness, then understanding, as well as learning to calm down is very important to learn for a 2-year-old, who will use this knowledge for the rest of their lives. Although a dropped blueberry at snack time can cause such a turmoil of emotions to appear, and it may not make sense to us, we can try to empathize and work through the problem with them because sometimes saying, “it’s okay” just isn’t enough to fix the problem.

It can sometimes be difficult to address a tantrum once it has begun. To begin with, we should let you know that not all tantrums are built the same. Especially with toddlers, it



can be hard to understand why they are upset when they can't communicate to you what is upsetting them. Often it can be frustration that leads them to be so upset. Other times it can be trying to accomplish a task: get something they want or even to get attention. In these instances, your child may be easily soothed when they receive what they were seeking, or they may attempt this tactic over and over, and there may come a time when you'll have to change your reaction. Ignoring is a common tactic used, but we mostly suggest this when you truly know the why.

And most important of all is to stay calm. Not the easiest, but to remind yourself to take a breath, as well as to remind them of this can be grounding. Your calm voice may also help them come out of the tantrum, by letting them know that they are safe with you. Tantrums are an experience most, if not all, families go through, so please remember you are not alone. Feel free to ask your teachers for any strategies they've used in the past, and most importantly, any strategies they've used for your own child. Please note that what may work for some may not work for all. Always remember to take a break if you need one! This stage in life is so important for their development as humans, as well as your development as a parent.

Owl snuggles are the best,
Moya, Jyanna and Maya

A great link to a Zero-to-Three article: [Toddler Tantrums 101: Why They Happen and What You Can Do | ZERO TO THREE](#)

News from the Hedgehogs

Jenn Boudro

Emily Courtemanche

Spring is coming! We have some days with snow and some days with no snow. We have some days with mud and some days with no mud. The Hedgehogs love being outside no matter the weather. You may have noticed from our daily e-mails and our pictures, but we spend as much time outside away from the playground as possible.

The Hedgies love to explore the trails in the woods and to walk around outside the fence that goes around the playground. They look and notice everything as they go along.

The Hedgehogs just love to play everywhere. They embrace every experience with gusto! They love to sing! Circle time can go on for a very long time when songs are involved. They also love to read books. Any Adult who sits still for more than one minute can be sure that a Hedgehog will ask them to read a book. One of the Favorites right now is Jon Stone and Michael Smollin's *The Monster at the end of this Book*. The Hedgehogs giggle and giggle as each page is turned and the end of the book gets nearer and nearer. They all know that Grover is at the end of the book, but they still get giddy with the anticipation. Imaginations run wild as the Hedgehogs play with stuffed animals, doll houses, dress-up clothes, paints, blankets, phones... you name it! If it is present, they find a way to play with it!

We are very happy that Vincent has returned from his adventures and has joined us in the Hedgehog room. He is full of fun and has fit right in. Nir has been away for a while, and we miss her. We will be very happy when she returns and shares all her stories with us. It is simply amazing watching these Hedgehogs as they grow and explore and start moving from very concrete thinking to more abstract thinking. They find multiple uses for so many things both inside and outside! We are looking forward to a fun-filled Spring full of exploring!





News from the Otters

Josie Byam
Lead Teacher

Megan Widli

Alejandra Gomez

Greetings from the Otter Room! This year in the Otter Room we have an older group. Everyone in the Otters this year is already 3 and has been for some time now. This is a change from the previous years where we still had a few two-year olds until the mid to late spring. With the older group Megan and I have had to change up our curriculum to make it academically appropriate for this age group. This is something Megan and I take pride in doing and have accomplished well with each individual student. Spring is a big deal for the Otters! In March we started out with our Dr. Seuss curriculum. The two big topics we read are the Lorax, and There's a Wocket in my Pocket! From the Lorax we learn that our actions have effects on others; not just people, but animals, and our planet as well. We introduce predictions and come up with our own story line to

compare. We end the Lorax with the Otters each planting their own "Truffula tree" (teddy sunflower) to give back to the earth and help keep the "trees" healthy. We then move on to the Otters reading There's a Wocket in my Pocket. From this book the Otters get to use their creative design by drawing and naming their own Wocket, that Megan and I turn into a stuffed animal for them to keep.

Following the introduction of prediction, we read our first chapter book; the B.F.G (The Big Friendly Giant). We use photos to help follow the story line each day and write notes on the board to help the Otters keep their predictions for the next day. The Otters in the past have then gone into other classrooms to explain the book and answer questions others may have about the B.F.G.

With the warm weather coming Megan and I look forward to getting the kids outside and into a more nature-based curriculum. Megan and I take the kids on long nature walks and special visits to the creek out behind the center. Watching the children use their imagination and creativity on their own is one of the great joys of being a child care provider. We find that the children get more out of an outside play experience with no toys than they do with a playground full of toys they use every day. Our goal this spring is to start a garden with Otters and see what different foods we can grow on our own. We are also going to be charting our compost pile and see how different types of food decompose into a healthy dirt for gardening. We also enjoy walking to the vernal pool and looking for frog eggs and catching what frogs we can.

Sometimes we have even been lucky enough to spot a turtle or the kids favorite, a snake that may or may not make Ms. Megan and Ms. Josie jump!

The Otter room teachers are strong believers in allowing the children to learn from safe natural consequences. For example, if we are out for a walk with the Otters and they are given the instruction to walk around the puddle and not through it if they do not have on rain boots, they take their chances if they choose differently. Walking through the puddle with sneakers will result in wet shoes. We ask other adults to not get upset if a child chooses to walk through the puddle with their sneakers. You have given the child a choice, “if you walk through the puddle in your sneakers, you will have wet feet, and I do not have spare shoes to give you”. The child has chosen, they do not care about having wet feet and tromps through the puddle with laughing delight. It is now time to walk back to the center and the child wants dry shoes because they don’t like their wet ones. The walk back to the center would be a natural consequence to not avoiding the puddle. With natural consequences it is imperative not to get upset or angry with the child. Megan and I have found it best to talk to the child about their choices and explain “when we get back to the center then you can change your shoes. You chose to go through the puddle in your sneakers and now they are wet. This is a consequence of your actions.”

Along with natural consequences the Otter room teachers believe in letting the children figure things out for themselves. Most of the time you find that in a classroom setting with this age group, there is a lot of “tattle tailing” Megan and I prefer that the children use their words to figure out their differences on their own. It is okay to allow the children to argue in a safe respectful manner. However, there is a fragile line between safe and respectful and not. Having two children argue over a toy or a certain space in the classroom is okay... as long as the argument is progressive. If the argument has concluded that they both want the same space but do not want to share, they can then take turns and discuss who can go next, there is no reason for the teacher to step in and help them make that decision. If the conversation is not progressive and it turns into a yelling match of “ME, NO, ME!” or throwing hands this is when a teacher would step in and give them the tools to make the best decision vs just giving them the answer of what to do. This helps with social-emotional communication and seeing a situation from another’s perspective.

Here are our 2023- 2024 Otters

Antonia - Antonia or Toni enjoys reading, writing and loves to be given math problems. She enjoys spending her free time playing doctor, and coloring unicorns. Toni is also very helpful in communicating for her friends when they have a hard time doing it for themselves.



Booker – Booker loves to create things with his hands. He loves to build towers with blocks or cool castles with magnet tiles. Booker also loves trains and is asking regularly for train sounds and facts from our classroom Alexa. He also enjoys rocking out to music and showing off his high kick moves.

Caleb – Caleb is our quiet little trickster; he likes to pretend he's sleeping or hiding in the classroom and then jump out and roar at you! Caleb likes to paint, however there is a catch.... He will paint as long as you let him paint on himself when he has finished with the project. Caleb likes to build with magnet tiles, play dragons and he will ask you regularly if you want to see how “speedy, superfast” he can run!



Giuliana – Giuliana or Gigi enjoys playing with the classroom dolls or playing Mommy with her friends. She likes to draw and show us how fast she can peddle the bikes outside on the playground. She has even started to sled down the big hill backwards!

Mattie – Mattie loves to read and tell us stories about her adventures at home. Recently Mattie has started to read the Hobbit at home with her parents and on the days that she is in the Otter room we get to have a new update about Gandalf the wizard and what that silly Bilbo is doing now!





Palmer – Palmer loves to help the teachers and is very into art; mixing primary colors to see what color she gets is a favorite! She has also become a “professional hill sledding girl” she really likes when we take the Otters to the big hill!

Rowan – Rowan enjoys listening to old rock and roll and some newer music like Roar from Katy Perry. He also really enjoys the Batman theme song and zooming around the classroom pretending to be Batman! Row has a gentle soul and loves when everyone is kind and getting along.



Raiyan – Raiyan has joined us again after being away for three months! He is full of new stories and loves to talk about all the different types of cars and trucks he sees throughout the day. Raiyan also enjoys having his penguin stuffie ride on the big firetruck toy we have in the classroom!

Svea – Svea is the mother hen of the group and sometimes likes to pretend she is the teacher and give the direction for what is next! She is great at reminding her classmates what the classroom rules are and is the first one to offer a hug or a helping hand if someone is sad or in need of assistance.



Tristan - Tristan or TT as we like to call her is our goofball, she loves to be silly and will keep you on your toes with the question “why?” throughout your whole conversation! Tristan loves animals and loves to play vet with LOTS of band-aids. She also brings her babies in to share with her classmates while they play pretend in the dramatic play area.



News from the Badgers

Cat Kaschak
Lead Teacher

Elizabeth Darragh

Hello Badger Families,

The Badgers have been learning so much this year! It is amazing to look back at pictures from the fall and then look at the kids now. We sometimes think that there have not been many changes when we see the kids every day, but over time, there is a big difference.

From the Fall until now, we are noticing that the Badgers add many more details to their creations, they think about symmetry, they strive to build higher, move faster, jump higher, complete more difficult puzzles, and even out talk one another. They can be more

responsible for their own belongings and picking up after themselves. These three- and four-year-olds are learning so much about problem solving. It is not uncommon to see a Badger working on a kind of difficult puzzle and hear them ask for help. By the time a teacher arrives to offer assistance, they have usually completed the puzzle on their own.

The Badgers are also learning that things are not always fair. Sometimes a friend will play with a toy much longer than desired. But, there are also times when the person who was waiting for that toy plays with it for a very long time. Some of the children are learning that just because I want a turn at the light table, doesn't mean that I won't have to wait.

Social structures are being created at this age as well. Watching this group of Badgers, you can see the children who take charge of situations and play schemes and the other children really enjoy listening to them. There are children who really want to help others. There are children who want to keep their physical space in order. There are children who want to maintain a daily schedule. There are children who want to be footloose and fancy free. The best part is –



there is room for everyone to be themselves and to explore and grow and learn and develop.

In short, Badgers are learning about themselves. They are learning that they can pay attention to what their bodies are telling them. They know when they need to use the bathroom and they do so (usually). They know when they have eaten enough to feel full and they do so (usually). They know when they are tired and need to rest and they do so (usually). They know when they need a snuggle. They know when they feel like being silly. They know when they are upset. They are figuring things out as they go and that is wonderful (usually)!

We wish you all an amazing Spring ahead.



News from the Black Bears

Viviana Rodriguez,
Lead Teacher

Anna Blair

Hannah Rowland

Hello Black Bear Families,

The past few months in the Black Bear room have been busy and fun filled, with many celebrations throughout the winter holidays and now as spring approaches. Your kiddos had a blast during our Christmas caroling concert putting on a performance, decorating cookies and making hot chocolate. They also really enjoyed exploring the winter with our Winter Sports/ Winter Construction curriculum in which Viviana's boyfriend Carl (who works at Killington Mountain) came in all his gear to discuss how to make snow for the mountains in winter, what equipment and vehicles are used to get the job done and how to snowboard, ski and use a snowmobile on the mountain. As the new year approached us, we did a wonderful Lunar New Year curriculum in which we learned some Mandarin and Korean words, did many crafts and games related to the cultures who celebrate the holiday and had multiple parents in the Black Bear room who celebrate Lunar New Year come to visit and share more about the holiday and their culture.

From there we did a Doctor/Dentist curriculum and a Mardi Gras/Carnival curriculum in which we had more parent visitors who work in the medical field and a student who celebrates Mardi Gras from Texas come in to do presentations with pictures and props for the kids to explore. During Mardi Gras/Carnival week we had a parade around the center tossing beads out to our audience and showing off our samba dance moves we learned with Viviana.





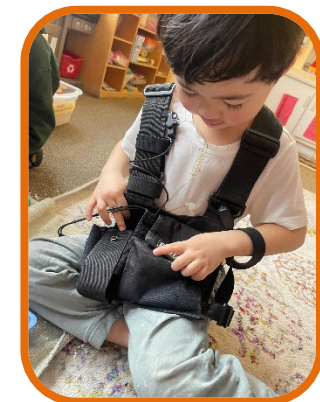
Another big favorite was our cooking unit in which we made ice cream, pancakes and much more. Currently we plan to explore the authors and illustrators of different books, how to build a house or building, the weather and animals outdoors in the spring, more countries and holidays around the world and accepting exceptionalities and differences.



The children continue to love writing workshops and are especially interested in word formation, how to spell our favorite things, what sounds each letter makes when you read them and what words rhyme. We plan to explore early reader books with the older kids who have shown great interest in sounding out words while looking at a book or listening to a story. The kids have also mastered their writing skills with a palmer grasp and will continue to learn how to write comfortably with a pincer grasp using pencil grippers. The multi is still a big favorite in the afternoon as well as playing board or card games with our teachers and friends or making bracelets until our parents come.



The Black Bear room has also celebrated more birthdays since the fall including Abby's in January and Rose in February. This month we will be celebrating three more birthdays including Miles, Josies and Theo B's birthday. The kids look forward to the spring weather, currently enjoying mud season- digging in puddles, making streams/trenches and can't wait to go on more hikes in the warmer weather to explore plant and animal life around DCCC.



Sincerely,

The Black Bear Team



Harnessing the Joy of Open-Ended Materials with Your Child

Jenna Valasek

Playful learning doesn't require the latest and greatest toys and technologies. Some of the most valuable learning materials are open-ended items that you probably have at home or can find at little to no cost. Blocks, paint, sand, water, playdough, and natural materials like twigs, flowers, and herbs lend themselves to playful learning and exploration.

Open-ended items are developmentally appropriate for young children of various ages and can be used for sensory, creative, or dramatic play. They are particularly engaging when children and families use them together.

Engaging with basic materials encourages young children's growth and learning in the moment and over time. Children initially use their five senses to explore colors, textures, and sounds. They then begin to use materials with more intention or with a goal in mind. They might put two objects together, take objects apart, or try to change how an object looks, feels, or sounds as they play with and learn even more about these materials and how they work. Eventually, children use materials to represent ideas and/or for creative expression. A stack of blocks can become the Empire State Building while a flourish of paint across a page can be a thunderstorm.

When selecting open-ended materials for your child, be intentional. Consider materials that you or your child are comfortable engaging with or would like to explore. Display items in a way that suggests what your child could do with them without giving explicit directions—such as grouping tape, paper, and twigs or craft sticks so your child might be inspired to make a sign but could choose to make something else entirely.

Likewise, when playing alongside your child, maximize a material's benefits and learning potential by

- › **following your child's lead and interests.** Join them on the floor or at the table, and encourage them to decide how they want to use the materials.
- › **narrating what your child is doing.** Giving language to their work is empowering because it gives meaning and weight to their actions. It also shows care and attention to their processes.
- › **playing and creating with them.** Demonstrate techniques for using a material, like rolling playdough into balls of various sizes, but avoid making a complete model or example. If your child wants more assistance or inspiration, use books or pictures to help guide them.
- › **supporting their efforts.** If your child has a big idea that begins to frustrate them, break the task into components to make it more manageable.
- › **focusing on the process, not the end-product.** Ask your child to tell you about their work, or comment on what you see them doing, what colors they are using, etc. Avoid asking what they're making because it may not be something that is real.
- › **appreciating your child's ability.** Acknowledge the skills they have by describing them.

JENNA VALASEK is a teacher at Bing Nursery School and a lecturer in the Psychology Department at Stanford University in Stanford, California.