

March 16, 2009
4-A.M.

Hi Everybody,

Over a month ago we started working on a play with the JK kids in the afternoon. In connection with this we introduced the idea of a curtain that could open and close at the beginning and end of the performance. The curtain is comprised of a cloth shower liner hung from the frame on wheels that usually surrounds our water table. A rope is threaded through loops at the top and two dangling handles allow it to be pulled open and closed. We weren't as yet working on a play with the morning kids, nevertheless we started leaving it out on the block rug to see how they might use it.

For a while everyone just wanted to have a turn to pull the rope. Which handle would open, which would close, this was a perplexing problem, especially when kids were working in pairs. Each holding an end, they would both be tugging furiously to no effect. It took a long time for partners to figure out that if they wanted to pull at the same time it had to be with the same handle. Occasionally, the rope would get tangled or caught on part of the frame and kids would work together to try to free it. All of these were absorbing challenges.

Then one day a girl started putting on a "show". She would pull the curtain open, or recruit a helper for the job and then break into song. This idea really took off. Soon lots of kids were coming for a turn and others were dragging chairs over to form an audience. Meanwhile a couple of boys ran to get instruments so they could play back-up. A different boy ran to the playhouse, loaded a small wagon with play food and started wheeling his refreshments around to the audience.

On still a different day a teacher introduced a new version of a game called 'Who's Missing?' Usually kids hide their eyes while a few conceal themselves in the playhouse. Then the group tries to figure out who is no longer present. On this occasion the teacher asked two or three kids to go behind the curtain and kids could try to guess by shadow who it was. Someone discovered that the feet stuck out at the bottom and then they started using the shoes as clues.

Then a few weeks ago we started using the curtain for a traditional play. We read a simple story called The Farm Concert in which six farm animals are so noisy they keep the farmer awake. He finds it necessary to protest and then they lower their voices. We thought it would make a good beginning because kids generally enjoy pretending to be animals and other than making their animal sounds there were no demands as far as dialogue which kids usually find initially inhibiting. The farmer does have four short lines which we thought might appeal to a few. As it happens, it's become the most popular role. So we open the curtain for the beginning and we close it at the end and then we open it once more for a bow. And perhaps soon kids will have a turn for that job. However, the traditional use of the curtain has not necessarily been the most interesting option.

Melinda and Joseph

WALK to Park West Play Lot: March 17th

if the weather is as nice out as they say it will be. We will take a walk to Park West Play Lot, located on Wrightwood between Burling and Halsted.