



# Children's Center

Bridgewater State University

December 2010

## Choosing Toys of Value

See *Toy Action Guide* on pages 4 to 8

by Nancy Clark, director

Toys are the tools for play and strongly influence how children play. Play has the potential to contribute to preschoolers' intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development in many unique and critical ways. Because such a wide range of concepts and problem-solving skills are integrated and sharpened during play, its importance to young children cannot be over stated. Children's natural ability to engage in imaginative, meaningful play is enhanced by toys which allow them to shape and define play according to their own evolving needs and purposes. Parents and other gift-giving adults can have a vital role in promoting positive play by choosing toys of value.

Holiday advertising seems to begin earlier every year. Many ads are directed at young children, who then tease and pressure adults to buy them every new toy on the market. Sadly many toys, especially those that are linked to DVDs, videos, television, or movies, undermine

children's learning by channeling them into *imitative* rather than *imaginative* play. These highly structured toys rob children of opportunities for problem solving and creativity. Unlike open-ended toys, media-linked products direct play and do the pretending for the child; they stimulate superficial play which is often nothing more than the recreation of the program's script. Thus, children lose many of play's educational and therapeutic benefits.

The cross-marketing of media heroes and props on TV was illegal until the Federal Communications Commission deregulated children's television in 1984. Without any government regulation, the media and toy industries are now free to market everything together, including violence, sexiness, and buying *more*. It's often hard for preschoolers to tell where the program ends and the advertisements begin! Deregulation has also made choosing good toys harder for adults.

In an effort to help adults select toys of value, a national organization of educators called TRUCE publishes an annual *Toy Action Guide*. TRUCE, an acronym for Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Children's Entertainment, is working to raise awareness of the negative effects of violence, stereotyped toys and media. The information on pages 4 to 8 was adapted from the 16th edition of their *Toy Action Guide* found at [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org). I hope this information will help you to make thoughtful, informed choices for the children on your gift list.

(continued on page four)

### School Cancellation Policy

The Children's Center will be closed whenever Bridgewater State University is officially closed due to snow or inclement weather. Decisions to close or delay opening are made by 5:30 a.m. and are aired on local television and radio stations. This information is also posted on the BSU website and on its inclement weather line:

(508) 531-1777

### Delayed Openings

Sometimes extra time is needed to plow the parking lots and clear the sidewalks. Although the Children's Center's day begins at 7:30 a.m., delayed opening announcements are based on the university's official 8 a.m. opening time. An announcement of a two hour delay, for example, would mean that the Children's Center and the entire institution would open at 10 a.m.

### Early Closings

Gradually deteriorating weather conditions or anticipated storm or hazardous road conditions occasionally cause BSU to close early. In this situation, Children's Center parents are expected to come as soon as possible, or to make arrangements for a nearby adult to pick up their children.

Thank you for your cooperation!

### Dates to Remember

#### December 17 - Friday

Last day of final exams;  
Children's Center closes  
at 5:30 p.m. and reopens  
Monday, January 3, 2011.  
(January 3-14 were offered  
as optional weeks)

#### January 17 - Monday

Children's Center closed  
For Martin Luther King Day

#### January 19 - Wednesday

Spring semester classes begin

Self-portrait  
by  
Abby M.



# Curriculum Notes - Investigator Group

by Jane Doyon, lead teacher



Nature Walk - November 3, 2010

Happy Birthday:

Jailyn 12/23

Note: We will be scheduling parent-teacher conferences during the month of December. Please see your child's teacher to set up an appointment.

Now that the weather is getting colder, please remember to bring in a warm jacket, hat and mittens for your child to wear outside. Should it snow, s/he will also need snow pants and boots as we go out almost every day during the winter season.

As we started the month of November, we were concluding our unit on *fall*. Along with reading a variety of fall stories, we also enjoyed taking a nature walk around the school grounds. We looked for different signs of the season such as colored leaves, pine needles, pinecones, acorns and more. The children were very excited to see and collect many of these items both for the classroom and their home. We hope you had a chance to see photographs of this walk on our hallway bulletin board. As we were approaching the end of this unit, the children began to show

excitement for the upcoming holidays. Because this is the time of year where many family members get together, we decided to make *families* our next topic of study. During this unit, we learned that all families are different and special. We discovered that some families have just a couple of people in them while others

have many members. Our classroom's families consisted of parents, grandparents, great grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and pets. Two of our Investigators, Lucas and Victoria, were also proud to announce the arrival of their new baby siblings. Lucas now has a sister named Gabriella and Victoria has a newborn brother, Anthony. During one of our group lessons, we discussed how to take care of babies. We learned they have to be held very carefully, fed with a bottle, and sleep in a crib. After this particular lesson, we noticed many of our dramatic play dolls receiving extra special attention and care. Also during this unit, we had a special visit from Max's mom, Robin. She came in to read the afternoon story to the children. The name of the book was Shortcut. We'd also like to thank Max's parents for donating a couple of new family books to our classroom. They were greatly appreciated.

As we concluded the month of November, we talked about Thanksgiving and the different things for which we

were thankful. We also enjoyed creating different art projects such as feathered turkeys, handprint turkeys, and Thanksgiving Day cards.

Another favorite activity was Dr. Greg Nelson's Math Carnival, held on Thursday, November 18<sup>th</sup>. Dr. Nelson's college students created seven different math activities for the children to play and enjoy. These games reinforced concepts such as number and shape recognition, one-to-one correspondence, counting, measuring, and more. Fun was had by everyone involved!

During the month of December we will be addressing what seems to be the children's newest interest: *ocean life*. Throughout November, there were several requests for our ocean animal figures to be brought into the classroom. Over the next few weeks, we will *investigate* life under the sea to see what we can discover. We're sure we'll have a whale of a time!

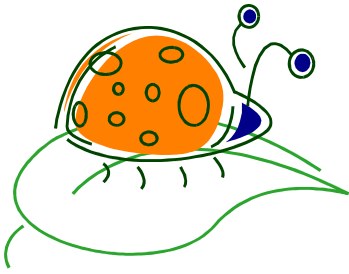
As we approach the end of the fall semester, we want to wish everyone a very happy holiday season. We hope you have a relaxing, stress free winter break and we look forward to seeing you again in 2011. Happy



Dr. Greg Nelson's Math Carnival, November 18, 2010

# Curriculum Notes – Explorer Group

by L. Eileen Estudante, lead teacher



Happy Birthday:

Audrianna	12/13
Abby M.	12/19

The year is coming to a close and it has been a very busy semester for both adults and children. The month of November was full of fun new experiences and joyful exploration. The children are now well accustomed to their teachers and classroom and as a result, good friendships with one another have been formed.

During the first few weeks of November, we brought out a box of plastic insects to examine. To our surprise, the children became very interested in them! We decided that we would follow the “teachable moment” and dove into learning about insects. We encouraged the children to learn more about the natural world that insects live in as well as the interesting lives that they lead. We did this through actual observations as well as stories from our favorite authors such as The Very Hungry Caterpillar written by Eric Carle. We acted out stories, created insects made out of clay, worked with insect rubbing plates, and participated in art activities that included making butterflies as well as ladybugs. In our small groups, we asked the children what they already know about bugs and what they would like to know, and then charted the results. We then took the opportunity to further investigate insects in which the children

were most interested. We hoped to have helped these young explorers feel more comfortable around insects and overcome any of their fears.

The last few weeks of November were dedicated to our families. In preparation for the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday, we discussed what it means to be thankful. We talked about the many kinds of families that there are and the special traditions that can take place within a family. No matter what the family structure is at home, the love, special relationships and traditions that are formed at this time are ones that your child will reflect upon for the remainder of his/her life. Within our group times, we shared traditions, pictures and special moments with each other and spoke of the experiences that are shared between families.

We had some very special visitors come into our classroom throughout November! We had students from a poetry class come in and share some of the works of author Shel Silverstein. You may remember him from his books of children’s poems, such as: Where the Sidewalk Ends, A Light in the Attic, Falling Up, as well as the story The Giving Tree. After the poetry was read, the children took part in related activities. We also had a parent come to visit. Michelle Anderson, aka Abby Marves’ mom, came in to read us a story. Thank you Michelle! If there are any other parents that would like to come to read a story, just let us know!

Our “Pre-K” children have been working hard practicing their self-help skills (i.e. putting on coats, zippering), becoming familiar with the letters in their names as well as practicing how to write them. They have also been working hard with number recognition and learning to distinguish patterns.

Our philosophy in early childhood education is very much based on developmentally appropriate practice. In other words, we believe that children learn best in non-pressured playful activities in which their skills are honed and reinforced. We do not believe in the “drill and skill” method of teaching for this young age. If you have any questions or concerns about your child, please bring them to your child’s small group teacher at your parent/teacher conference.

We schedule parent teacher conferences twice a year and it is now time for us to do so! You will be receiving your child’s “progress report” through the “Teaching Strategies” website. Please review this report before coming to see us and let us know if you have any questions. We are looking forward to speaking with you to discuss your child and the time of learning and exploration that s/he spends with us!



\*Special Note: Please be sure your child is dressed in appropriate winter clothing especially when the temperatures drop below 40 degrees. This would include an insulated winter jacket, mittens and hat. We try to go outside even when it is cold and there is snow on the ground – so snow pants and boots are a must if we have a snowy day! Also, please be sure to label ALL your child’s winter clothing!



## Choosing Toys of Value

### Choose toys that promote. . .

#### **Meaningful learning**

Children's play is often influenced by the toys they use. Toys of value enhance children's natural ability to engage in imaginative, meaningful play by allowing them to try out their own ideas and solve their own problems. Toys of value can offer children the kind of learning which will help them succeed in school.

#### **Respectful play**

Children learn many messages through play. As educators, we believe it is important to select toys that promote cooperative play.

When children's play is filled with competition, they learn that playmates are opponents and winning means that everyone else is a loser.

When we support cooperation, children learn to live together better—respecting each other's ideas, finding solutions to challenges, and working together toward a common goal.

*Consider this... when you shop for toys, look for environmentally-friendly products.*



### Choose toys that provide opportunities for...

#### **Dramatic play**

Helps children work out their own ideas about their experiences. Provides a powerful way of learning new skills and a sense of mastery. Examples: blocks, dress-up clothes, fabric pieces, dolls, puppets, props to recreate real life (post office, restaurant, store), plastic and stuffed animals.

#### **Manipulative play with small play objects**

Develops small muscle control, eye-hand coordination, and visual discrimination – skills needed to read and write. Teaches about relationships between objects, essential for understanding math and science. Examples: construction sets and toys with interlocking pieces (basic Legos, Lincoln Logs, K'nex), puzzles, pegboards, pattern blocks.

#### **Game playing**

Teaches about taking turns, planning strategy, sequencing, rules, and cooperation. Examples: board games like checkers and chess, card games, jacks.

#### **Respect for the environment**

Apply the motto of reduce, reuse, recycle to gift and toy giving.

- **Reduce:** Involve children in sorting through the toys they have outgrown. Donate to local organizations or hold a toy swap event.
- **Reuse:** Put away toys when interest lags. Reintroduce at a later date.
- **Recycle:** Renew everyday items by transforming them into toys. Use recycled materials to create instruments, toys, and other creations.



### A Word About The Environment

*Adults can help children appreciate our natural environment. Children are curious about the world around them, finding joy in a leaf, acorn, or rock they discover while outside. Children learn from the behaviors we model for them. We can provide a model that demonstrates our commitment and responsibility to our environment.*

#### **Creative arts**

Encourages self-expression and the use of symbols, a vital skill for problem solving and literacy. Develops fine motor skills. Examples: poster and finger paints, assortment of blank paper of all sizes and colors, crayons and markers, scissors, glue, recycled materials, stamps, clay, weaving kits. Collaborative art experiences are easy and simple. The process of creating together doesn't always require a lasting product. [See Sensory Fun & Collage Shoe Boxes, p. 8.]

#### **Physical play**

Promotes healthy body awareness and coordination. Provides opportunities for social interaction. Use *Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle* ideas for toy swaps: bikes, scooters and other wheeled toys, climbing structures.

## Create cooperative play experiences...

### *Dramatic play*

Together children can use an old sheet or blanket to drape over chairs/tables to create a house, animal den, or cave, and decorate with fabric markers. Use Shoebox Ideas (p.8) to create cooperative play opportunities, for example "Shoe Box Garden," which could develop into joining a community garden.

### *Manipulatives*

Children can learn to work together, negotiate, and achieve a common goal by building with small blocks (making a town) or doing a puzzle together.

### *Game playing*

In addition to commercial cooperative board games, adults can change the rules for traditional games. There is no need for winners or losers or to keep score, or there can be a group score, which is an agreed upon goal. The game ends when all players have had a chance to finish.

### *Creative arts*

When children paint or draw, they can be given a larger piece of paper to create a mural together.

### *Physical play: Musical Chairs*

When the music stops, take away a chair, not a child, to encourage sharing of remaining chairs. Almost all games can be changed with a goal of a shared outcome, accomplished by all players finishing rather than one individual winning, the rest, losing. Adapt your favorite games to a achieve common goal—play together, rather than against each other.



### **Toys have enhanced play value when they . . .**

- ✓ Can be used in many ways.
- ✓ Allow children to be in charge of the play.
- ✓ Appeal to children at more than one age or level of development.
- ✓ Are not linked to video games, TV, or movies.
- ✓ Can be used with other toys for new and more complex play.
- ✓ Will stand the test of time and continue to be part of play as children develop new interests and skills.
- ✓ Promote respectful, non-stereotyped, non-violent interactions among children.
- ✓ Help children develop skills important for further learning and a sense of mastery.
- ✓ Can be used by children to play alone as well as with others.
- ✓ Can be enjoyed by both girls and boys.



Support independent specialty toy stores that have made a commitment to high quality non-violent toys.



## Toys and Toy Trends to Avoid

### Toys have limited play value when they . . .

- ✗ Can only be used in one way and/or encourage all children to play the same way.
- ✗ Are limited to a single age or level of development.
- ✗ Are fun for the first 1/2 hour and then rarely get played with again.
- ✗ Do the play "for" children, instead of allowing for children's unique exploration and mastery.
- ✗ Lead children to spend more time with TV or other media, and/or let the screen take control of their play.
- ✗ Promote violence and stereotypes, which can lead to aggressive and disrespectful behavior.
- ✗ Lure children into watching the TV program or other media linked to the toy.
- ✗ Introduce academic concepts too early and replace the kind of creative play that best prepares them for learning.

### No Substitute for the Real Thing!

Little treadmills and other exercise equipment for children, much of which is electronic or hooks up to a TV, are being marketed as the new way to get children moving and address child obesity issues. Exercise specialists and psychiatrists are warning that these pricey products are not a substitute for outdoor play and exercise. They are concerned about the physical and emotional harm that can come from isolating kids from the outdoors and other children.

### Avoid toys that promote . . .

**Media Mania: Toys and games linked to media.** Traditional toys and games with themes from TV shows and movies encourage children to imitate what they see on the screen instead of using their imagination. Each time they play with a branded toy or game, children are reminded to nag for more products that go with the brand. And each time a new movie or TV show is released, they think they need all the new toys or games that are linked to it. Examples: the classic game Uno features the Hannah Montana TV show and Lego is promoting Star Wars, Batman, and Indiana Jones movies. Often these linked-to-media toys introduce young children to content rated for older children.

### Bang, Bang... You're Dead!: Toys that make violence the focus of the play.

Children gain control over scary experiences through play, including play with violent themes. But toys, like Iron Man Firing Missile and Stealth Launch Batmobile projectile toys, replace creative and constructive play. Often taken from violent media rated for older children and targeted to boys, they promote play that imitates screen violence. They also teach children to use violence to solve problems, make violence seem easy and fun, and make the world feel like a scary and violent place.

**So Sexy So Soon: Toys that focus on sexiness and appearance.** Toys like Bratz dolls and Disney princesses narrowly focus girls into play scripts about shopping, appearance, and being sexy—including being thin, wearing make-up and sexy clothing. Tag lines like "Beauty is our duty" tell girls to act older at younger ages and that how they look determines their value. This confuses children and promotes rigid gender stereotypes, negative self-image, and eating disorders in girls. Toys that imitate superstars through sexy clothing, make-up, cell phones, and microphones encourage identification with sexually provocative role models.

**Bells & Whistles: Traditional activities linked to electronics.** Electronic toys take control of play, have limited ways of use, are outgrown quickly, and can make traditional toys seem boring. They promise to teach children skills using methods that are untested by research. For example, digital art sets that use computers to replace creative art also remove the problem solving, imaginative, sensory experience traditional art materials provide. The onslaught of electronic "reading kits" with CDs, DVDs, and flashcards, like Hooked on Phonics Discover Reading Sets, can undermine the benefits of language development, love of reading, and parent-child bonding that comes from parents reading a simple book to children.

**Baby Madness: Electronics aimed at infants and toddlers.** For infants and toddlers, learning is done best by interacting with people and materials in their environment and seeing the effects of their actions. Electronic toys teach babies that play is done for them, and keep them from creating their own "smart" actions and ideas. Electronic "teaching" toys, for children as young as 6 months, claim to teach letters and sounds despite the child's lack of developmental readiness or research supporting these promises. Electronic music centers and busy boxes distract

and may entertain, but replace human interaction and curiosity, the true building blocks of learning.

**Beware of Branding**

using logos on toys and clothing teaches young children to make choices based on name brands, not on the value of the product. "Branding" can lead to:

- unwise buying choices
- unhealthy habits
- nagging!

### Buyers Beware: The Scoop about AGE RATINGS on Toy Boxes

Many parents use age recommendations on toy boxes to help with toy purchase decisions. But did you know that manufacturers can put any age rating they choose on a toy box? And early childhood experts are rarely consulted. Do not rely on age ratings alone. Rely on what you know about your child. Toys with small parts are required to have an age warning label, not related to the age recommendation.

### Baby DVDs Fail the Test!

Even though the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no electronics for children under the age of two, manufacturers claim watching Baby Einstein and Brainy Baby-type videos helps babies get smarter sooner. But the Campaign for a Commercial-free Childhood (CCFC) filed a complaint with the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) saying there is little research to support these claims and some research that finds these items can even delay development. In 2008, the FCC agreed with CCFC and told these companies to change their advertising claims.

### Beware of Princess Mania!

Teachers and parents everywhere are concerned about the current "Princess" craze fueled by Disney movies and the aggressive marketing of their toy line. They see "Princess mania" affecting girls' (and boys') play, behavior, relationships, interests, consumer habits, and understanding of gender roles. Parents and teachers can work together to help children resist this marketing onslaught, develop creative play themes, and expand girls' choices beyond "princess play."

For more information contact TRUCE: [www.truceteachers.org](http://www.truceteachers.org)  
PO Box 441261, West Somerville, MA 02144 • [truce@truceteachers.org](mailto:truce@truceteachers.org)

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## Shoe Box Gifts for hours of creative play

Usually, giving gifts to children means buying manufactured toys at a store. Here is an alternative gift idea that you can easily put together. Shoe box gifts are collections of small, familiar items that are organized around a play theme and presented in an appealing way. They also show that expensive toys in fancy packages aren't necessarily the best.

**Think Outside The Box**  
In these difficult economic times, here is an appealing way for promoting quality play without spending a lot of money.

### Making Shoe Box Gifts

- Decorate an empty shoe or appropriate-sized box and lid (gift wrap, stickers, etc.)
- Choose a theme and put a clear label on the box which includes both a simple word and picture of the theme.
- Most of the items we suggest are found at hardware stores, pharmacies, stationery stores, art/crafts stores, supermarkets.
- Use small containers, ziplock sandwich bags, or build dividers with small pieces of cardboard to make compartments for the various items in the shoe box. Young children appreciate organization—being able to return everything to its place.
- Most of these suggestions are appropriate and safe for children to use independently; however, objects in some kits may require adult supervision and/or aid (e.g., food coloring.)

### Shoe Box Gift Theme Ideas: Use these or create your own.

#### SENSORY FUN

- hypoallergenic, unscented shaving cream
- plastic tray
- food coloring
- popsicle sticks, clean combs, plastic fork, etc.
- smock or old T-shirt [Adult sprays piles, lines, or other shapes on tray. Children sculpt, smooth, draw, and write.]

#### COLLAGE KIT

- roll of wax/craft/freezer paper
- recycled gift wrap/ribbon
- children's glue or tape
- fallen pinecones, other natural materials
- scrounge materials: old keys, plastic bottle tops, buttons, fabric scraps, etc.
- craft feathers, glitter, etc.

#### RESCUE/FIRST AID

- flashlight
- bandaids
- fabric strips/ bandages
- ace bandage
- sling
- eye patch
- gauze
- stethoscope
- surgical mask

#### SHOE BOX GARDEN

- plastic-lined shoe box
- potting soil
- seed packets
- small watering can
- popsicle sticks
- garden tools
- gardening gloves

#### NATURE EXPLORER

- nature guides with pictures of birds, trees, woodland animals
- small sketch book and colored pencils
- binoculars
- plastic magnifying glass
- camera (toy or real)
- vest or small backpack with pockets
- small ziplock bags
- bag of bird seed

#### BEYOND SHOE BOXES

Recycle large boxes that can be painted/decorated for dramatic play. Create a car, spaceship, animal, creature, house, or cave. Extend the play possibilities by adding blocks, flashlight, tablecloth, and/or pillows.

##### Materials:

- appliance box
- paint, tape, markers
- wallpaper books to decorate and glue
- utility knife (for adults to cut holes)
- carpet samples

### Children's Center

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