

# BROOKLYN



*free space*



a cooperative pre-school since 1978

Spring 2009 Newsletter



## BFS students celebrated the Chinese New Year...

with students from Yee's Hung Ga Kung Fu and Tai Chi school in Windsor Terrace. The festivities included traditional Chinese drumming and the opportunity for students to try on an amazing Lion Dance costume as well.

## Lights, Camera, Movie Night!!!

On one of the nicest Saturdays of the winter, nearly two dozen BFS families and their friends came to the Big Room to enjoy a great kids' movie on the 'big screen'. Snacks were sold for the kids and some fun treats were available for the grown-ups too. At the end of the event over \$300 was raised.

## Carmen's Play Dough:

(Requires no cooking)

Ingredients:

- 2 cups flour
- 1 cup salt
- 3/4 cup water
- 1 Tbsp oil
- Food coloring



1. Pour flour and salt in a bowl
2. Add oil to flour and salt
3. Put food coloring in water
4. Pour water into other ingredients in bowl
5. Mix with a spoon
6. Knead with hands

## **Emotionally Responsive Practice at Brooklyn Free Space Preschool**

-Stacy Roupas

I think it is clear when you spend any amount of time in the BFS classrooms that the teachers are responsive to the children's emotional needs. This has been a hallmark of our school for 30 years, and will continue to be the backbone of our philosophy.

Emotionally Responsive teachers are able to tune into the developmental issues that are important for the kids. They accept children's feelings and respond to their needs for recognition, comfort and inclusion. They do not attempt to distract children from feelings of sadness, anger or frustration, but develop language to address such issues within the classroom.

At the beginning of the year for example, we know that children who are worried about separation from their parents and caregivers have trouble staying focused and being receptive. There are also many feelings of excitement, fear, anxiety, and joy about asserting yourself and making new friends in a new classroom environment. This is why we have a phase-in schedule to ease children into the day, why teachers will work in partnership with parents to create a drop-off time with comforting routines, and why the focus of the first month of school is on books, activities, songs, etc., about the self, family, and building friendship connections.

While these emotionally based practices have always been integral to our approach here, I believe that any school program- preschool, primary school, and onwards, has to explicitly be a community of learners where everyone- administrators, teachers, and families are interested in

stretching, and growing. It is so important for us also to model this crucial life skill for the children.

What I think that we, as early childhood educators, can learn from exploring the tenets of emotionally responsive practice is the conscious, consistent reflection of our teaching to assure that the children's emotional needs are being met in all areas of the school environment- from our language and tone to the classroom environment and curriculum.

Examining ourselves with this lens was the purpose of the consultation and workshop we had in March with the Bank St. Center for Emotionally Responsive Practice, and we will continue to do this through our individual teaching practices, in the classroom teams, and as a whole staff.

Perhaps some families might have a concern that an over emphasis on emotions might create a neglect of cognitive development within the classrooms. Marion Hyson notes in *The Emotional Development of Young Children; Building an Emotion-Centered Curriculum*, that many brain researchers now believe that emotions are primary motivators and organizers of all development and learning. She related that studies have shown that if you start with a concern for emotions you will actually increase the likelihood that children will benefit intellectually and academically.

I feel that we constantly see this manifested in the Jitterbugs classroom, where there is a clear understanding that our youngest ones need to be connected with emotionally before they are ready to engage fully in classroom routine. The children are able to take their time to ease into routines such as circle time, sitting for snack or lunch, or listening to a story in the beginning of the year, and are

then ready to delve into more cognitive activities.

Recently I was looking at some Snapfish photos that Daniela had posted of the children building with blocks, and was really impressed with the complex structures the children had created. The block area is chock-full of early childhood math concepts such as spatial relationships, and measurements, and at this point the children are ready to unleash those cognitive skills.

We also saw cognitive learning arise from an emotionally responsive teacher practice in the Sunshine room. The children were talking about neighborhoods and communities and building a model of their community. This sparked an interest in homes- the place where they live and a very fundamental emotional lodestone. From there the children were ready to explore the types of homes that people live in around the world, and what sorts of different materials could be used to build them. They literally started from home base, and then traveled outwards in their minds to grasp a reality far outside themselves.

Might the unleashing children's emotions lead to a sense of disorder in the classroom, as we all know the intense emotions and excitability of this age group? As Lesley Koplow states in *Unsmiling Faces; Creating Preschools that Heal*, teachers who successfully build emotionally responsive classrooms work to build a balance between creating an open atmosphere where expression is welcome and creating a safe atmosphere where there are clear boundaries for behavior. Schools lacking a strong emotional focus often subdue individuality because children are expected to behave in ways that are not developmentally appropriate.

At BFS, with our play based, child-centered focus you can feel the individual personalities of the children very strongly in a way that you would not if all the children were sitting quietly at tables tracing letters.

But of course there needs to be teacher created and supported boundaries. The Dragonfly teachers explored these boundaries when they decided to do a thematic learning unit on cooperation in the classroom. They felt that the children were expressing some emotions that were hurtful to each other, such as, 'You are not my friend!' and 'I don't want to play with you!' The implementation of the cooperation theme allowed the children to address some of those problems and how it felt to be excluded or treated unkindly, and then helped to channel their emotions towards each other in a more positive way.

The intention of an emotionally-centered curriculum is not to talk about feelings all day long, or to rob the classrooms of their vitality around various learning themes. Fostering the joy of learning and a sense of fun and excitement are priorities at BFS. An emotion-centered curriculum simply pays more attention to the themes and activities to make sure that they have emotional relevance for children and that can be an endless number of topics. For example, if a child is excited because they saw a bright Venus in the sky with their uncle one night - this could be a jump off point for a rich, scientific inquiry of planets .

Curriculum ideas that build from an emotional resonance can result in more persistent, engaged, and enthusiastic learning. This is apparent in the Rainbow classroom, where the teachers build the learning themes explicitly around the children's interests. When Tania from Bank St. observed their classroom, they were in

the midst of the babies theme the children had chosen, and were discussing the results of an interview the children had with their parents about the origin of their name. There was so much cognitive learning happening with strengthening of their verbal and critical thinking skills, and the children were so interested and engaged because this skill building was based on a subject so close to their hearts and minds.

I am excited for BFS to continue to explore emotionally-responsive practice, and to see how growth of the directors and teachers (and families!) continues to manifest in the classrooms.

Sources and Suggested Reading: The Emotional Development of Young Children; Building an Emotion Centered Curriculum- Marion C. Hyson Unsmiling Faces; Creating Preschools that Heal- Lesley Koplow.

## *Jitterbug*

This spring, some of the many things the Jitterbugs learned about were the signs of spring and keeping their bodies healthy.

The students learned that the rain and sunshine of spring help flowers and plants to sprout and bloom. They visited a store and bought soil and bulbs to plant which they will watch grow!

Jitterbugs learned that a lot of animals are born in spring. They learned that chicks, ducklings, goslings, other birds and snakes, turtles and alligators hatch out of eggs and that puppies, kittens, calves, sheep, rabbits and other mammals are born from their mothers, like humans.

The Jitterbugs learned that we take care of our bodies by eating healthy foods, exercise, sleeping, brushing teeth and by being safe. The students learned about the food groups and made a leprechaun out of veggies – and they ate it!

After Spring Break, Jitterbugs will be exploring seeds, plants, and worms. They will also raise their own butterflies and learn more about farm animals and pets.

## *Dragonfly*

This Spring the Dragonflies collected found objects and shared them with the class. Through this project they discovered wonderful items to explore, discover, touch, inquire, notice and sort. They discussed what it means to share and collect as well as discussed the Spring season.

They are learning about trees, plants, flowers, and animals in the neighborhood and have some specimens as well.

The Dragonflies have also begun to take out their own lunches and use their words to solve problems and (continue to) show acts of kindness.

As always, the Dragonflies continue to make lots of art and music. Back in March they did a cool project where they blew paint with straws when learning about the wind. Try it at home and make original art for your kids room!

## Rainbow

One really fun thing the Rainbow class did this spring was to make life-size puppets! They made them by tracing themselves in positions that would look like the animal they were trying to depict. The puppets were cut out, straps were added and they were reinforced so they could be worn.

The puppets were used in a fun dramatic activity in afternoon circle. The students took turns improvising how their animals would talk. Some of the many animals that participated in the skit were dogs, butterflies, tigers, a bat, a cat, a zebra, a cheetah, and even a cockroach.

The skits were used so that discussions could be had about ways that people talk to each other. For instance, the teachers explained that while it is good to express one's feelings, just because one says something loudly, does not mean they are better heard.

## Sunshine

This spring, the Sunshiners learned about storms. They learned about the many different parts of a storm; clouds, rain, thunder, and lightning. They did this through cooking, science experiments, dress-up and art projects.

The students also learned about the importance of their sense of sight, about the color blue and about the letters R, S (a particularly challenging letter) and T. They also celebrated the earth and how to keep it clean

For April Fools Day they learned about and shared jokes and began work on a joke book.

After Spring Break, Sunshiners will finish up their storm lessons by creating Rain Sticks out of beans, rice, and popcorn kernels.



## Spring Fun for Grown-Ups

Parents, friends, new families, teachers, staff, and the director emeritus got together on the evening of March 28th to celebrate, eat, dance and bid on fabulous prizes at the BFS Spring Party and Auction. In all, about 60 people got together and raised \$7009, half of which went to the Lourdes Torres-Sheperd Scholarship Fund. Top bidding went to the dinner for four at Per Se restaurant, which went for over \$800. Bidding was equally fervent for the other fifty items and a good time was had by all (until midnight for a few hearty folks!)

Photos courtesy of Daniela Vancurova.

## Birthdays

### **Jitterbug**

**Alexandra** – March 14

**Lila** – March 14

**Sadie** – March 19

**Mary** – April 2

**Maya** – April 23

**Xin** – April 5



### **Dragonfly**

**Owen** – March 18

**Merce** – April 25

**Grace** – April 27

**Graham** – April 25

**Savannah** – May 5

### **Sunshine**

**Kiran** – March 10

### **Rainbow**

**Marlowe** – March 22

**Sebastian** – April 1

**Sylvie** – April 21

## Mark Your Calendar

### **Fly NY Kite Festival**

Saturday May 9, 11:00am-4:00pm  
Riverside Park, Pier 1, 70th Street @  
Hudson River

Open kite-flying, international kite  
design competition, live music, family  
kite-making (11:00am-1:00pm only).  
[www.flyny.org](http://www.flyny.org)

### **It's My Park**

Saturday May 16, 10:00am-2:00pm,  
Prospect Park (times vary at other  
parks)

City-wide park clean-up extravaganza!  
Meet at Wolman Rink to lend a hand in  
our own Prospect Park.  
[www.itsmypark.org](http://www.itsmypark.org)

### **Kids Fest**

Saturday May 30, 10:30am-1:30pm,  
Madison Square Park (23rd  
St/Broadway)

Art, music, activities and theater.  
[www.madisonsquarepark.org](http://www.madisonsquarepark.org)

## On-Going Free Events

### **Introduction to Bird Watching**

Saturdays noon-1:30pm, Prospect  
Park Audubon Center  
All ages nature tour to learn about the  
250 species of birds in Prospect Park.  
[www.prospectpark.org](http://www.prospectpark.org)

### **Nature Crafts**

Saturdays and Sunday, 1:00-3:00pm,  
Prospect Park Boathouse  
Fun projects for kids with all-natural  
materials.  
[www.prospectpark.org](http://www.prospectpark.org)

### **Brooklyn Botanic Garden**

Free Adult Admission Saturdays,  
10:00am-12:00pm (except festival  
days, including Cherry Blossom  
Festival on May 2)  
Kids under 12 are always free  
[www.bbg.org](http://www.bbg.org)

## BFS Calendar

**May 16** – Spring Stoop Sale

**May 17** – Spring Stoop Sale Rain Date

**May 19** – [General Meeting](#)

**May 25** – **BFS Closed** – Memorial Day

**June 16** - Annual New Members  
Potluck Picnic