

This Week at Central Academy

April 12, 2010

Children are naturally curious; and that curiosity by nature makes them marvelous learners. When you watch a group of very young children reacting to and engaging with their environment, you can't help but see the joy and wonder they bring to their process of learning and making sense of their world. But if you compare that to other experiences further along the educational path, we frequently see that joy replaced with detachment or boredom.

The secret is to somehow retain that sense of wonder – that delight in trying to figure something out that we really are truly curious about. Without this, learning can easily become just another page in a textbook, or another 45 minutes on the clock until the next bell.

At Central we have worked to help students link this sense of wonder to their school experience from our beginnings 19 years ago. At the core of our philosophy lies the belief that *all* children not only *can* learn, but also *want* to learn. Our challenge is to find what intrigues them, and tie that into the classroom work we do each day.

We were fortunate to begin this school year with Dr. James Beane working with us for 3 days in helping to identify what students wondered about themselves and about their world. Out of those wonderings have come many incredible individual and group research projects this year.

As we move into the next two weeks of state testing, we recognize the importance of being accountable for the intellectual growth in our students. Please make certain that your child knows the importance of these tests, and that s/he comes rested and on time to school each day.

But also know that we recognize and are committed to the importance of growing future citizens who are life-long learners – full of wonder about themselves, their communities, and the world around them.

We promise you we will not forget that small child in each of us who finds joy in just figuring things out. Our hope is that when your child is grown, she will still know that same joy every day!

Dianne

Central Academy's Website

Find out what's going on at Central by frequently visiting our website. The website includes:

Important Dates Newsletters Classroom Web pages

Pictures of Students (**You can search by student's first name, teacher name, or by level!**)

www.middletoncityschools.com

(click on Central Academy)

IMPORTANT DATES

Apr. 12	TEAM mtg. – 6:30
Apr. 14	Early Release – 2:00 pm
Apr. 15	EP program – 7:00 pm
Apr. 22	Skating Party – 6:30-8:30
Apr. 30	Central Sensations

EARLY PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

Here at Central, we work hard to foster a love of learning in many ways. One recent special evening was our school-wide Literacy Night! The Early Primary classes showcased the work of author/illustrator, Eric Carle. Our “Eric Carle’s Creative Corner” had four areas for students and their families to investigate. Several of our Middle School students enjoyed reading to our Early Primary friends and their siblings from the various Eric Carle books in the book nook.

Ronnie, Morgan, Lexi, and Liv constructed their own “very hungry caterpillar” using strips of colored paper and googily eyes. *Nicholas, Nathan, Dallas, and Serina* displayed the life cycle of a butterfly, using a variety of pasta shells, popcorn kernels, and markers. *Tristan, Gabe, Bree, and Justin* were among those eager to share their newly published class books! These activities brought our Central families together to celebrate literacy and allow the students the opportunity to share their excitement for learning.

LATE PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

In Mrs. Andrade & Miss Zumbahlen’s Late Primary Class, there is only one way to tell if we are fostering a love of learning: our students’ reactions. Wouldn’t the way our students approach a subject or part of their day be the true test? So, we dug deep into our memory banks to find the instances where children either showed a disappointment for the lack of something being executed or the time the children were overjoyed by a task.

Asking children to go without some part of their learning is not an easy thing to do in our room. But sometimes, assemblies or early dismissal Wednesdays cause our time to be shortened. When our time is cut short, our class gathers together and forms a plan of what we can accomplish in a set time frame. It never ceases to amaze us that most of the children wish to have their voice heard about what they are not willing to cut.

If it were up to the children, they would not cut out their math workshop when they get to work with partners on *Investigations* or CGI. They would not cut out their reader’s workshop when they get to meet in reading groups, work on their individual goals, or read books of high interest to them. They definitely would not want to drop poetry time—a creative time of the day to choose their own partners to enjoy a short, expressive, and rhythmical poem. Writer’s workshop would also not make the chopping block. Please do not ask any of them to forgo their writing pieces even just for one day as you are likely to get a snarl. Lately, we have had to show them a list of what would be expected in such amount of time, so that they can make individual choices of what they are willing to let go of, and what they cannot live without. The other end of the spectrum includes moments of pure bliss such as theme time. We were so overwhelmed and swept away by the first school theme of “Counting On Us” that the kids put on their own student-led production of “Counting On Space” for a Celebration of Learning in front of the entire school. The second trimester’s theme was individual choice, so we went far, far away into the mystical land of fairytale creatures and folktales. Watching several fairy tale productions performed at MUM was like icing on the cake as we had even more forms to compare to our readings.

That brings us to our third trimester’s theme, which is “Shaping Our World.” After revisiting our list of things our class wondered deeply about, we decided that the ocean was our next journey. As creatures of habits, the teachers in the room wanted to use the old stack and study method before letting anyone dive too deeply. Luckily, these children are very persuasive in the land of let us discover what we want to

discover. *Allison* eventually stopped us and said, “Please let us choose our partners. Just let us get it out of our system.” We are not kidding when we say that we didn’t even have time to give them permission. When they saw our eyebrows raised in such excitement about their eagerness, they just started wandering around the room trying to find friends with similar interests.

Here is the final partner list along with their research topics: Salmon—*Daniel & Briley*, Jellyfish—*Amalia & Jocelynne*, Sponges—*Emily & Aly P.*, Sharks—*Aaron, Hayden, Austin F., Madison*, Stingrays—*Chris J. & Day’Sean*, Squid—*Rowan & Savanna*, Flying Fish—*Allison & Jake*, Starfish—*Chris R. & Austin R.*, Electric Eels—*Donnie & Gabe*, and lastly Dolphins—*Briella, Kya, Anastasia, Chelsea*.

Fostering a love of learning is like a work of art in our room. You cannot create a room that fulfills the kids’ eagerness to learn on most days and then take something away just because the learning time has to be cut on another day. Experience has shown us that we could never make a shortened day plan without student input. On the other hand, overzealousness can definitely take the steering wheel when it comes to students easing their teachers into letting go of the students’ theme time. The buzz after the partnership formations revolved around what they felt would make an excellent final presentation of their work at another Celebration of Learning. While we are at the preliminary stages in our research, we do want you to stay tuned to learn more about how “Oceans Shape Our World.”

- - -

“I hear and I forget, I see and I remember. I do and I understand.” This quote is an old Chinese Proverb, which encapsulates how our students learn at Central and how Central fosters our students’ love of learning.

In **Vanburgey’s and Mrs. Zahora’s room** you will find students who are busily engaged in various hands on learning throughout the day. During science class recently, students were conducting investigations on force. They built ramps to investigate the effects of mass and gravity on motion. The engagement of students as they worked collaboratively in their groups was high.

As various concepts were explored and discussed new questions arose. *Aaron* wondered, “How does a rocket move in space?” He can’t wait to research to find out the answers to his questions. How does this hands-on research approach affect student learning and engagement? *Turner* said, “It helps me learn without getting frustrated.” *Kylie* said, “Hearing what other people are doing is inspiring because it makes you want to go and do a project.”

When students are actively engaged and are involved in the *doing* piece of their learning it epitomizes the Chinese proverb, “... I do and I understand.” Until next time, Go Central!

INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOMS

Students in **Mrs. Larison’s Intermediate** class are more eager and excited about learning when they are able to have some control over the content, over how they learn, and over how they share with others what they have learned. *Violet* enjoys learning more when she is able to work collaboratively with classmates. *Brooke* always asks about reading with a partner. *Nic* and *Jadon* enjoy theme time and being able to have choice in what topic they want to study. Currently, both of these students are researching airplanes because they have a personal interest in them. *Emma* enjoys sharing what she has learned with students in the school and with her own classmates. She has shared about backpacks in one of our

Celebrations of Learning, and just recently she put on a puppet play to tell her classmates about Hovaworts, a breed of dog. In both instances, her face and voice indicated how much she liked learning about each of these topics.

- - -

At Central we foster a love of learning in our students through various opportunities every day. One way we do this in **Muenchenburgey Land** is that we try to teach as many things as possible through students' interests. As adults we are typically more interested in and engaged in learning about topics that are enjoyable or meaningful to us. This is the same with children! If we can find a vehicle with which to deliver the curriculum, such as students' interests, then learning for the students is going to be more natural, engaging, and exciting and will carry over into other areas of their lives.

During our comprehension time, we have had a continued focus on identifying the main idea in an informational text. When we work on this skill in our larger groups, we attempt to pick a topic that many Intermediate-age children would find interesting. Our recent topic has been...spiders! The students are reading a book all about spiders and identifying the main idea of each section.

However, what seems to be even more effective is when we can teach students through their own *personal* interests. An area where we are able to do this is during our theme time. Students are also working on identifying the main idea while collecting information on their research topic. Finding the main idea becomes less of a task because the students are so engaged in the text they're reading. For example, *Christian* is currently researching Greek Gods, which is of great interest to him. This is evident because he often comes to school with resources that he has found on his own outside of the school day. He has chosen to continue learning beyond 2:45 PM!

Turjam is another student who is researching a topic that is extremely relevant to him, as he has such a love for music. Currently, *Turjam* is finishing up his research on the history of guitars. Again, he has been able to demonstrate his understanding of identifying the main idea in an informational text by reading the information in his resources about guitars and recording the main ideas in his graphic organizers and journal. He, too, has read about his topic outside of the school day and has truly been engaged in his research.

While teaching students through the ideas they are passionate about is only one way we foster a love of learning at Central, it is a very important one! When we hear our students talking about conversations they have had at home, books they've read, and connections they've made about skills and topics they have learned at school, as well as when they discuss new ideas they have developed, we know the students are truly demonstrating a love for their learning!

- - -

Central fosters a love for learning in our students in many ways, especially in **Ms. Thinnes' Intermediate Class**. Students foster a love for learning through the amount of student choice in what they research. The students came up with a list of "I wonder..." questions from the Dr. James Bean work at the beginning of the school year. The comprehensive list of student topics are a guideline for what the student chooses as a subtopic now.

Students with an interest in current events picked September 11th to research for their presentation. *S.A.*, *Reggie*, and *Austin* presented a power point presentation with a documentary on the attack. Most students in the class had heard of the event, but did not understand what had happened during the attack. The topic was intriguing to most students because it interested them. Since the topic was student initiated, students learned more and also increased their own love for learning.

Students also increase their love for learning at Central during other times of the day. Students have choice over their own books in reading book bins during Silent Sustained Reading. Students are more engaged during reading and retain more because they are reading on a topic of interest to them. During

the reading block of time, students are encouraged to also read about topics they are researching during Theme Time. The student choice aspect of learning helps to create a love for learning that will continue to grow with each child at Central Academy and in **Ms. Thinnes' Intermediate Class**.

MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

As teachers, we can inspire and foster a love of learning in our students, but we cannot teach it. The best way of accomplishing this is by creating an environment of support. It allows them a place to develop ideas of their own, express themselves, take chances, make a choice and above all express themselves by using their voice. This helps them become strong individuals.

In **Mrs. Hodson's Humanities**, many students feel comfortable enough to express themselves about concerns. Graduation is a hot topic for the eighth graders, of not only excitement, but also the stress of pulling things together for portfolios and final presentations.

For their graduation presentation, students picked the field that they would present for their committee. *Aleah* and *Mikala* were particularly concerned about the amount of work they still needed to complete. They felt that word work was truly time consuming, and would bog down their efforts to complete their final portfolios. They brought it to our attention and we discussed it. By bringing it to our attention the problem was solved in one easy step. As teachers, we need to stop and listen and adjust what we are doing or expecting the students to do.

- - -

Central fosters a love of learning in students by giving students voice and choice in their studies. In addition Central fosters a love of learning by personalizing instruction for the students. As the students are working at their own level and pace, they are motivated to learn and assume the responsibility for their learning. In **Kristi Joseph's** math class, *Jonathon*, *Angel F*, *Alex*, *Stevie*, *Althea*, *Ericka*, *Rachel* and *Raven* are consistently engaged during learning, as they are working on concepts at their individual level. They are demonstrating confidence in their work and are beginning to share their new concept knowledge with their classmates.

- - -

To foster a love of learning is a natural occurrence. Young children learn so quickly because they touch everything and are engaged with the material. The middle school uses this concept for both math and science. Recently in **Mrs. Smith's** math class, the students are creating cylinders from their own measurements and finding the surface area as well as the volume. We have been exploring the concepts of doubling the diameter or the sides and seeing how that changes the other measurements. Does doubling the dimensions of a box simply double the volume? *Cole*, *Bailey*, *Izzi*, and *Tyler* helped classmates create their shapes. *Asia*, *Johnna* and *Davey* helped others with calculations. Miss Fink, our student intern, helped the final group develop some formulas for calculations that helped them make connections between the use of symbols to the real life shapes they created.

Science is another area in which we use discovery to enhance the love of learning. We have been studying the concept of circuits. Provided with batteries, harnesses, leads, bulbs and several types of materials, the students were asked to come up with their own experiment and testable question. The scientific method and experimental design were to be followed. *Mark*, *Ethan*, *Raven*, *Emily* and *Quinn* had a very interesting method of testing circuits. They were the most successful with parallel and series circuits. Overall, the students really enjoy the science labs. They are engaged with the material and often have very interesting discussions. This lends to greater comprehension and longer retention.

Other Places and Voices Around Central

A love of learning is the one of the best influences an educator can have on a student. This love will serve them throughout their academic career and their adult life.

In the area of **mathematics**, we want all of our students to think of themselves as mathematicians. We encourage our students to struggle to solve problems and to value that struggle. Students are not simply given the correct answer when it presently eludes them. Teachers and their peers discuss the different strategies others have used allowing the struggling student to possibly learn how to solve their problem or another approach or strategy that they may try to solve their problem.

Valuing student's work no matter where they are in the process of problem solving is one of the ways that we foster a love of learning mathematics. Honoring the many different ways students solve problems shows each child respect for their thinking and encourages them to continue to strive to learn how to solve problems accurately and efficiently.

As I (**Mrs. Brubaker, Central's Math Coach**) move from room to room throughout the day Central students, of all ages, never cease to amaze me with their mathematical thinking. More and more of our students are truly thinking about themselves as mathematicians. Go Central!

- - -

Mr. Perdue has seen many times in which our school has fostered a love of learning. One such instance was when he tutored a student after school. *Austin* from **Mrs. Thinnes'** class was having a little trouble with fractions. One day after school a light bulb went off, and he understood the process of how fractions worked. He told his mother about how he now knows fractions. Another time was also in tutoring. *Davin* was enjoying what was being taught, and shared that because of the tutoring he now knows the subject better than he did before.

- - -

This year was the first year to have 8th grade at Central Academy. One part of the graduation requirements is for the students to complete a 12-hour internship. One question that **Mrs. Carroll** asked many of the students as they were finishing and presenting their internship's was "Will you continue volunteering at your internship?"

Julia had already completed more than 12 hours and was still volunteering for the food pantry. *Jacob* told me that he really enjoyed helping the elderly patients at the nursing home and it was worth it to make them happy each time he saw them. *Emily*, who organized our school wide day of giving, couldn't believe the work involved in organizing this one day event, but came up with many ideas and suggestions to make the job easier next year. I asked her if she would be willing to come back and help another student with the same internship next year and of course she said yes.

What a wonderful way to help the students learn about and help our community! If you get the opportunity to talk with the 8th grade students, you will see that they have all gained a great deal from this experience and will use it as they continue learning and growing into adulthood.