



Beautiful Birds

Owl - Saint John Paul II: Infant

Background

Birds have become an interest to the infants. They have seen them hopping on the sidewalk outside our door and sitting on the awning in the playground. The 5 older infants ranging from ages 15 months to 19 months have heard the birds chirping from the awning. They will point to the birds and bring the birds to the attention of their teachers. Connie Cunningham, RECE, Jen Silva, RECE, Joanna Turski, RECE and Judy Hackbart, RECE have all encouraged the older infants to verbalize new words such as “bird, tweet, and tweet-tweet”. Our bird project started in April 2019 and continued until the end of June 2019. During this time, the educators helped the 4 younger infants ranging in ages 13 months to 15 months, take notice of the birds in our playground and on neighbourhood walks.

Phase I: Beginning the Project

Every Spring we see the smaller birds build their nests in the awnings in our playground. There is always lots of activity as the birds fly in and out building their nests. The nests become their home for the next few months. The infants notice this activity. The birds are very vocal with their chirping as they are protecting their nests. We brought out books focusing on birds to help the infants visualize birds and their habitat.

The educators encouraged conversation about the birds and asked questions that the infants might be interested in learning about.

What do we know about birds?

- Birds need to eat
- Birds need a place to live
- There are many different kinds of birds

What do we want to know about birds?

- What do birds eat?
- Why are the birds in our playground?
- What kinds of birds are in our neighbourhood.

Whom are we going to ask?

- Educators
- Library books for research

Phase 2: Developing the Project

One of our questions was “What do birds eat?” We read that birds eat seeds and will come to bird feeders to find food. Connie brought in two bird feeders and helped the infants fill them up with seeds. One feeder was filled with smaller seeds that would attract the smaller birds like a finch. The other feeder has larger seeds including sunflower seeds as we hoped this would attract larger birds such as blue jays and cardinals. The little sparrows are plentiful in our neighbourhood so we hope to see lots of them come to the feeders. Nayana used a small cup to scoop up the seeds and poured them into the feeder. Madeleine was eager to have a turn as well. Wilder was very interested in the other bag that contained the sunflower seeds. All the infants were curious to come over and see what their friends were doing and take a turn scooping and dumping seeds into the feeders.

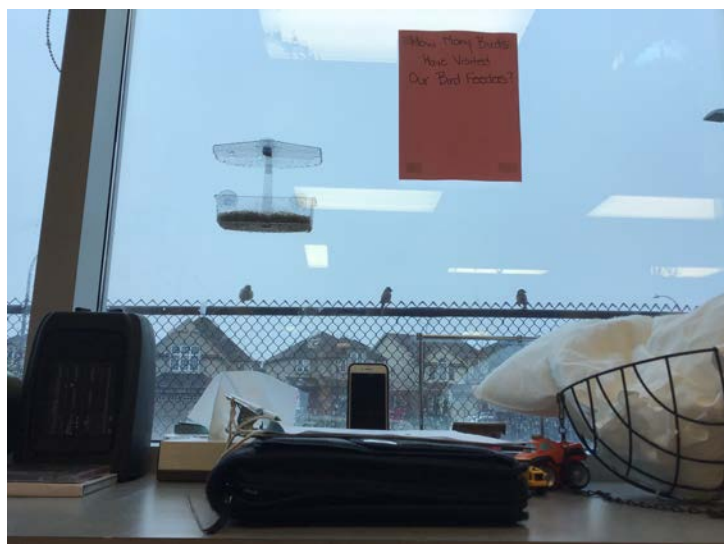
The windows in the infant classroom have provided us with the means of having bird feeders on the windows. We put the feeders on the window on April 24th. The educators and infants kept watch but the birds didn't come to feed. We watched again on the 25th and still no activity.



Finally, on Friday April 26th we spotted birds sitting on the fence looking at the feeders. Madeleine spotted the birds as she stood at the door.



The birds were definitely interested in the feeders but very shy to approach. The little sparrows hopped around on the sidewalk below the feeders and flew near the windows as they hovered over the feeders. None of the birds were brave enough to actually land on the feeders. It took some time but the birds were eager to come and feed we were very still inside the classroom. Eventually they didn't even mind if we were on the inside pointing up at them feeding.



We noticed the one feeder was not protected enough from the rain and the seeds got wet. We monitored that feeder and changed the seeds as needed. Throughout May and June, we continued to have the infants refill the bird feeders.

Another question we had about the birds is “why do they come into our playground?” We watched the birds in the playground and saw how they flew up into the awning. Nayana was quick to notice the birds sitting in the awning. She could hear the ‘tweet, tweet’ and pointed up to the birds. We could see bits of twigs, straw and grass peeking out of the awning. Connie and Jen explained to the infants that the birds had built nests up there and we were seeing part of their nests. We told the infants the nests were where the birds lived. This was their home and this would be where they laid their eggs. We told the infants the nests needed to be strong to hold the eggs until they hatched into baby birds.



We talked about what we could do to help the birds build more nests and to keep their nests strong. We looked at books from the library to find out what the birds like to use for their nests. On April 30th we took a walk through the forest and the infants gathered leaves, grass and twigs as materials to help the birds build their nests.



We needed to have something that could hold our materials for the birds to find. We stuffed our supplies into a suet cage and hung it in our playground with hopes that the birds will use the materials for their nest. You can buy these cages at the hardware or pet stores to hold suet cakes. Birds will come and eat the suet in these cages so we thought this cage would be a good way for the birds to come and find our materials.



It appeared the birds had already built their nests by this time and they didn't need our extra supplies. Their nests were strong and stayed in place under the awning even though we unrolled the awning to give us shade in the playground. There was always lots of activity to watch as the birds flew in and out of their nests. On June 18th a co-worker provided us with a real live nest that had fallen out of a tree. The infants came for a look at the nest but actually showed little interest.

Our final question with the infants was "what kinds of birds are in our neighbourhood?" We had anticipated seeing lots of variety but saw mostly the sparrows coming to our feeders and the nests. We had hoped to see Blue Jays and Cardinals but no luck. We did take stroller walks in our neighbourhood and kept an eye out for seeing these bigger birds. We brought in binoculars to show the infants how you could look for birds through these special glasses. Through a creative experience we helped the infants each make a pair of binoculars out of paper towel rolls. We did have a pair of Mourning Doves come to investigate the seeds that were being spilt out of the feeders onto the walkway. The infants were definitely interested in watching these larger birds walk around outside our door and peck at the fallen seeds.



On June 3rd we provided the infants with large sheets of poster paper and several cut outs of birds. They used their fine motor skills to glue on the pieces to make their own personal collage that we posted in the room on our project board.

Phase 3: Concluding the Project

To wrap up our project we had 2 activities planned. Our first was to have each of the children make their own feeder that they could take home and hang up. We used our empty milk cartons as the holder. The infants had several colours of paint to brush onto their feeders. With some teacher help we attached string to two sides to allow the feeders to hang. The infants were focused on using the paint brushes and with Judy's help rotating the carton, they painted all 4 sides.

Our second wrap-up event was to make bird feeders to hang out in our neighbourhood. We helped the infants pour bird seed into a large dish. We had gathered pine cones as the base of our feeder. Jen helped each child rub lard onto the pine cones and then let them roll it in the dish of seeds. Jen was able to attach a string to the pine cones turning them into hanging feeders. Everyone had a turn and we put our finished feeders into the fridge to harden up a little overnight. The following day we packed up the infants in the strollers and headed for a neighbourhood trail. We found sturdy branches hanging low enough for the infants to slip on the pine cones. As we walked along the trail looking for good spots to hang the pine cones we were hearing all sorts of bird calls in the area. It was a beautiful sunny hot day and we were sure the birds were going to appreciate finding our homemade feeders.

Teacher Reflections

Observing the infants while doing this project was quite amazing. The interest shown as they watched the birds feed from the bird feeders, build nests, and fly through the air created an awe factor. Some infants were so intrigued they would stop the activity they were doing and just watch, point and express that they saw a bird. Expressive language skills developed as the infants would repeat new



words heard such as bird, tweet-tweet and feathers, to name a few. In our bird watching nature walks the infants' senses were also increased and heightened as we would stop and listen to hear the different kinds of bird songs. We also introduced binoculars a new tool to observe the birds from a distance and bring them in closer view. A creative experience allowed the infants to make their own binoculars to look through while on our nature walk. This project also gave us an opportunity to connect with nature and our surrounding community, which all co-insides with How Does Learning Happen. Jen Silva-RECE

At first when we filled up the feeders and waited for something to happen it was a long couple of days before the birds started to come. When they first started to come I got so excited, we would slowly point out the bird to the infants and bring them quietly for a closer look. By the end of the project the infants would point, smile and sometimes chant bird noises when they saw them out the window often even before we noticed. We expanded their learning in different ways by offering creative experiences where they picked different bird pictures to glue on their bark/word paper, going for many nature walks and exploring science while exploring feathers, nests and eggs. It is fascinating how much they observe in the classroom, on our playground, on walks and/or at home. It is so rewarding when a parent asks if we have been talking about birds because their infants have noticed, get excited and point whenever they see the birds. This shows us that what we are doing is truly impacting and meaningful to the children. Connie Cunningham-RECE

Over the 3-month period we used for this project, many birds have continued to come to our window feeders and it has brought great excitement to the infants as they watched them peck out the seeds and feed. We had started a poster to keep track of how many birds we saw come to feed. By the end of the project the count was up to 88. We know there were more as we could only count what we saw during the child care hours. We have left our feeders up and plan to keep filling them over the summer as something for our new friends joining us as of July 1st to watch. This project has truly been one the infants could visualize on a daily basis. Judy Hackbart-RECE

As a supply I rarely get to be a part of a classroom project, so I was excited to finally get that chance and it was definitely worth it. What a thrill it is to see the results of work you put in the first time a child notices a bird on their own without our help. Or when they learn a new related word and begin using it in everyday language. And now, the older infants are passing on the knowledge to the new comers. I also loved seeing how all-encompassing the learning was. ELECT categorizes the types of learning a child experiences and this topic hit them all. Social- they talked about birds at home, they imitated us in a variety of different ways. Emotional- I observed a couple children self-soothing by standing in front of the window and watching the birds feed. Communication Language and Literacy- we read many books and learned many words that each child added to their vocabulary. Cognitive- attention regulation, problem solving, symbolic thought, all important in learning new things. And lastly Physical- we went on many walks and even helping to fill bird feeders with seeds can amount to some hard work. Joanna Turski - RECE