

INTEGRATION LEARNING ABOUT OURSELVES, and ANTS

from ACORN 9/22/23

We are beginning to learn about insects, particularly ants, that live in the meadows of Holcomb Farm. Throughout our explorations we are integrating aspects of growth and development by learning through mathematics, science, the arts, reading and social studies. Examples of this kind of integrated learning might include:

Inquiry: KWL (What do you know? What do you want to know? What have you learned?) This helps children put a structure to their learning, and helps them realize that meaningful learning takes place over time.

Cognitive: Symbolic play is when children use or create an object to stand in for something else - a thing, a feeling or a thought. Symbolic thinking is an essential component of cognitive development for children in that it is the foundation on which reading, writing, math, music and art are based. Our week saw symbolic play in action as our friends created ant hill play. We have been learning about ants and their roles as members of a colony. Unprompted, they constructed their own ant habitat, shoveling dirt into a dump truck, dumping it and shaping it into a mound, placing holes with their fingers for the ants and searching for and placing food in the holes (see above photos). They were spontaneously finding ways to apply their learning while demonstrating higher thinking skills of planning, sequencing and symbolic thinking. All the while they worked collaboratively, applying the social concept of their own roles in a community.

Physical development and health: Being outside for learning is a healthy end in itself. We are so fortunate to have the land at Holcomb Farm to explore.

Language and literacy: Reading about ants, their body parts, talking about what we have learned.

Creative arts: The arts promote symbolic thinking. Through music, movement and painting children will find multiple ways to express what they are learning about ants. Children played in the sand to work together to build ant hills. In doing so they construct their own understanding through hands on experimentation and creativity.

Science: In the science developmental domain we are learning the tools of scientific exploration, including observation boxes, magnifying glasses and microscopes. We are learning the rudiments of scientific exploration - hypothesizing, testing, making conclusions. We are learning facts, as well, but in a broader context than just facts. We are learning about ants in relation to their environment and to other animals in the meadow.

Mathematics: In mathematics we count, compare, sort and measure.

Social Studies: The domain of social studies invites us to learn about the roles of ants in a colony, and to think about and compare their communities to our own, and to discuss our own roles in our classroom.

Although the above examples sound pretty formal, the reality is that learning about ants through these domains unfolds naturally - in small time segments, experientially, and spontaneously. There is a balance between child-centered exploration and structure of an investigation. Teachers may provide the environment and begin with a query like "Where do you think all the ants are going?" and let the children take it from there.