



What to say when the WOLVES come knockin'!

Shared with you by Lisa Murphy, *the ooey gooey lady*™

A CRASH COURSE IN THE LANGUAGE OF WOLVES

An article by Lisa Murphy

In her book, *Teaching in the Key of Life*, author Mimi Chenfeld talks about the “wolves” that are occasionally seen stalking school hallways and lurking around preschool classroom doors. Wolves, by definition, are those concerned types who want to know what children are *doing* all day (read: doing to get ready for kindergarten). They desire to know the rationale for flubber, the developmentally appropriateness of ooblick, the reason for the hokey pokey, the goal of splatter painting, the objective of swinging on your tummy and seem to search incessantly for an overall justification of the importance of what we might call “play.”

You might find wolves disguised as parents, administrators, colleagues, co-workers, principals or maybe even yourself. Wolves desire goals, objectives and activities that are aligned with standards, benchmarks and an assortment of desired results. Obvious links between classroom projects and established learning guidelines assists them in truly believing that we (educators) know what we are doing.

This can be a bit of a challenge for all parties. Teachers want to plan exciting activities for the children, parents want the clothes clean. Teachers are jazzed up about a new experiment and administration is worried about playdough in the carpet. Teachers feel frustrated when asked, “But what are they *learning*?!” and know in their hearts that there is more to be said than, “Kids learn through play.”

Where is the middle ground? I dream of a day when we say, “Today everyone played so hard!” And it is collectively understood that this means we counted rollie pollies, measured sand and water, wrote stories with inventive spelling, negotiated a turn on the bikes without hitting, mixed red and yellow for the fiftieth time and realized it still made orange, sat quietly while we

watched the hummingbird sip the nectar from the feeder on the playground, sang songs, did fingerplays and balanced a table-high tower of corks and blocks.

Sometimes I worry that when we say “we played today,” many grown-ups have forgotten what this means. They have forgotten “play.” Remind them. “When we stack blocks we are learning about balance, gravity and patience, come let me show you the photograph of the tower Karen made today! She worked on it for a solid half hour!”

While reconnecting them with play you are also linking the “learning words” to the activities and projects you do in your classroom. Believe me - great will be the day when we no longer have to defend what we do – but for now, we do. So we must be armed with an arsenal of information!

While fighting the good fight and continuing to wage the uphill battle of having play valued for its own sake within our preschools, childcare centers and elementary schools, we must be able to articulate what is happening when children play.

We know that while children are engaged in meaningful experiences they are “getting ready for school.” Some folks can see that clearly, some need us to point it out. We must be able to work with both groups in a professional manner! We must continue to point out (for the millionth time) that when children spend time in hands-on, play based, educational environments that emphasize the importance of wonder, discovery and creativity (not the accumulation of a bunch o’facts) that learning is happening all the time.

Even though many of us work in environments where there is a lot of pressure for children to be performing, gathering random bits of knowledge and hurrying up to be “ready” for the next expectation with no time left to appreciate the here-and-now, I have found, amazingly enough, that sometimes all it takes is a few strategically placed phrases such as, “when we are squeezing playdough we are strengthening our hands and eventually, when our hands and fingers are strong enough, we are able to hold pencils”, or “when we make ooblick we are exploring the difference between solids and liquids” is all it takes to ease the worries and fears of parents that the children aren’t *doing* anything.

Sometimes a few exchanges such as these shows parents that you know what you are talking about. It reassures them that their child is in an engaging environment where play is being facilitated by caring adults who know their stuff. Your responsibility is to then facilitate and to know your stuff.

After a few conversations with parents where you are able to show and educate them as to the “learning words” that can be linked to the play activities you can often begin to deepen your relationship with them. Once this trust is established (they trust that you know what you are doing and that you can talk about what their child is experiencing and learning and you trust that they will listen when you explain and talk about what is happening in the classroom) you can then take on the deeper issues of honoring childhood for it’s own sake, not just as training ground for all the things that might be coming next.

These words can be used to describe the activities you are doing in your classroom. Link them to the day’s events to show what the children were *doing*. I have found that wolves respond better when you use words like:

Absorption	Effect	Magnification	Risk Taking
Action	Evaporation	Manipulating	Seeking
Amplify	Experimenting	Matching	Sight
Arranging	Explaining	Measurements	Small Motor
Balance	Exploring	Membrane	Smell
Buoyant	Force	Naming	Spatial Representation
Carbon Dioxide	Friction	Observing	Static Electricity
Cause	Gravity	Opposites	Surface Tension
Chemical reaction	Hearing	Ordering	Suspension
Classification	Heavy	Patterning	Taste
Coagulate	Identifying	Pitch	Temperature
Constancy	Inertia	Planning	Tone
Constructing	Inflate	Problem Solving	Touch
Cooperation	Investigating	Propulsion	Vibration
Density	Large Motor	Questioning	Weight
Displaying	Light	Reaction	
Dissolve	Listening	Reconstructing	
Distance	Magnetic	Rhythm	

It is my wish that this brief list assists you in connecting with them....

My current focus and goal is to assist educators and parents in linking a play based early childhood program and philosophy with mandated educational standards and other various programmatic expectations, i.e.: Kindergarten Standards, Preschool Standards, The Desired Results for Children and Families, the Family Day Care Environmental Rating Scale (F.D.C.E.R.S.) and the Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale (E.C.E.R.S.). *Why?*

- We have gotten away from hands-on curriculum.
- We have forgotten the importance of play.
- We have become too focused on content standards and expected outcomes and have forgotten about the children.
- There is too much pressure on “academics” at the expense of the development of social skills.

For the last seven years I have been encouraging teachers and family childcare providers who are working so hard to create child-centered places to “link it up!” I’ve been saying stuff like, “Just connect what is expected with what you do! You can do it! Take a weekend and pound it out!” Yeah right.

In our travels we had begun to witness that many many “good things” had stopped happening in the classroom because folks felt they just “couldn’t do it anymore.” We met teachers who *feared for their jobs* if they dragged out easels, playdough and sensory tubs. We started to hear the battle cry of BIGGER! BETTER! FASTER! MORE! in preschools and HOW IS THIS PREPARING THEM FOR HIGH SCHOOL? in elementary schools. But it was when I saw an ad in a phone book for a preschool that touted itself as “college prep” that I hit the ceiling. Something needed to be done. Not talked about any more – but DONE!!!

I printed the California (I started with where I currently live) Kindergarten Standards off the internet, grabbed my pencil, pen, highlighter and laptop and sat at a coffee shop for two days determined to link it all together. (Please permit a quick sidebar of thanks and gratitude to Larry and Bernie at Twiggs Coffee House in San Diego). I wrote, I scribbled, I drew arrows, I screamed, I laughed, I cried, I connected, I huffed and puffed and through it all, I linked... I linked and linked and linked until I thought there could be no more linking but I went back through and linked it all again.

When I finally put my pencil down I had a realization: We spend so much energy worrying about “getting them ready” for kindergarten! Yet if we have set up an engaging preschool program firmly rooted in a hands-on ooey gooey style and philosophy and we are able to articulate to the wolves what we are doing – forget “getting ready” for kindergarten...

We are already DOING KINDERGARTEN!!!

I became completely committed to showing folks how to link ooey gooey to standards and how to be play-based and still meet expectations. And then I did what I do when I’m kick starting a new project - I started telling folks about it. Truth be told, I might have started talking about it a bit too soon! It wasn’t ready. We had linked it all up but what were we going to do with it? How would we present it? The project was still in it’s fleshing out stage but we were so excited! We were telling *everyone!* And then... you started calling. And emailing... “When is it going to be ready?” you asked, “When!? When!? When!!!!?”

In February of 2004 at the California Association for the Education of Young Children Conference we made an official announcement that the wolves workshop (as it had come to be called) would premiere at our annual summer series workshop in July. And it did.

Now let’s get started.

GOALS

I have four main goals:

- Be able to link HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES to any EXPECTATION
- Be able to link any EXPECTATION to various HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES
- Be able to COMMUNICATE these connections to folks who don't see them on their own, and
- To not get caught up in the mindset of "I can only do it if it meets a standard" nonsense – they are 3! 4! They are children and we cannot forget that PLAYING is how they learn!

What do we need to do this?

- A working knowledge of Preschool **and** Kindergarten Standards regardless of the age group we ourselves teach
- A realization that *everything* is a "learning experience"
- Good communication skills
- A true understanding of the WHY behind our work
- Respect for the other professionals we work with
- To find and nurture a support system
- A willingness to be introspective
- An open mind
- Flexibility
- The ability to change and compromise when necessary
- Patience
- To know when to speak out and to know when to shut up
- Time
- A passion for our work and a fire in our belly
- Self confidence and self respect
- An ability to keep a handle on the fact that you are a professional and to be able to articulate your knowledge in a way that is respectful and not sassy
- The insight to see the fine line between articulating your wisdom and knowledge and being disrespectful
- Common sense
- A belief that we ALL want was is best for the children

SO - what do I say when the WOLVES come knockin' in the **ART AREA?**

Well – first off – what does your art area LOOK like??

Ideally - there will be a table and chairs for the children to participate in the “creation station.”

Creation station materials are stored on low shelves for easy reach. The creation station is available daily with little direction from the adults.

In addition to the creation station the **easel** is made available on a daily basis. Paint cups are filled daily and the brushes and lids are washed daily. Paper is always available.

In addition to the creation station and easel an open-ended process oriented **art project** is planned for the children. At least one art project *in addition to* the easel and creation station is prepared daily. In a full day program (or if child interest dictate) two different art projects might be planned for daily.

Playdough is available on a *daily basis* and *in addition to* the activities mentioned above. A fresh batch is made at least once a month.

Creation Station

- Markers
- Crayons
- Pencils
- Rulers
- Paper
- Glue
- Scissors
- Glitter
- Masking tape
- Scotch tape
- Journals for individual writing and scribbling
 - Photos of each child on front of the journal along with names

Collage Art

- Colored tissue paper
- Lids of dried out markers
- Cotton
- Tops to water bottles
- Glue
- Sturdy paper (or paper plates)
- Cellophane scraps
- Glitter

Easel

- Paper
- Paint
- Brushes
- Drying racks

Art Supplies for:

- Marble Painting
- Feather Painting
- Sponge Painting
- Flyswatter Painting

- Plunger Painting
- Finger Painting
- Etc etc

On the walls:

- Children’s art at their eye level
- Prints or posters of “real art” such as Van Gogh’s “Starry Night”

And when you do all this... You Meet...

Visual Art Standards having to do with:

- Naming art materials
- Using lines to make patterns
- Demonstrate skill in using tools such as scissors, glue and paper in creating 3-D designs
- Making collages
- Paint pictures expressing ideas about family
- Use lines to express feelings
- Use shapes in a work of art
- Creating a 3-D form
- Look at art from a variety of times and places
- Discuss their own works of art
- Discuss how and why they created something

Written and Oral Language Standards having to do with:

- Using complete sentences when speaking

Listening and Speaking Standards having to do with:

- Sharing information in complete sentences

And when you explore patterns... You Meet...

Visual Art Standards having to do with:

- Recognize simple patterns
- Using lines, shapes, colors to make simple patterns

Statistics, Data Analysis and Probability Standards having to do with:

- Identify patterns via size, shapes and/or colors

Measurement and Geometry Standards having to do with:

- Identify common shapes

Math Standards having to do with:

- Counting

But what do I say when the WOLVES come knockin' in the **BLOCK AREA?**

Well – again – what does your block area LOOK like??

Blocks

- Table top blocks
- Hollow blocks
- Small blocks
- Tree Blocks ®
- Big (on the floor) building blocks
- Lincoln Logs ®
- Dr. Drew Blocks ®

Writing Instruments

- Paper
- Crayons
- Markers

Legos®

- Small ones
- Duplos®
- Lego table

Trains

- Train accessories and materials
- Possibly a train table

People & Animal Figures

- Farm
- Ocean
- Jungle
- Dinosaurs
- Family
- Construction

Traffic & Road Signs

- Stop
- Go
- Pedestrian walking
- School area

Transportation Materials

- Cars
- Trucks
- Tractors
- Boats
- Airplanes
- Trains

Design Elements

- Corks
- Small fabric squares
- Various recycled items for building and construction

Books About:

- Cars
- Building
- Transportation
- Construction

On the walls:

- Photos of real construction projects
- Photos of the children building
- Pictures of real things relating to building, blocks and construction
- Maps of general and specific locations i.e.: State map, local town map, map of your school, map of a neighborhood and/or a map of the U.S.A

And when you do all this... You Meet...

Language Arts/Reading Standards relating to:

- Locating objects – using terms such as near/far, left/right, behind/in front, etc.. (sometimes also under Social Studies)
- Directional language
- Describing common objects in general and specific language
- Descriptive Language
- Identifying traffic symbols (sometimes also under Social Studies)
- Constructing maps and models of neighborhoods incorporating various structures, police station, bank, hospital, etc.. (sometimes also under Social Studies)

Math Standards relating to:

- Counting
- Estimating

Measurement and Geometry Standards relating to:

- Comparing length and width of various objects and noting which is longer, shorter, taller, higher, lighter, etc..
- Identifying common shapes and geometric objects

Physical Science Standards relating to:

- Knowing what materials objects are made out of (wood, fabric, cork, etc.) and their physical properties, i.e.: shape, size, color, weight, etc.

Investigation and Experimentation (Science) Standards relating to:

- Experiencing and exploring objects using the five senses
- Describing positions of objects in relation to another, above, below, next to, etc..

Visual Arts Standards relating to:

- Creating 3-D forms and objects

Written and Oral Language Standards relating to:

- Using complete sentences when speaking
- Spelling skills

Writing Standards relating to:

- Using inventive spelling to write about experiences, people, objects & events
- Writing from left to right and top to bottom

Listening and Speaking Standards relating to:

- Sharing information and ideas in complete sentences
- Describing things referencing colors, sizes and shapes

But what do I say when the WOLVES come knockin' while kids are playing with

Table Top Activities & Manipulatives?

- Pegs and pegboard
- Geoboards and elastics
- Playdough
- Activities that require the use of eyedroppers/pipettes
 - Color mixing
 - Baking soda and vinegar
 - Egg carton coloring
 - Wax paper/paper towel absorption
 - Blow art
- Scale for weighing objects
- Table top blocks
- Buttons and rocks and other objects for sorting
- Flubber
- Matching games
- Shaving cream scribbles
- Magnets
 - Free exploration
 - Magnet painting
 - Salt and magnets in a sensory tub
- Dominoes
- Wall Braiding
- Button fastening
- Cutting strips
- Magnifying glasses and things to see
 - "The looking box"
 - Collections of things
- Goggles
- Smelly jars (or try recycled dish soap bottles - pop the lid up to sniff and smell!)
- Touch box
- Tweezer and/or clothespin transfer games
 - Cotton balls
 - Beans

- Rice
- Sewing cards
- Geometric shapes for designs
 - Parquetry blocks
- Sink and float items
- Nesting cups
- Self correcting games and supplies
- On the walls:
 - Photos of the children using the materials

And when you do all this... You Meet...

Visual Arts Standards relating to:

- Creating a 3-D form or object

Algebra Standards relating to:

- Sorting and classifying objects

Math Standards relating to:

- Comparing 2 or more sets of objects
- Counting
- Larger numbers describe sets with more things than smaller numbers

Measurement and Geometry standards relating to:

- Comparing objects based on size, color, shape, length, and width, etc..
- Identifying common shapes

Science: Physical Science Standards relating to:

- Physical properties of various objects

Science: Investigation and Experimentation Standards relating to:

- Experiencing and observing objects using the five senses
- Comparing and sorting objects by physical attributes

Written and Oral Language Standards relating to:

- Using complete sentences when speaking

Listening and Speaking Standards relating to:

- Sharing information in complete sentences

And when you...

Have table top blocks for building with shaving cream...

You Meet...

Measurement and Geometry standards relating to:

- Understanding taller, shorter, longer, etc..
- Common geometric objects
- Comparing common geometric objects by position size, etc..

Algebra Standards relating to:

- (Assuming you use different colored blocks for this) The notion that they are ALL blocks, but some are blue and some are green, etc.. Sorting and classifying objects

Number (Math) Standards relating to:

- Counting

Science: Physical Science Standards relating to:

- Experiences using the five senses

Statistics, Data Analysis and Probability Standards relating to:

- Posing information questions (How many will it take before it falls?)
- Noting patterns via shapes, sizes and colors.

WOLF SPEAK 101

A BEGINNING PRIMER



Let's Practice.....

Today while we were **(verb)** looking at, exploring, investigating, balancing the **(noun)** rocks, ooblick, stars, clouds, blocks, pebbles, fish the children were engaged in a hands-on investigation of the concept of **(insert it here)** !!!!!

When we play in the **BLOCK CENTER** we are investigating concepts related to **balance, gravity and estimating!**

A Helpful Tip:
Remember it's about **verbing** the **noun!!!**

During **SHOW AND TELL** we are increasing our **oral language skills!**

Today, the children were **engaged** in a hands-on **investigation** of the concept of _____!

And that's what you say when the wolves come knockin'!