

The Importance of Play

A Service Learning Project



Andino and Eric pretending to sway in the wind like trees.



A tree swaying in the breeze.
<http://www.travelblog.org/Photos/453745.html>

Lauren Briede,
Nicole Cadiz,
Melissa Koziel

Why is play important?



Jackie and Marshall imitating a frog.



Sarah pretending to be a tree.

For our service learning project, we set out with a specific question in mind:
why is play important in a child's development?

We worked with four and five-year-olds at the children's campus and taught them about nature.

For the first week, we got a chance to get to know each child and introduce them to nature. We read books to them about nature (spring, trees, etc.) and played with them to find out what we were starting out with.

After the first week, we were given the responsibility to plan lessons and centers for the children. We read them stories, such as *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, *A Fairy Went A Marketing* by Rose Fyleman, and *The Very Hungry Caterpillar* by Eric Carle, along with various short poems.

We also shared the Andy Goldsworthy book that was an influence for us. Goldsworthy is an artist that works strictly with nature. He creates sculptures with leaves, tree branches, rocks, and other items found in nature.



On left: A mosaic by the river Lune near Caton created by Andy Goldsworthy.
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/44959708@N00/3356950808/in/pool-andygoldsworthy>

On right: Jackie and Marshall's sculpture representing a "frog on a log".

Andy Goldsworthy was a very large stepping stone for our project. We looked through a couple of his books and were amazed by the beauty that lies in nature. We wanted to share this with the children, so we took them on nature walks to start our project.

We gave each child a brown paper bag to decorate. When we went on our nature walk, the children were encourage to pick up interesting things around them.



Eric showing us what he has found so far.



Ryan and Olivia inspecting dead grass.

The children picked up things such as leaves, grass, rocks, and even moss.

On the next day, the children we given their brown bags filled with nature and a large white paper. They were told to built something– anything of their choosing.



Olivia made a house.

Eric created a helicopter.





Above: Harrison made fire. **Below:** Kristian built a nest.



Above: Jackie created a garden. **Below:** Marshall's monster.



Once the children were acclimated to building sculptures inside, we took the outside. While outside, we instructed them to get into pairs and pick up two things each. From those four items per pair, they were to build different aspects of nature. As soon as the children had all found their objects and were lined up in their squares, we gave them specific things to build.



Left: Kiara and Ben scurry to make a tree.

Right: Kiara and Ben's tree.

Left: Nicolo and Andino making a frog.

Right: Nicolo and Andino's frog.



The Importance of Play

From working with the children, we learned that reading to them just was not a sufficient way for them to learn. They need to be immersed in the learning through interaction. According to Randy White and Vicki Stoecklin, “it is a well accepted principle in early childhood education that children learn best through free play and discovery.” Once we realized that the children need hand-on activities, we brought in crafts and activities that were better suited for their learning.

Ryan feeling which rock is heavier.



Ean feeling bark.

Right: Nicolo and Andino playing in the “grass”.

Emma showing her butterfly.





Olivia showing off her butterfly.



Diego shows us his butterfly.



Ben pretending the butterfly is about to land on him.



Kiara putting the finishing touches on.

We made butterflies...

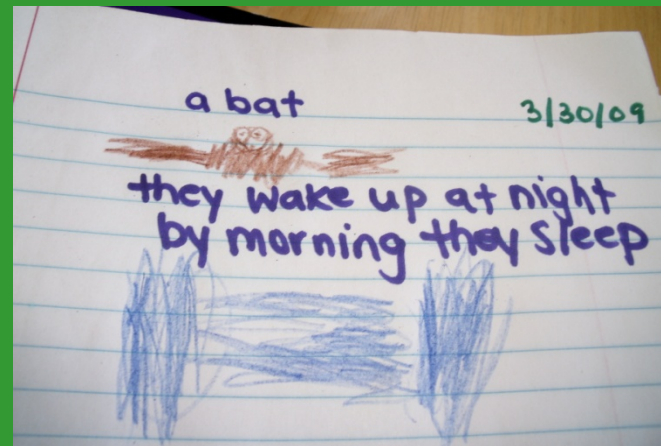
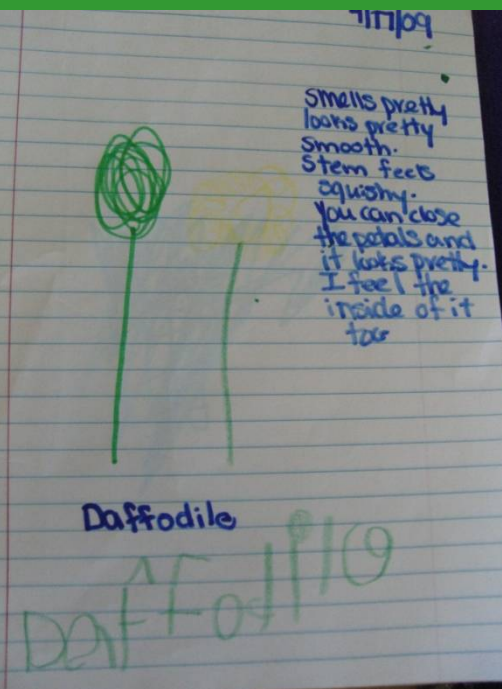
We also brought in a box full of random items collected from nature including button mums, rocks, pieces of bark, and daffodils.

The children were all very excited to be able to touch and feel the items.

Clockwise from top left:
Gabriella and Alyssa carefully hold a flower, the contents of the nature box, Eric and Ean feel the soft lamb's ear leaf, Ben handing Jackie a flower, Marcello getting a closer look at a button mum.



After the children got to feel nature, they were asked to draw in their journals and come up with a poem.

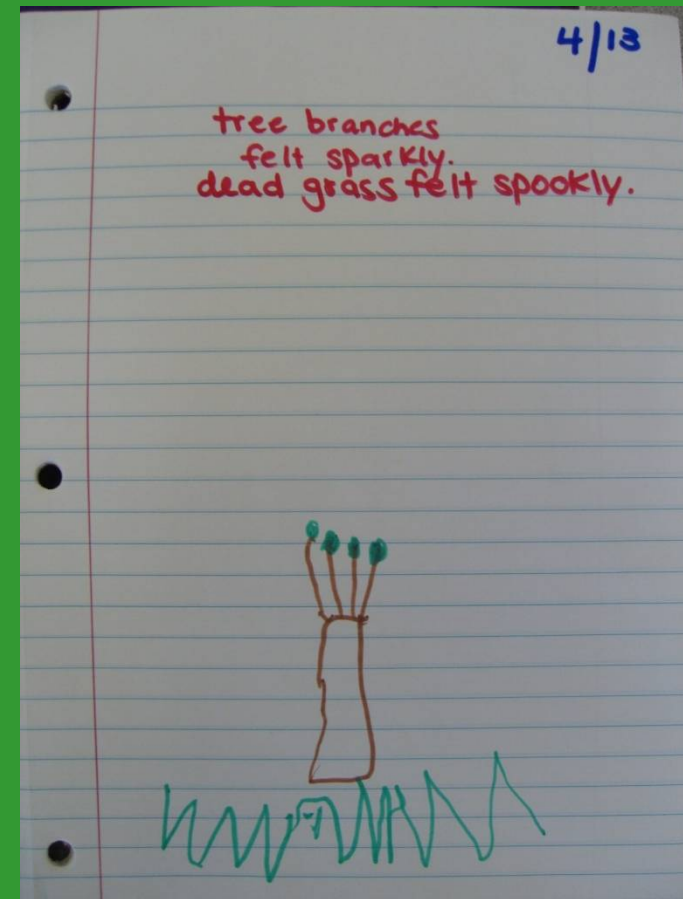


*Button mum, button
mum,
Jump, jump, jump.*

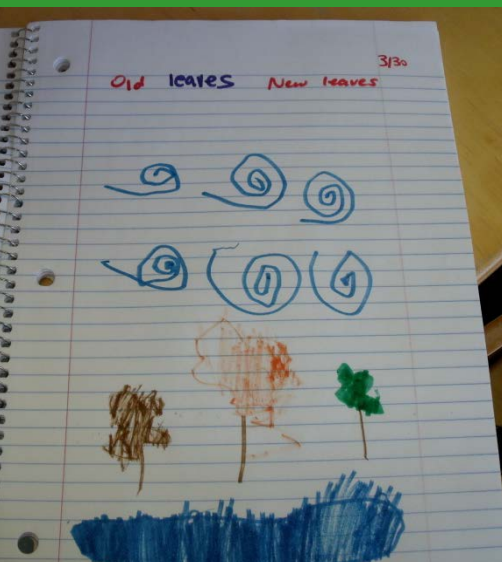
*Button mum, button
mum,
Hop, hop, hop.*

*Jump, jump, jump,
On the me-mama-me.*

-Jackie



Clockwise, from top left: (Journal entries from) Marcello, Nicolo, Eric, Marshall.



Why nature?

We chose to teach the children about nature for a couple of reasons:

- 1.) Our English class' theme is the focus on nature and;
- 2.) Nature provides a much bigger playground for us. "Plants, together with soil, sand, and water, provide settings that can be manipulated. You can build a trench in the sand and dirt or a rock dam over the stream, but there's not much you can do to a jungle gym except climb, hang, or fall off." (White and Stoecklin)

Top right: Ean finds the perfect object to use.

Bottom, left to right: Marshall finding an interesting branch, Kiara and Jackie searching for objects, Andino pretending to fly like a bird, Gabriella showing us her bag of nature.



Reflection

Children need to learn through interacting with the lesson. Playing is such an important part of learning. Through interacting with the lesson, children can put the pieces together so much quicker and more efficiently. They don't seem as interested in reading as much as they are interested in playing. By incorporating play into learning, the children become interested.

"I want children to read and write, but I think what is stopping them is the loss of other parts of childhood." (T.E.S., www.literaryworld.org.uk)

Clockwise, from top left:
Marshall building a masterpiece, Jackie and Ean writing in their journals, Montana and Alyssa, Eric holding bark.

