

Talking Trees

The newsletter for Norwich Steiner School

6th December 2012

Dates for your diary

Friday 14th December – Last day of term

Monday 7th January 2013 – Inset day

Tuesday 8th January 2013 – Spring term begins

Workdays - all 11-3pm

Thursday 20th December

Thursday 3rd January

Kindergarten Mathematics

By Jacqui Armour, Kindergarten assistant

The kindergarten children develop and use mathematical thinking, concepts, skills and language during their play and everyday activities, in the same way as they develop their language skills; through imitation and experimentation. The organic, fluid and social way in which the children develop their emergent mathematical language and thinking as they explore, construct, interact with and make sense of their world is fascinating. I have unpicked some of the mathematical language and work from a typical day in kindergarten, and would like to share some examples with you here.

Baking bread rolls: weighing, measuring, counting, shape, fractions (“I have cut mine in half”), magnitude (“mine is twice as big as yours”). A child explained that he could see that there was a pint of water, because it was the same as in daddy’s pint glass.

Free Play: construction, designing, building and operating a book shop: How many are we? How many racks can we have each? How many all together? How much do the books cost? What do we use for money? “The wooden blocks are worth a hundred, the smaller ones can be ten, conkers five and the shells one.” How many more conkers do we need? How many do we need if we have 4 each? Playing (alone and collaboratively) with wooden blocks involved working with ideas around shapes, space and patterns.

Finger knitting: Mine is wider than yours, that is why it is shorter. Mine is longer because I started before you. Mine is as tall as the school. We measured mine, it is as long as the hallway.

Snack time: setting the table: counting children, adding 2 teachers, placing the right amount of chairs and boards, discussing the snack: I have

more than you, mine is longer, I have more left because I ate it slowly. I have 36 raisins. I have more. All start to count raisins. Count together to 100. Talking about animals- Which are the fastest? What do tigers eat? How many sheep could seven tigers kill? “One tiger could kill one sheep, two could kill three, three could kill four, four could kill six, five could kill seven, six could kill nine, and seven could eat ten, because they couldn’t kill half a sheep”. “How long would it take to get to the moon?” “A bigger rocket would be slower than a smaller rocket, so it would take longer, it would take a year, a small rocket would take a week.”

Outside play: construction: levers, judging weight, length, space. “If we put this plank here, it will make it high enough”, “Try this one, it is longer so it will reach”. Digging tunnels. Running and skidding: “Faster”, “Further”, “Longer”. And my favourite: how many short gnomes would have to stand on each other’s shoulders to reach the top of the gate post, if a gnome was as tall as my two fists on top of each other?”

During the course of the morning I observe the children, like true mathematicians, working alone or collaborating, developing and testing their theories, developing language alongside concepts, naturally, without any interaction or intervention from the teacher. They use cardinal and ordinal numbers, positional language, explored direction, distance, speed, temperature, time, magnitude, shape, fractions and geometry. They actively look for, notice and construct relationships, organizing them into concepts that will later become regarded as mathematics.

Oak Class

By Jeremy Nowell, Class teacher

A thousand years ago, when their plimsolls still fitted and their teacher still had a healthy mop of black hair, Oak Class embarked upon the Autumn Term. Ah, happy days, when we all clambered into a minibus and wafted off to Sutton Hoo, eager to find out what it was really like to be an Anglo Saxon warrior. But we were deceived - the ‘golden’ brooch turned out to be counterfeit! All the real stuff had been taken off

to a museum in London and, by the end, we weren't even sure whether we had come to Sutton Hoo at all - perhaps it was a duplicate, complete with imitation imitations.... What was real, however, was the joyful, almost tuneful Oak Class rendition of *'We are the Champions'* on the drive home. Nobody seemed to know the second verse, so the first was sung over....and over.....and over.... again!

In our Local Geography/History block we drew some unlikely looking Norfolk mountains and covered them in contours. Whilst map reading, we were particularly drawn to an area of Norfolk marked 'Danger - MOD target area.' But we began with the Native American story of 'Jumping Mouse.' This is the story of a little mouse who, one day, hears a distant roaring. None of his little friends and neighbours want to know about it - 'Keep your nose down! Get on with your work! There's no such thing as a roaring sound!' But he cannot ignore the evidence of his own ears and one day he sets off to investigate. He bumps into Brother Raccoon who guides him to the edge of the great roaring river. He meets Brother Frog, who offers him a medicine that involves jumping in the air. At the very top of his jump the little mouse glimpses the distant Sacred Mountains, and his life can never be the same again.

As they embark on their journey this year, the children of Oak Class are that much more awake. The future sounds more distinctly as an invitation, hinting at possibilities both wonderful and, sometimes, a bit daunting. Our task, as teachers, is to hold the present in such a way that the future remains open, ripe with opportunity, so that the children are able to hear the roar of the great river above the vast, all-pervasive culture of noise and fear in which we find ourselves. How do we counteract the effects of this culture, that would have us keep our noses down and our ears closed? There is a very simple answer to this question: by helping the child to relate to the world through his feelings, and not simply through his head. Nothing roots a child more firmly in the unyielding quagmire of the past than facts taught out of textbooks. Teaching children 'facts' is the educational equivalent of serving them pre-digested food. Facts belong to others, they distance the child from her experience of the world. They keep her rooted firmly in the ideas and potentially debilitating values of the past. In our 'Human and Animal' block we encountered a number of creatures, including

fox, cow, guide-dog and eagle. The children entered imaginatively and artistically into the world, gesture and gifts of each of these creatures. There were facts, of course, but hopefully not so many that the ponderous certainties of the known world were allowed to interfere with the powerful medicine of the unknown, and of that which we may glimpse if only we are allowed to jump high enough.

Willow class

Nina Scaife, class teacher

Willow Class has had an action-packed start to the new school year: we've travelled to the Spanish mountains learning about Rosa who lived on a farm and needed to work with numbers daily to fulfil her tasks. We've sang about the plight of '700 hungry wains' in Glasgow and twirled, sung and spun our own dance to 'The Lewis Bridal song'.

Most recently we have traced the ancient footsteps of the wise Native Americans Tales through written, spoken and artistic work. The Sun, Moon, Stars, Mother Earth, weather spirits and animals featuring strongly as images throughout.

The narrative content of Class 2 (Willow being in the final term of) alternates between Legends and Fables. Eugene Schwartz conveys how apt this content is for a child of this stage in their development:

'The second grader's soul gently oscillates between these two poles: the Saint, who represents that which is highest in human aspiration towards the spirit and the Fable's which draw us into error and selfishness.'

Elder class, a first term of upper school

By Sandie Tolhurst, Elder class guardian

An exciting term, with change every three weeks...new visiting teachers to get used to, new main lesson blocks and linked afternoon art & craft sessions.

Term started after the long summer break with the initiation of the Norwich Abundance project, modelled on 'Sheffield Abundance' where Elder learnt about the waste of unpicked local fruit and the huge import of apples and other popular fruit from around the globe. Linked to this, the class also had their first insights into climate change and issues of

global warming. During this first block, Elder were to be seen around the ground floor in their classroom, the offices and the laboratory, busily writing press releases, phoning the libraries and a range of other people who might be able to help them publicise the project and locate fruit trees that needed picking. The class made and sold jams and chutneys from some of the produce that they harvested, and worked with balance sheets to ensure the project was self-funding.

The second block of the first term was a classic class 9 English Literature block taught in Waldorf schools generally named: "Comedy and Tragedy". As a framework, the teacher, Jeff van Zyl used the Highwayman poem as a basis. As well as analysing the poem - its content, structure, emotions and language, the class had afternoon drama sessions acting out parts of the poem. This culminated on the last day of the 3-week block, with the class providing a powerful and moving recitation of "the Highwayman" during a morning break to an audience of teachers as well as pupils from Birch class.

A study of Conic Sections, a three-week maths block followed half term holiday. What are conic sections you may well ask? Well, Elder would need to explain that to anyone who really wanted to know, but it's all to do with cones, parabolas, ellipses and other such forms.....Roy Allen, the science/maths teacher from Ringwood Waldorf School who came to teach this block, produced a great handout showing how around us in everyday life we are surrounded by conic sections, so if anyone would really like to know more, we do have some information on it. However, an infuriating side effect of studying this block, the class assures me, is that you can no longer look anywhere without seeing an ellipse or parabola in it.... In the afternoons, the class spent a constructive three weeks making wooden moulds and mallets for future metal work when Roy returns in the spring.

And finally for this term, Graham Kennish is working with Elder class doing human science in the main lesson and chemistry in the afternoons in the new laboratory.

After Christmas, Jeff van Zyl, our new full-time member of staff will start the term with Elder class doing a Modern History block.

A thank you at this point to all the parents who helped in the summer work days with the preparing and painting of the laboratory - it was quite a job. Special thanks to Nick Charles (Alfie & Finn's dad) for the quality installation of the wooden benching, the sinks and the gas taps and to Andrew Jeckells (Toby and Bella's dad) for helping to source and organise the wonderful lab flooring.

Birch Class

Sarah Higgins, Class teacher

This term the children in Birch class have shown a real motivation for independent work. They have worked well to further each other's ideas - here are 3 examples from one of our literacy lessons in the autumn, where a snack time observation became an opportunity for a crusade against false advertising...

Dear Sir/Madame,

I have a complaint about your Sunny Raisin boxes. One morning, my Mum gave me a box and I noticed that on the front it had a picture of a raisin skateboarding. Raisins do not skateboard, wear a bandana, have eyes, legs, arms, eyebrows or wear sunglasses, and they are also not purple. My little sister also had a box, and she was really scared that the raisins she had eaten would be skateboarding around in her stomach.

Your picture could also make little children try putting raisins on skateboards and waiting for something to happen, then they would be annoyed because nothing does. I am aghast at your terribly false advertisement, and would like a refund of a big box of raisins, and also request you change the packaging.

Yours Sincerely

Alfie Charles

Dear Sir/Madame,

Recently I was relaxing in my living/dining room when my brother hurtled a packet of your 'Sunny Raisins' at me. I stopped to examine them and was shocked that you have placed a skateboarding raisin on your packaging. This has led many children into a false hope about raisins doing extreme sports, and shortly after trying to be like that certain 'Sunny Raisin' and trying these perilous stunts themselves, which has led to a lot of injuries, and even in some cases death! I mean, who do you think you are killing innocent, raisin loving children?! I advise you to change

your advertising, and refund me with some compensation.

Yours Most Seriously

Ferdie Fraser

PS. Think of the children.

Dear Sir/Madame,

Your raisins are nice, but the picture on the front of the box is untrue. Just yesterday I was walking my dog, and whilst I was walking I saw a little boy, sitting in the street. He was crying. I went over to see if he was alright, and he said to me, "Look in this Sunny Raisin box." So I did, but I only saw raisins, so I said, "What's so bad about raisins?" The boy asked, "But where are the skateboards?"

Yours Sincerely

Helena Walker

Dear (Mr Charles, Fraser, Ms Walker),

Thank you for your letter of the 12th September. I have noted the comments and concerns you have raised and have forwarded these to our Marketing Department. So that you can continue to enjoy Whitworths products, I am enclosing a complementary pack of Sunny Raisins and sincerely hope you will not be deterred from buying and enjoying Whitworths products in the future. Kind regards.

Yours Sincerely

Sandy Letman - Consumer Services Manager

Beech Tree Baby and Toddler Group, and plans for a new group at my home

By Helen Kibblewhite. Leader

I started Beech Tree Baby and Toddler Group in May and it now feels established in providing a warm and gentle place for children and their carers. I have been involved with Steiner Parent and Child groups for 12 years (since first attending one with my daughter) and I love this work, and feel that being with the families during the very important and special years when the children are very young is a real privilege.

As the group is small it has made a very strong and healthy beginning; the children seem very at home in the room and the garden, and with each other. Three families attend regularly from a wide area of Norfolk. A further family will be joining us after Christmas. We need three more families to be a full group, so if you know of anyone who is interested in being part of a very friendly and creative Parent and Child Group, please encourage them to contact me

(details above). We meet in a lovely rural location 10 miles west of Norwich in a small flint church room with its own little garden next to some majestic beech and oak trees.

I am currently planning another small group for a slightly older age range (1-4 years) at my home, probably on Friday mornings. I am excited about this because I have wanted to run a group which spent more time outdoors for a long time. We will have more opportunities to do messy things and long-term gardening and craft projects through the seasons compared to being in a village hall or a school situation. I have a large kitchen and an acre of garden. Two families are interested and I am prepared to start with just three families, with the group being full with six families. I would like to begin this group in January, so if you are interested in more details, please contact me asap. **Contact details: 01362 850426 07745193809 helen.kibblewhite@yahoo.co.uk**

Sequoia Class

By Michael Higgins, class teacher

It already seems such a long time since the six children of Sequoia first came into their classroom back on an early September morning; slightly wary, shy though quietly confident, eager to find out their new rhythms and routines. Now here we are near Christmas, the playground pond freezing over, the class reading and writing about Mary's donkey getting caught his fur caught in the thorn bushes on his way to Bethlehem.

I could already see, back in the final weeks of the Summer term, how confident and bonded these children were, and how well the Kindergarten teachers had prepared them all for their leap into school life.

It has been wonderful, then, to be able to build on those foundations and to reflect not only on how well the children have coped, but also how much they have thrived in learning so many new ways of doing things: speaking two new languages, playing the flute, experiencing paint, crayons and clay in new, more structured ways and of course, beginning a relationship with the world of letters and numbers.

Finally, it is heartening to see the children so open to the seasonal songs and stories that we are exploring together and to share in their excitement as we move towards Christmas.