



## Inspiring Classrooms

by Teacher Susan Eisman

On November 5th, HFP's doors were open to 25 teachers during PCPO's (Parent Child Preschools of Oregon) annual center crawl. Teachers had the opportunity to walk through classrooms at Childsworld Learning Center, Opal School, and Hawthorne Family Playschool for inspiration. There was a buzz of enthusiasm as teachers perused our classrooms. Teachers were actively engaged—asking questions, taking photos and sharing their own practices and ideas with one another. Invigorated teachers delighted in our intentionally designed learning areas and praised our inviting, homey, natural play settings.

When I first considered working at HFP 3 1/2 years ago, my greatest hesitation was the classroom environment. I wasn't eager to work in a basement (the common compromised setting of most early childhood programs) and I was put off by the visual clutter and what seemed to me to be an immature collection of toys and materials. However, as I met with the founders and learned more of their

underlying values and commitment to building a preschool community, I was impressed. Their desire for progressive, quality practices was clear and their eagerness for my leadership followed. In 2005, I started teaching at HFP backed by a supportive board and a dedicated parent community with the intent to improve the classroom setting and grow the curriculum.

Over the past three years, I've gained a deeper appreciation for the hard work and clever scavenging it takes to furnish and supply the school on such a limited budget. Gradually I worked with families to improve the setting. In just three years our classrooms have become one of the most appealing aspects of our program, impressing experienced teachers. Baskets have replaced plastic toy containers; paint has been stripped off of tables, shelves, coat hooks and cubbies revealing wood grain; hand-dyed silks soften the institutional lighting; curtains now obscure storage containers above the

**Visiting teachers took notice: the classrooms have transformed thanks to the time, energy and creativity of our committed families.**



sink area and below the sensory table (left); the walls are freshly painted with warm hues; plants grow throughout our rooms; and a tree loft stands where an "off-limits" piano used to be stored. Further we've significantly added to our toys and materials collection through school purchases and gifts from families, acquiring more wooden toys, an array of loose parts that lend themselves to a variety of play, props emphasizing nature's seasonal changes, a collection of Northwest stuffed animals, additional sensory materials, and a collection of props to use in the touch tables. A solid supply of play options and natural materials now dominate the classroom as they do the outdoor play area.

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From the President: Cara Bauer

## Thoughts on Connection

**W**hat an honor it is to work with Teacher Susan and 27 other families who care so much about their kids and community. It is wonderful to see kids and adults connecting with each other and settling into the school year.

We came to HFP because I wanted a school for Zane where relationship was the focus and where our whole family could learn more skills in connecting with people of all ages. I'm really thrilled to see that happening at HFP. At the beginning of last year I would ask Zane when dropping him off, "What do you want to do today?" But for him it's not about the activities (cool as they are). He started to feel really comfortable in

the classroom after he made a connection with Hollis last year. When he started asking me to "help him get attached" to a person or a game, I realized the question for him is "Who do you want to connect with today?" This year he is much more able to ask for help in getting connected and more able to make connections himself.



This need for connection makes sense to me because Zane comes to school with an energetic connection (or attachment) to Matt or me. He is very sensitive and he needs and wants this kind of connection wherever he goes. When we get to school he transfers the energetic connection to a friend and lets us know that it's time for us to leave. During the school day he can transfer that connection many times and then back to us when we pick him up. This year he is so much more confident in himself and his connections.

In addition to the wonderful connections happening in the classroom, the administration of the school is running smoothly with all families learning and doing their jobs. The school is in such a great place due to the hard work of the families who have come before us and our focus this year is on making it that much better for the families to come. We're continuing the website upgrade that was started last year so that our website can be a resource for past, present and prospective families. We are also focusing on maintaining connections with the founding and alumni families who have put so much into the school. Our Fall Alumni Picnic was a great success and we'll be thinking of other ways to stay connected. I feel that by honoring my own needs for connection in the world I can help Zane to honor his.

I would love to hear about the ways you feel connected to or not connected to the HFP school and community.

## Overheard ...

At snack time Hollis asked Zane how loud he cried when he hit his head. Zane replied, "I cried so loud I roared like a Tyrannosaurus Rex." All of the kids decided it was a good time to practice their dinosaur roars. —Nancy

Kendall continues to tell her own mom Xyla, "Susan is almost my mommy."

A number of the kids were playing with the safety cone and some of the tubing, and they turned it into a rocket. Adriano was filling it with sand and I asked him what he was going to put in the rocket. He started to say "candy" then stopped himself and said "Gold! And the rocket is flying to the Gold Planet!" I said "Wow, I'd love to go to the Gold Planet" and Adriano replied: "Oh no, only kids get to go to the Gold planet and get all the gold!" and giggled. —Michael



**Clara, Rachel and Ezra at an HFP Field Trip**

## Aha! ...

The Petke-Long family is loving school so much this year—many thanks to Susan's skills and her nurturing and joyous presence! A cute tidbit—for the past several weeks Shane, Clara and I have been trying to figure out what Ezra means when he says "hurckle pime," which he does often and with great excitement. We knew that it had something to do with singing, because he would have an instrument and would tell us to sing when we asked him to show us to help us understand, but we couldn't figure out what song he was talking about. We finally figured out yesterday that he is saying "circle time." How thrilled we all were—particularly Ezra. —Rachel (Clara's mom)

# Alumni News

Alumni families share their news at our fall potluck picnic:

Abby C. is learning sign language in first grade at Laurelhurst. She feels proud of herself for riding her bike to school! She remembers preschool as lots of fun and a very special time. 2003-04

Sisters Jaden and Kaia B. love soccer and their family is still in touch with many HFP families. 2002-06

Even though Porter L. loves kindergarten at Creative Science School, he misses HFP a lot and says he wants to stay in preschool until he's an old man. 2006-08

Jackson and Tucker R. have been hitting the road, traveling to Sweden, and then Chicago and Virginia. The family enjoyed the history they learned along the way, and love seeing HFP families at soccer and Sunnyside Environmental School. 2002-07

Gus Y. is having a great time at Trillium, playing soccer and learning the guitar. 2006-08

## HFP Dates

- Nov 27-28 NO SCHOOL, Thanksgiving Holiday
- Dec 3 Board Meeting, 6:30 pm
- Dec 6 Family Potluck in lieu of December Membership Meeting, 4:30-6:30 pm
- Dec 22 – Jan 2 NO SCHOOL: Winter vacation
- Jan 5 School starts
- Jan 7 Board Meeting, 6:30 pm
- Jan 19 NO SCHOOL, Martin Luther King Holiday
- Jan 20 NO SCHOOL, Teacher Inservice Day
- Jan 21 Wednesday Evening Membership Meeting, 6:30-8:30 pm
- Feb 4 Board Meeting, 6:30 pm
- Feb. 7 HFP Auction!

Hawthorne Family Playschool is located south of SE 28th and Hawthorne at 2828 SE Stephens Avenue Portland, Oregon 97214 (503) 784.8873 HawthorneFamilyPlayschool.org Membership Info: (503) 771-1744

HFP is a nonprofit 501(c)3 and donations (which are tax deductible) are gratefully accepted.



## New Website: HawthorneFamilyPlayschool.org

by Jason Wilson (Tabor)

The new website is up and running and I hope we can really form it into a hub of valuable information, inspiring insights, rich community interaction. The two main sections I'd like to point out are the Parent Helper Schedule (/members/calendar) which you can subscribe to, and the Photo Contribution Page (/members/photos) where you can upload snapshots you take (we will cull these for use in the year-end photo book).

Some areas are still being updated, but I'd love to hear back about any errors or dead ends that people might discover.

Best, Jason Wilson  
jason@platial.com

Many thanks to Matt Kramer who designed the shell of the site.



Circle Time w/Teacher Susan

# Inspiring Classrooms

continued from front cover

Not long ago HFP's outdoor play area elicited a few raised eyebrows. Many critiqued the lack of a traditional play structure and were hesitant of the founders' solitary "sand lake." In our three years, we embellished this natural playscape and the large organic-shaped sand area now clearly presents itself as a well-designed central component. Families have significantly improved our "outdoor classroom" via ongoing work parties. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of our families, and the support of the church, we extended the fence providing more square footage for active play as well as two mature trees with which to mingle. We have added garden beds, plants and fruit trees, a teepee structure, and barrels of nature's loose parts—stones, branches and wooden blocks. We have built natural structures to divide the play space, creating distinct options for more focused play. We constructed a spider web climber and a branch wall as well as bamboo corner. We've purchased equipment such as balls and stick horses and have created a more appealing, uniform means to store these items in the outdoor shed and in barrels in the yard.

Our vision and craftsmanship have clearly enriched the experiences of the children and families in our community. Recently our collective work has inspired a number of teachers as well. The center crawl teachers were especially impressed with our tree loft, the silk hangings and our natural outdoor playscape. These creations were all undertaken by our parents. Toward the end of teachers' visit, some shared specific ideas they'd gained from observing at HFP and planned to bring back to their own classrooms. In turn, the steady work we've done to advance our own classrooms impacts other programs, improving the circumstances of more children and families.

Lisa Houghton (teacher at Creative Discoveries Preschool in Salem) was energized by the warmth and calm of our classrooms and our use of natural materials. After seeing HFP's classrooms, Lisa shares: "Our rooms now feel so sterile. I can't wait to go back and make some changes." Hillsboro Parent Preschool's teacher, Penny Berrien has a history with HFP. Her program donated toys to HFP at its inception in 2002. Over lunch, Peggy beams at me with her thumb up in the air: "It's exciting to see the transformations in the environment, playground and in the philosophy." Peggy's right: the classrooms have transformed thanks to the time, energy and creativity of our committed families. While many programs make due with what they have, HFP advocates for children as we reach for what we want. Our playschool community's choices, commitment to young people, and joint efforts makes HFP a model program. It is a tribute to our families, past, present, and future, to have a program that reflects our shared values, offering inspiring settings for our children's first school experiences.

## Additional Improvements

Our current HFP project is organizing our toys and materials in the creation station, the outdoor shed and beyond. Rhonda (Finn) spearheaded the project of purchasing and arranging a shelving and storage bin system to more effectively meet our needs. "The way materials are stored and presented sends a message about how the environment is valued. If they live in mess, disorder and clutter, they will likely create more disorder, rather than using the materials thoughtfully."

—Deb Curtis, Environments for Living and Learning

A huge thanks to Rhonda Iten (Finn) for spearheading this project. Additional thanks to our handy shelf-assemblers: Kerry (Finn), Diana (Gabriel), Matt (Zane) and Jennifer (Caden). More appreciations to our queen-bee sorters: Rhonda, Nicole (Claire), Laura (Lili), Rachel (Clara) and Liz (Eli).

## Hopeful Future Additions

We will continue to strategize to better address the needs of our kinesthetic learners, offering more physical challenges for their gross motor needs. We will continue to plan additional provisions for our outdoor play area, considering water play, water catchment, and an elevated play structure such as a tree platform or tree house. We'd also like to shelter some of our outdoor play space so children can better utilize it in rainy weather.

## Our classroom rocks!



**HFP's naturescape provides a variety of sensory experiences from which children can invent and collaborate.**



## The Pumpkin Patch (M/W)

by Sheena Bjork (Avery)

Our trip to the pumpkin patch at Kruger's Farm took place on a beautiful morning in October. Farmer Don greeted the group with a cart full of fresh vegetables. He asked the children to name the vegetables and, to his amazement, they identified every one. I felt proud that our community teaches its children about the incredible bounty and beauty of Mother Nature. After exploring all the produce grown on the farm, from cabbages to weeds, we were off to see the animals. We saw huge pigs that some of us remembered from the previous year as tiny piglets, and a calf that was visiting from another farm. The older kids also remembered what came next—the hayride!

What joy to sit on hay next to friends, and have a tractor transport you from one place to another. Excited conversations were about the shape, size and color of the pumpkin each child hoped to find. The hayride dropped us off in the middle of an enormous pumpkin patch, and the preschoolers scattered to find the perfect pumpkin.

I think the best part of the whole trip was watching the children search for and carry pumpkins.



I followed Avery and Zane who had decided they were going to find the largest pumpkin in the whole patch. Upon finding a perfect pumpkin, the boys contemplated how it was going to be carried... teamwork of course! What a sight to see two little boys carrying a huge pumpkin. The two of them were working hard as they had a big job to accomplish. Their cooperation was inspiring and well-coordinated. After succeeding with one pumpkin, they chose another to carry. It was exciting as a parent to watch Avery cooperate with Zane.

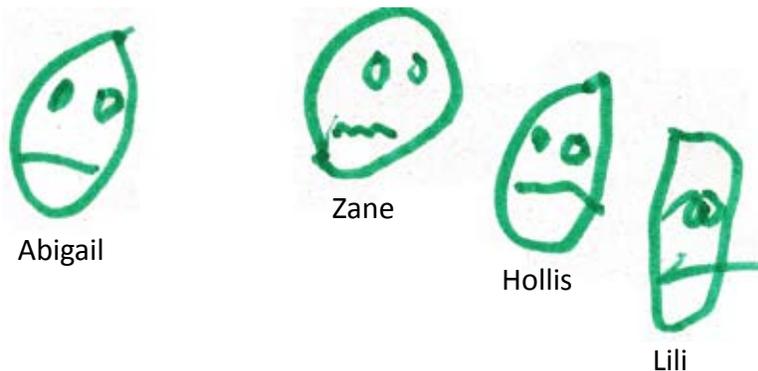


### Both classes had awesome experiences.

This year Avery has opened up so much more to exploring new friendships along with holding dear the old ones. Watching Avery working with Zane showed me how much he's grown and how perceptive he is becoming to his feelings and the feelings of his friends.



Hollis portrays herself surrounded by friends.



## *I Can't Wait for Lunch Bunch!*

by Jenny Lawrence (Rayley)

It was the first Saturday following Rayley's first week of preschool at Hawthorne Family Playschool, and I was ecstatic to hear the words come out of her mouth, "I can't wait for lunch bunch."

After all the anxiety I'd felt leading up to this milestone in her childhood, our family's transition from an unstructured, impulsive daily life to this school structure of routine, friendships, challenges—I felt a sigh of relief overcome me as I heard my own response, "Me too."

We are building friendships right along side our child, creating relationships with her friends, and her friends' families. There is a definite sense at HFP that this is more than a school. This is our community.

## Can you describe HFP?

Here's how some of our parents describe Hawthorne Family Playschool:

- |                             |                    |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| nurturing                   | communicative      |
| inquisitive                 | energetic          |
| fun                         | family support     |
| social                      | green              |
| playful                     | new                |
| joyful                      | inviting           |
| happy                       | warm               |
| nature                      | earth-centered     |
| creative                    | deep connections   |
| comfortable                 | family involvement |
| sandy                       | laughter           |
| open & free                 | invested           |
| community                   | delight            |
| learning                    | busy               |
| developmentally appropriate | flurry             |



**Dylan and Claire shriek with delight as they scare off Teacher Susan, playing the werewolf.**

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