

Hello Everybody,

March 4, 2014 2AM

We have been taking advantage of our empty sand table to do some large-scale paintings in class, and wanted to tell you a little bit paddle-ball painting.

To begin this project, we put several balls into our empty sand table, and offered children paddles to bat them around. After they'd gotten the hang of that, we put paper into the table and dipped the balls into paint. This created a new element – kids could see the movement of the balls from the trails they left on the paper. Many kids signed up for a turn, with a teacher's help if needed. At first we kept one paper in the table, and multiple kids had turns, creating the elaborate designs you see hanging outside our classroom.

Some children were most focused on using the tools provided to transfer the balls from the paint vessels to the paper. We had two different sorts of tongs and one spoon, each requiring different fine motor manipulations. Both kinds of tongs required grasping the ball, and then continuing to apply pressure as they transported the ball. This proved to be a delicate maneuver, and various approaches were employed – one hand, two hands, asking a teacher or friend for help – but ultimately the balls were dropped quite a few times before some kids mastered this. The persistence and ingenuity shown was impressive, and was a great example of how much thought children will give to a problem they are intrinsically motivated to solve.

Once the balls were in place, some children might paddle the balls to the other side of the table, then stand waiting for the balls to come back. Some figured out they could move around to reach them, and others needed a prompt or question from teachers –or a reminder that they could walk around the table. Sometimes a teacher joined with another paddle, and batted the balls back to them.

Children approach Paddle Ball Painting based on their prior experiences and knowledge, and in the act of experimenting with these materials they may form new ideas or refine their original understandings. Teachers are offering prompts and questions, and commenting on the results or noting the patterns created by the movement, in order to provoke kids to think about what they're doing.

It has been fun to see all the different approaches, and results. Aside from fun and novelty, and a fabulous huge painting, this activity offers many learning opportunities. Here are some of the ways this project is contributing to your child's cognitive development:

*Signing up = exposure to literacy skills, including pencil grip, letter identification, name recognition, sequencing, fine motor

*Execution of procedure = sequencing, hand-eye coordination, fine and gross motor

*Identification of and experimentation with concepts such as force and speed

*Language skills including self-expression, communication, and understanding new vocabulary and terms.

We know that children are most engaged when they can actively manipulate objects, notice their effects on them, and make adjustments or adaptations to achieve a desired outcome. Paddle ball painting is just one of the ways we encourage this sort of thinking.

Melinda, Sarah and Anita