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Toying with the idea of children's toys

By Chloe Learey, Executive Director

Playing is one of the main ways children learn about how the world works, including social norms like what it means to be a 'girl' or 'boy', as well as how we treat people who are different than us. These are lessons that are learned very early and can broaden or limit not only the possibilities children imagine for themselves but the very skills they develop.

The debate about toys that are for boys or girls is long-running. Perhaps you remember the song, "William Wants a Doll", from Marlo Thomas' 1972 children's entertainment project, "Free to Be You and Me", which was based on a book by Charlotte Zolotow. Many well-meaning parents strictly enforce gender-typical toys (e.g. "no dolls for my son") or do the opposite (e.g. "my daughter will not get a Barbie"). The problem in either scenario is limiting the toys. If we want our children to be open and accepting, have good relationships with all kinds of people, and develop a depth of both social and academic skills, allowing them to play with a broad range of toys is important.



A New York Times article, "Breaking Gender Stereotypes in the Toy Box" (Feb.5, 2018), highlighted research that demonstrates how a child thinks about gender is not limited by the toys to which they are exposed. Images of others playing with toys shapes their views of what is ok to play with as well as who they want for playmates. For example, seeing and hearing about a girl who likes playing with cars did not necessarily make girls want to play with cars. However, they were more likely to think it was ok for girls to play with toys typically thought of as "masculine" and more likely to be open to playing with boys themselves. It is important to avoid assigning toys to a gender in order to help children see an expansive world of possibilities that is not limited by what and who they are allowed to play with.

Additionally, limiting toys can narrow the scope of a child's world in the skills they develop. For instance, traditional 'masculine' toys like blocks and puzzles help develop spatial and visual skills, while more traditional 'feminine' toys encourage social and communication skills. This can ultimately impact educational goals, academic ability, career choice, and ultimate success. Well-rounded skill development is important for all of our children. Allowing children to play with a diversity of toys and people is critical.

The day after the NYT article was published, CNN published a story, "More US teens are rejecting 'boy' or 'girl' gender identities, a study finds." It is interesting to think about what toys and type of play these teens were exposed to when they were developing their ideas of gender identity between the ages 2 and 3 years old. Whether or not you appreciate the idea of gender fluidity, hopefully the fact that we have young people who can think critically about our social constructs is heartening. The skills for curiosity and engagement, for critical thinking and self-awareness, for empathy and understanding are all developed in these earliest years of a child's life. The toys they play with shape that development. If we limit their experiences, we undermine their chances of being the best person they can be.



The Winston Prouty Center for Child and Family Development provides inclusive education and family support to promote the success of children and families.

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UPCOMING EVENTS:

Place Based Education with David Sobel

Thursday, March 15 ~ 4:30-7:00 pm

Guilford Central School

After showing the new short film "The Best Day Ever: Forest Days in Vermont Kindergartens," David will talk about research and practices in nature and place-based education, answer questions, and lead a discussion about the benefits of connecting young children with nature. Free child care & dinner. RSVP: ragan.beebe@cc4guilford.org

Box Maze Mini

Monday, March 26 ~ 10:00 am-12:00 pm

Brooks Memorial Library

Have your toddler or young preschooler come explore, waddle, and crawl through a box maze at their own pace.
 Perfect for ages 1.5-5.



Thanks to everyone who supported and attended our 4th Annual Par for the Cause benefit. It was a big success!

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Kristy Rose, Food Program Specialist

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March 11-17 is CACFP Week

What is CACFP? The Child and Adult Care Food Program provides training, support and financial reimbursements to child care providers for serving nutritious meals and snacks to the children in their care. Nationally, 4.2 million children benefit from CACFP. The Winston Prouty Center is the local sponsor of this program. Our Food Program Specialist, Kristy Rose, works with 32 Windham County providers in serving over 4,200 healthy meals and snacks to 219 young children each year. Here are some tips for serving healthy meals at home:

TIPS for HEALTHY Family Meal Planning

ONE

Take 15 minutes over the weekend to plan ahead for the week's meals.

TWO

Keep it simple when you're deciding meals. You don't have to make elaborate dinners every night. Who has time for that?

THREE

Try to stick to a schedule, try to eat meals at the same time each day. When schedules conflict, adjust.

FOUR

Make it fun! Meal time should be engaging. Cut sandwiches into shapes, make up imaginative names for fruits and vegetables, and introduce different ways to eat food, like using chopsticks.

FIVE

Be flexible, don't assign meals to a certain day of the week. Rotate meals throughout the week based on what time you have or what you're craving. Let the kids choose from the meal menu.



SIX

Prepare as many meal elements as possible in advance over the weekend (for example, chop and bag veggies). You will be thankful when it's six o'clock and you have no energy to chop peppers.

SEVEN

Ask your kids to help in the kitchen. They are more likely to try new, healthy foods if they help make it.



EIGHT

Organize your grocery shopping so you do it all at once, saving you a lot of time and money. Plus, there's always something healthy to eat in the house.



NINE

Set the example by joining the family during meals. Children are more likely to eat healthy foods if they see mom and dad eating them too.

TEN

Double up your meals. Less meals to make during the week is great when there are leftovers.

EARLY LEARNING CENTER

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Paul Rossi, Liz Martin, Kitchen & Lunch Support

Kathy Wright & Brianna Root, Floating Teachers

Bob Peebles, Susan Mandell, Volunteers



Acorn Room

Nancy McMahon, Mandi Martin / Ext. 218

Email: nancy@winstonprouty.org

In late February, we had a taste of spring. It was a nice change and so wonderful to get all the babies out for a beautiful walk in the morning. We look forward to longer periods of time outside, less layers to wear and warm fresh air to breathe. The promise of spring ignites excitement and wonder in all of us to what lies ahead during this first year of life. It's so fascinating to watch how they react to their first snow, how they begin to navigate when they take their first steps. And now we begin planning for the spring where these Acorns are all mobile, and toddling around ready to explore the yard, mud, earth, water, birds, wind, and all that spring has to offer. We look forward to many spring morning walks, and messy spring play outside as we discover the world around us this spring.



Elm Room

Susan Heimer, Allie Barrett / Ext. 207 / Email: susan@winstonprouty.org



This group thinks our "Hickory Dickory Dock" storyboard is the best one yet, as they make their own little mice go "Up" and "Down" or tell us what kinds of crumbs they think the mouse is looking for-- before getting chased by the kitty!

The ice and snow outdoors was complimented indoors by our Antarctic Table. Penguins were the favorite toys, along with polar bears, sea creatures, and explorers.



In February we explored the color "pink" by blending red and white. We also did a number of pink collage projects, especially around Valentine's Day.



A big part of our curriculum this month is our "Fantastic Foods" unit. March is National Nutrition Month, and we will try to sample different foods as a group every day, since we have found that seeing other children enjoying something is a great invitation to try something unfamiliar. We are asking for your ideas, your family favorites, and especially donations of vegetables and fruits to examine, cut up, smell, and taste.



The Prouty Repair Shop continues to be a social magnet and a great place for imaginary carpentry work and repairs.

Willow Room

Colleen Quigley / Ext. 212 / Email: colleen@winstonprouty.org



February was a fun month exploring a winter theme. We noticed how cold and crunchy the snow was while we were outside playing and sliding in the snow. We read stories about arctic animals as well as created arctic animal themed artwork. The children in willow room spent a lot of time at the sensory table filled with snow, sand, or water. During the week of Valentines Day, we discussed how to be a good friend after reading books about friendship. We have shown interest in cars, trains, and buses so next month our classroom theme will be transportation. We will also continue to explore water. We look forward to singing songs, reading books, and completing activities that go along with our transportation theme.

Maple Room

Amy Fulton, Melaney Moorhead, Sara Fradkin / Ext. 205

Email: amy@winstonprouty.org

February in the Maple Room was very busy! We had our Valentine's celebration with a special "red" snack of red grapes, strawberries and raspberries, with yogurt, and red peppers and cherry tomatoes for afternoon snack. We also had a card exchange in the afternoon and everyone was so excited to open up their Valentine's bags.



We made "sticky paper" hearts with tissue and clear contact paper. They are on our big picture window and when the sun is shining they make our room look so beautiful. We also made hearts and bees to decorate our room, as well as cookie cutter paintings.

We spent the month learning about our feelings and made a giant heart and put lots of wonderful stickers on them. Most importantly we shared some of our feelings and wrote them down. We even made healthy "Friendship Cookies" and everyone ate them.



Birch Room

Jamie Champney, Kim Jacques, Alfred Hughes, Jr. / Ext. 220 / Email: jamie@winstonprouty.org

February was a very exciting month in the Birch classroom. We spent the month learning about China and celebrating the Chinese New Year! In our block area we talked about what buildings in China look like and then used our materials to create our own pictures of Chinese buildings. We used blocks to make 3D versions of our pictures. We identified China on the globe and found out that it takes about 12 hours to fly to China from Brattleboro. In our art area we made Chinese lanterns, and spent weeks creating our own Chinese Dragon costume to wear for our Chinese Dragon Parade. We worked together to make our class dragon "Lightning" which is displayed outside of our classroom to welcome us when we come to school every day! On February 16th, we celebrated Chinese New Year by having our won Chinese Dragon Parade through the Winston Prouty Center. We spent the morning cooking vegetable lo mein and wonton soup and enjoyed using our chopstick to eat it during our weekly Friday picnic. We were lucky to have Sueño join us for our picnic and she even made us home made fortune cookies to have for dessert. Thank you Sueno! In the afternoon we were lucky to have Sienna's mom Yuan and Gram Barb come to our classroom to teach us how to count to 10 in Chinese. The showed us some Chinese money and gave the children red envelopes for good luck. Thank you so much Yuan and Gram Barb! In March we are looking forward to getting back out on the trails and embracing mud season.



QUESTION OF THE DAY:

Where do kisses come from?

- Liam- Kisses come from my house
- Shawndra- From Mommy and Daddy
- Desiree- From Grammy
- Layla- From your mouth
- Boden- Your body
- Adrian- I don't know
- Luna- Your lips
- Parker- From my Dad
- Jeremiah- From love

Oak Room

Sarah Bemis, Alyssa Kelly / Ext. 217 / Email: sarah@winstonprouty.org

The month of February we learned about the weather in the Oak room. We created many art projects this month including; catching a snowflake picture, valentines notes for our family and friends, sun mobiles, wind painting, and making rain sticks. Our scientific exploration included learning about the properties of ice, snow, and water. We tested what liquid would make ice melt the fastest and created rain clouds to watch how water moves. At circle our 'weather watcher' looked to the sky each day and reported what the weather was like. Our outside time also lent itself to conversation about the weather. From day to day we would notice how warm or cold it felt outside. We also noted changes in the snow on the ground when we played, fluffy, wet, icy, slushy, and one day just plain gone!



We have been enjoying some handmade weather games such as rain math, snow dough, weather memory, and dress the snowman. In our writing center we have been practicing how to write the words sun, rain, wind, and snow. Our dramatic play center has been transformed into an ice fishing experience complete with a tent, a fire, and of course fishing poles. We have two sets of fish. One set of fish have been helping us recognize our numbers 1-10. The other set of fish help us recognize the letters A-Z.

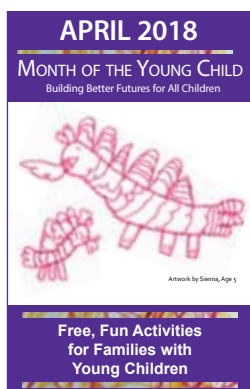
We continue to work hard at identifying our feelings. You may notice your child being more descriptive of how they are feeling ("I feel really sad when you knock my blocks down."). We are encouraging children to recognize and 'sit' with a feeling for a few moments before we jump into a solution to the problem. We have been looking for body language signs of how a friend may be feeling ("She is smiling and jumping up and down. She must be excited!") and noticing how we feel inside when we have a strong emotion ("My heart is racing, and my hands are in a fist, I am feeling mad.").

In the month of March, we look forward to learning about our favorite fairytales!



March 2018						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2	3
4	5	6 Emily is 1! Janelle is 21!	7	8	9 Grayson is 1! Happy Birthday Paul!	10
11 Kyra is 4! Happy Birthday Amy!	12 Emily is 3!	13	14 Elliott is 2!	15	16	17
18	19 Xander is 2!	20	21	22 Zane is 2! Happy Birthday Angela!	23 ELC closes at 12:00 for parent conferences	24 Damian is 3! Scarlett is 2!
25 ELC closed for parent conferences	26	27	28 Happy Birthday Sueño!	29	30	31

UPCOMING DATES:



Wednesday, April 4 - Center closed at 3:30 for all-staff meeting

Monday, April 16 - Friday, April 20 - ELC closed for Spring Break

Wednesday, April 18 - *Month of the Young Child event*: Take a Walk with Mrs Cranberry through the Winston Prouty Center forest. Led by Alfred Hughes, Jr. Meet at Vermont Hall at 3:30 pm

Friday, April 20 - *Month of the Young Child event*: Puppet Variety Show, presented by Early Learning Express bookmobile librarian Sueño LeBlond. 10:00-10:30 toddlers, 10:45-11:30 preschoolers in Vermont Hall.