



Important Dates

Friday, January 21st -

Teacher In-service (School Closed)

Wednesday, January 26th, 7-8pm –

Information Session

This is an information session for both the Elementary School and the First School for **new families**, or for First School families wanting more details about the Elementary School. Please pass the information along to anyone you know that might be interested.

Saturday, February 5th, 10am –

Family Trip to Nature & Science Museum

We are coordinating a Family field-trip to the Denver Museum

of Nature & Science! Natrisha will be joining everyone for a

wonderful opportunity to further explore bones, dinosaurs, and

human bodies. This is a great extension of our current threads and a chance to meet up with other families. Please

check out www.dmns.org for more details on ticket prices, directions, etc. Families should plan to be in the Discovery Zone at 10:15am if they want to meet up with Natrisha!

Thursday, February 10th 7:00-8:30pm – “Free-Range Kids” Learning Dialogue

Since it came up on the PatchworkCommunity list, and has been a hot topic in the news, lately, it seems appropriate to discuss this book, and some of the interesting suggestions the author makes. Please join us for a discussion and also for one-on-one conversations with staff afterwards. You do **not** need to have read the book!

Monday, February 21st – President’s Day (No School)

Wednesday, March 9th – Teacher In-service (School Closed)

Wednesday, March 9th 2:30-4:00pm – Learning Dialogue Open House

This event will be in the afternoon in order to offer a different time to make sure everyone has had an opportunity to attend a Learning Dialogue. This will be an open house format where we will be focusing on speaking to parents and families about the current threads and interests. Please be ready to participate in various activities that will help us to expand these threads! Children are welcome to come, so please help us be conscientious about including children in our conversations so that we are not talking about the children in front of them.

March 21st – 25th – Spring Break (No School)

Announcements

Parent Offerings – We have so many wonderful parent offerings this year, and just want to suggest that February would be a great month to sign up to try one if you haven't before. With the cold weather, it's always a



**Tristan celebrates
a beautiful day at the park.**

great time for some extra activities! This could be something related to a current thread (see below for more ideas) or anything that you are excited about sharing with the children. Just let Michele or Elizabeth know if you are interested and we'll get you on the schedule!

Staff Updates

Returning to Teaching

By Isaac Graves

It's been a long time coming—a return to spending meaningful time with young people. Five years ago I co-founded and taught at a high school very similar in philosophy to Patchwork in upstate New York. After leaving for Colorado two years ago, it has been my dream to work with younger folks again. Coming from a long line of early childhood educators, it's safe to say the return was inevitable. After volunteering once a week last year and serving on the board, I am excited to be working Monday and Wednesday afternoons at the First School for the rest of the school year. I look forward to sharing my passions and talents with the Patchwork community and getting to know all of you! I'm the tall guy with the red beard wearing a baseball hat...



Isaac reads to a small group at Still Time.

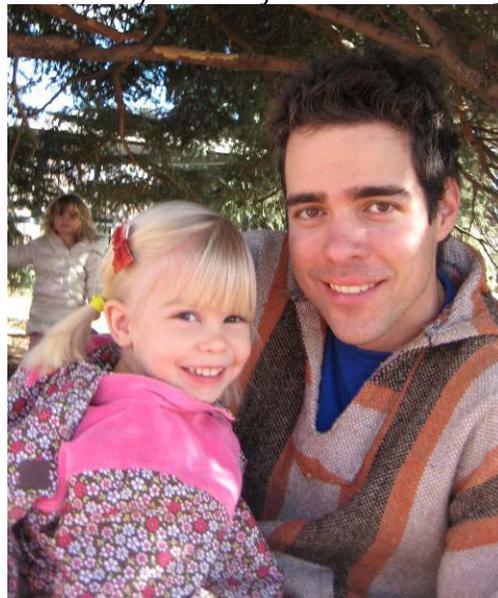
Introduction

By Sean Allen

Hello everyone, my name is Sean Allen, I am the newest member of the Patchwork staff, and very happy to be here! I have spent much of the last six years working with children, the elderly, and people with developmental disabilities. I have worked for five years at Imagine!, a non-profit that works with people that have developmental disabilities. I volunteered for a summer at Thorne Ecological Institute, a wonderful organization that offers environmental education to children. I have worked at Rocky Mountain School for the Gifted and Creative, as well as Boulder Journey School, a preschool based on the Reggio Emilia approach of learning. I was attracted to Patchwork because of the democratic based education style, and a desire to focus on creating opportunities for children to learn rather than trying to learn for them. I also spent two years teaching snowboarding to children at Eldora Mountain Resort, which was great fun. The main thing I got from this experience is that children really do well when it is fun and interesting. As a teacher I really strive

to find vehicles for learning that allow children the opportunity to learn important life skills that are both interesting and relevant to where they are.

In my free time, I enjoy playing chess, hiking, snowboarding, being outside, and spending quality time with friends. If you have the chance, please come up to me and introduce yourself if you have not already!



Sean and Mira on the field trip to Pirates Park.

First School Updates

Ballet

By Amanda Easton

The children have been really excited about ballet offerings recently. We have spent entire mornings occupying the blue room for stretching, warm-ups, dancing and reading about dancing. One morning, the children decided to put on a show. This included costumes (scarves tied onto arms, foreheads and hips), rehearsal, and learning some choreography. Many children have contributed to learning about positions (first and second position, plié, relevé). In fact, I have learned a lot about ballet from the children!



Amanda demonstrates a new ballet move.

Extinct vs. Endangered

By Haley Sladek

As many of you know, we have been busy learning about the body and bones, especially dinosaur bones. We have found bones in the Patchwork backyard, and Emerson even brought in an animal skull! We have been doing research for the last couple of weeks on what different animal skulls look like. Over the course of this very interesting thread there have been some great conversations! Most recently, bald eagles have come into the conversation because they are endangered (I found out after school that they had been removed from the endangered list in 2007 and instead are on the threatened list, so I will update the children soon). After reading a page from a book, we began talking about *how does endangered relate to becoming extinct (like the dinosaurs), why would anyone want to kill a bald eagle, if something is extinct does that mean it is **only** bones, like dinosaurs? What is a species?* All these questions came up and each of the participating children collaborated with one another to begin answering the group's questions. This is a great example of the way we co-construct knowledge here at Patchwork.



Zoey & Kaitlyn create their own bald eagles.

Trucks, Roads, Trains, and Sandbox

By Sean Allen

So far much of my time at the First School has been spent outside by the sandbox. Normally I will try to set up scenarios in the morning, and see how the children respond. For example, I may make some roads in the sand, or set up a circular track, or build a fort or a wall out of tires. If one of the children asks me what I am doing, I will say something along the lines of "This is a racetrack, this is a street, etc." In most cases, I will say something only once or a few times, and then observe where the children take it. If they change the layout and want me to help, I usually do. It is fascinating to see how some children naturally fall into different kinds

of roles, and how they assigned these roles. A few children settled into leadership roles, some preferred to engage with the space at times, dis-engage, and re-engage, and some switched their roles around. Some defined their roles by certain types of objects, for example, if one of the children really liked a particular kind of rake or truck, they might change their role, but it would always involve having that particular object. If a certain type of project was decided upon, the children would stick with it for a while. These kinds of provocations and observations allows us to really get to know the children as individuals.



Austin, Jonah, Zidane and Maya explore Sean's "tire road."

Elementary School Updates

Chess

By Sean Allen

Chess has been fun, as all of the children have shown interest in this. Besides being a fun game, chess is a great tool for developing skills. For those who are unfamiliar, chess is a rather complex game involving six different kinds of pieces on a board of 64 squares. Each side has a king, and the object of the game is to attack your opponent's king while leaving it no flight squares. Each of the different pieces has specific moves that it can and cannot do, and all of the children have demonstrated understanding of this concept. Children that understand the moves of the pieces have been great at teaching others how pieces move. Once individual piece moves are memorized, a next step is to begin to develop a more complete understanding of how pieces can work together and how to visualize your position as a whole rather than just seeing it as a few individual pieces. This gets into more complex visualization, concentration, problem-solving, and decision making skills. To help children take this next step, I started offering chess puzzles. Normally I will set up a few pieces in a configuration on the board, with there being a few viable options for moves. Especially if two or more children are working with the challenge, typically one of the children will make a move, and we will all discuss the move and the possible results from it. When the best move has been found, I will acknowledge it. One of the skills developed that I did not foresee is teamwork, as oftentimes the children will play on teams and help each other with the rules or formulating the best move.



Henry, Jackson and Cameron start a game, which Gavin, William and Afi all later join.

Football

By Sean Allen

I've tried to focus on things that I've really enjoyed as vehicles for exploring and developing skills. First is

football. I played from 12 until I was 18, and I played quite a few different positions. We started out playing simple games, with the children asking me some of the rules, then they began making up some of their own rules. They have also begun exploring different roles in the game, as sometimes one of the children likes to stop playing so he can be the referee, or manage an "injury" time out. They have enjoyed pantomiming different scenarios, such as when there is a penalty, a time-out, an "injury," or a field goal. With "injuries," one of the children will pretend to be injured, and the others decide how to respond, normally by carrying the injured player off the field. The most interesting thing to watch is how different rules are decided and carried out, and how the rules sometimes change. In many cases, if one of the children changes the rules and the rule change is accepted, there is normally no mention of the previous rule that was changed. Skills learned include teamwork, sharing, and strategizing plays. I have also noted that the process of rule changes and playmaking tends to be democratic, and that if one of the children attempts to act out outside of the agreed-upon rules, play usually stops for a discussion and does not continue until there is agreement about what is allowed and what is not. This is normally the case when a child that is new to the game joins in. It has been great fun to share this with the children and to see where they go with it.



William, Gavin, Afi and Michele visited the First School for some football, and Layton, Jonah, Avery, Maya and Charlie joined in.

Card Tricks & Magic

By Sean Allen

Growing up, one of my favorite hobbies was card tricks and magic, and I was delighted to find out that the children are interested in these things. I started showing card tricks at lunch, and pretty soon, just about everyone was involved. I enjoyed watching the different types of experiences that the children were having, and how they shared with each other when they were amazed at what had happened or did not quite grasp what had taken place. I saw some activity of children

who understood what was happening explaining what was going on to some children who did not. Later, after showing most of my tricks, I offered the solution of one of my tricks to a group of four children, as well as how to deliver the trick. One of them was able to duplicate the trick after seeing it only once! Quite a feat. I talked about the importance of how to deliver the trick, and how this is really what makes it work, especially being able to make eye contact and engage the spectator in conversation. The child who was able to do the trick really got this concept and was able to incorporate it into his delivery of the trick. I think he amazed quite a few of the staff with it! After this, many of the children began playing with some of the concepts around magic shows and magic tricks with each other and with staff. I feel this could be a very big thread as long as it holds interest.



Henry & Cameron watch Sean's trick!

Tea Time

By Amanda Easton

We have been enjoying "tea time" every afternoon at the Elementary School. The children have really been enthusiastic about the process of picking out the tea, waiting for it to steep and enjoying it (or deciding they don't like that flavor!) together. We read several books during tea time which have included fables and old time favorites like "Millions of Cats". We have also begun having tea time "conversations" during which we all sit around the table with our tea and have a topic discussion. The last one was an invention discussion; involving children's ideas about robot type inventions.



Kebbeh, Henry, Afi, Cameron & Amanda chat over tea!

Community Connections

Parent & Community Association

By Michele Beach

We are excited to announce the formation of our new Parent & Community Association or PCA. This group will allow all parents to have opportunities to give input regarding fundraising ideas, ways to support families in our community that are in need, ways to connect outside of our community, family events, issues that are important to parents, and more. Kat VanMatre will be working with Michele Beach on getting the ball rolling. More details will be coming soon, but please feel free to contact us if you have suggestions or ideas regarding the formation of the group, meeting times, etc. at info@thepatchworkschool.com.

All-School Collaborations

By Michele Beach

Now that everyone has settled back in from break, we feel it is a good time to open up the gate and start more collaborations between the First School and Elementary School. We had the gate open the other day and a few of the First School children were given a tour of the Elementary gym. They enjoyed checking out the little trampoline and roller boards. Children from both schools also enjoyed watching Sean saw a few branches off the tree behind the playhouse. Offerings and activities that involve both groups create wonderful mentoring opportunities, where older and younger children learn from one another. Let us know if you have ideas for more fun collaborations!



Here Kebbeh (from the Elementary School) works with Jonah, Avery and Winston (from the First School) to create an amazing Magna-tile city.

Puerto Rico

By Elizabeth Baker

Last October we were pleased to welcome a group of teachers from Nuestra Escuela, a special school in Puerto Rico. During their visit, it was decided that we would mutually benefit from a collaboration between our schools, with the eventuality of possibly naming each other as "sister schools". One of the projects that

Patchwork is able to offer assistance with is their plan to develop an Early Childhood and Elementary program to complement their existing schools for older (middle and high school) children. To support them in this endeavor, a couple of teachers will be visiting Puerto Rico in February, to further build our understanding of and connection with the amazing work Nuestra Escuela is doing. Learn more about them

at: http://democraticeducation.org/index.php/features/nuestra_escuela_a_school_with_a_mission_of_love/.

Learning Dialogues

Next Year and Beyond

Thanks to those of you who came to discuss "Toys & Materials" last month and for those who attended our "Kindergarten & Beyond" discussion this month. Before we jump into next month's topic, we just want to take a moment here to be totally honest with you and say that we think Patchwork Elementary is an incredible school, and even we have been amazed at what can happen when children are given space to pursue their passions. We are having another Info Session on January 26th at the First School from 7-8:30 if you want more details, but here is a short list of things you can expect if you choose to send your child to Patchwork Elementary:

- They will have many opportunities to interact with their local community, inside and outside of the school, allowing them to feel connected and truly understand what community can mean.
- They will exercise their critical thinking skills as they engage in real-world problems and negotiate social situations.
- They will be leaders of their peers as they run meetings, create offerings for others, and stand up for their own ideas.
- They will continue to feel a sense of wonder and a desire to understand the world, as they attempt everything from memorizing multiplication tables, to learning the rules of football, to playing chess (and yes, all of these things have happened this year)!
- They will experience relationships with peers and teachers that will build the foundations for successful relationships for years to come.
- They will acquire communication skills that even adults will envy, as they learn how to stand up for themselves and one another.
- They will learn to be resourceful so that no matter where they go after Patchwork, they will be armed with everything they need to thrive.



Patchwork Elementary students deliver stools to downtown businesses, providing young children access to sinks in public places.

Free-Range Kids

Thursday, February 10th 7-8:30pm

This book, by Lenore Skenazy will quickly make every parent simultaneously laugh and sigh a breath of relief. It's funny, and also a bit sad, to see just how paranoid we, as a society, have become about everything from Halloween Candy to Kidnapping. She uses statistics and research to show just how safe we really are, so that we can feel okay about letting go of some of our worries. Let's get together and talk about some of the crazy fears we have, which of them may be unfounded, and what steps we can take to let our kids be a little more "free-range." Here is a short blurb from the book, and a list of some of her suggestions:

"You can't be too safe!"

That's the modern-day mantra when it comes to child rearing, right? A mantra that has brought us everything from baby knee pads (to protect kids from that daredevil activity called "crawling") to GPS backpacks (to track every second that they're not at mandarin class) to the Cub Scout troop leader who demonstrated how to whittle with a pen knife, then handed each boy a potato peeler instead.

Just like Gramps used to whittle with...

"You can't be too safe!"

Or can you? (pg. xi)

- *Let your little bikers, starting at age six or so, ride around the block a couple times, beyond where you can see them. (Yes, in their helmets). (pg. 11)*
- *If you seek parenting advice, first try asking an older parent you admire. She'll be thrilled, and her advice won't last 378 pages. (pg. 30)*
- *At the grocery store with your grade-school children, have them go get you things from other aisles. (pg. 90)*