

The Project Approach to Learning at

RisingOaks
Early Learning

Saint John Paul II

Project Name: Dogs

Age Group: Toddler (16 months to 2 years)

Project Start Date: October 14, 2022

Project End Date: December 9, 2022



RisingOaks
Early Learning

Growing minds through play

Background

The following educators involved in the project were Cara Kieswetter RECE, Krista-Ann Tzeckas RECE and Cristina Faria RECE. The age range of the children was 16 months to 2 years of age. Throughout the duration of this project 17 toddlers took part in exploring the ideas and concepts surrounding the topic of Dogs.

Phase 1: Beginning the Project

The toddlers began showing an interest in dogs early October, as we would often see dogs while on our walks and as we played out on the playground.



Figure 1: George at the fence with the neighborhood Dog Tux



Figure 2: (Top left to bottom) George, Isla. and Cam observing Tux

Our initial observations when we asked the toddlers about dogs included; a toddler taking notice of a strange sound coming from a neighbour's backyard, which an educator labeled as a dog barking, a toddler noticing a dog far past our playground and said "dog", and the toddlers gathering at the fence (figure 1 & 2) when a dog walked past our fence. With these observations in mind we then inferred that our toddlers do have some general knowledge about dogs in which we can explore further. We decided that Dogs would be a natural interest for a project to begin as they were very vocal and in motion to the dogs that they had seen.

After the decision was made to start a Dog project the educators then did some brainstorming on October the 3rd of 2022 and created a topical web as pictured below; which also took into account the Domains of Development as well as criteria such as parent engagement, first Interpretation and surveying.

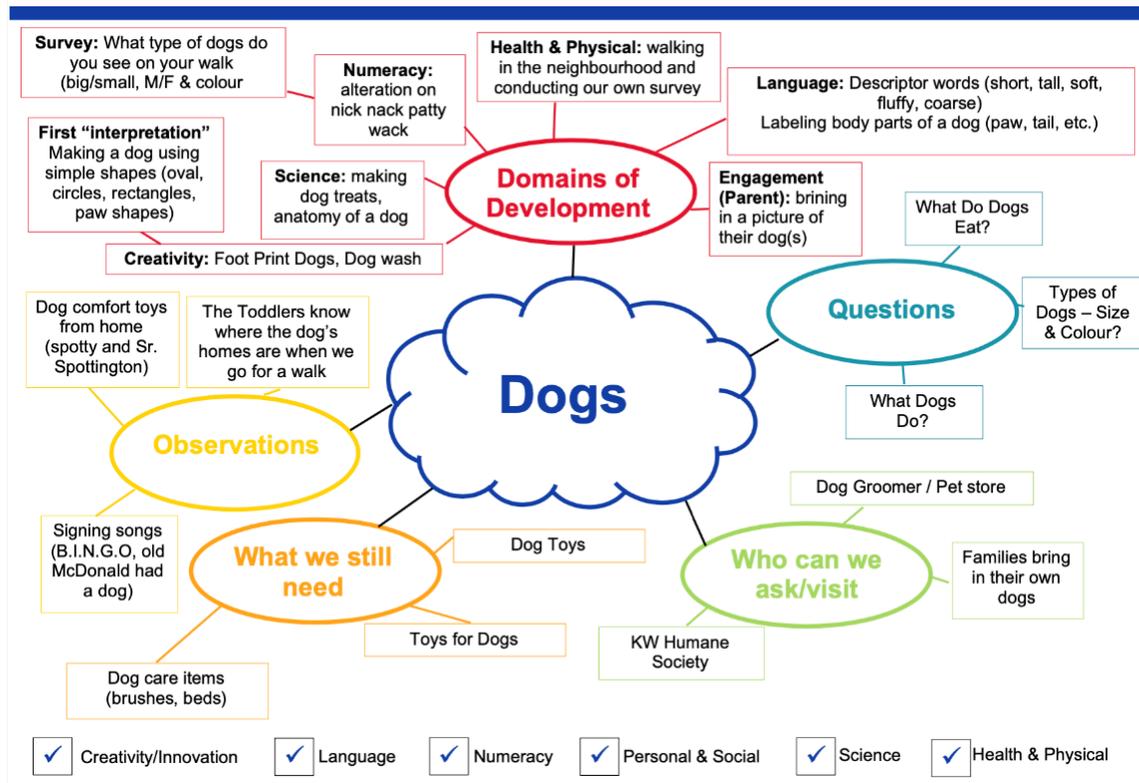


Figure 3: Word web about dogs.

Topic Questions

On the topic of dogs, the next steps were to figure out what do we want to learn more about. It was decided that our three questions we wanted to learn more about would be:

1. What do dogs eat?
2. What do dogs do all day?
3. What types of dogs are there? their size, colour?

Brainstorming: Who can we ask about dogs?

We can ask fellow ECE's, parents, professionals such as veterinarians, the humane society, pet stores and toddler families that have their own dogs at home. We can also use our iPads, resources from the local public library and from our own personal libraries at home.

Teacher's Expectations

Through this project we can expect to see an Increase In language development particularly words, phrases and sounds that pertain to dogs. The Toddlers already showed a general Interest In dogs, we can expect to see our toddlers hold this Interest and engagement with this topic long term. we hope to continually see the toddlers point out dogs on the other side of the fence as well as on our walks. we also expect to have discussions arise naturally with families and children.

Phase 2: Developing the Project

The Toddler Definition of a Dog:

Everly: "Outside" as she points out the window.

Isla: when Isla was asked about a dog she went to retrieve a book from the basket and points to a picture of a dog.

Heerut: barking sound and said, "Dog!"

Oliver: "walk" as he pointed to the window, perhaps remembering that we had seen a dog earlier one morning while out on our walk.

Scholarly Definition of a Dog: The dog is a domesticated descendant of the wolf. Also called the domestic dog, derived from the ancient, extinct wolf, and the modern wolf is the dog's nearest living relative. The dog was the first species to be domesticated, by hunter-gathers over 15,000 years ago, before the development of agriculture.

First Interpretation of a Dog

The next step was for the toddlers to draw their own depiction/representation of what a dog looks like. When asked some toddlers were able to point to where they had drawn their dog's eyes, ears, tail and nose.

Here are some examples of the toddlers' first drawings:



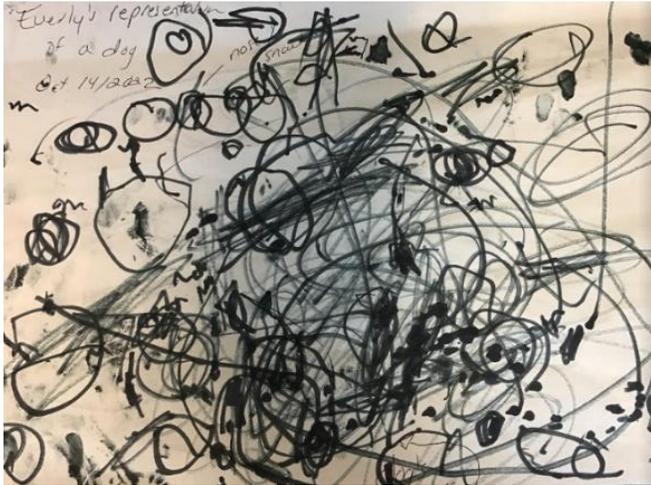


Figure 4: Everly's Drawing of a Dog on October 14th 2022



Figure 5: Calvin's Drawing of a Dog on October 14th, 2022

Exploring A dog's facial features using simple shapes

After trying to challenge the children with depicting their knowledge of what dogs look like through their drawings, we decided to try something different. Recognizing that simple shapes are the building blocks for any type of drawing both simple and complex, we decided to focus on this with our toddlers when creating a representation of a Dog at their skill level and capabilities. Before our creative experience began, we looked at an image of a brown dog and identified its eyes, nose and tongue. Lily stuck out her tongue and made a panting sound, just like that of a dog when the rest of our friends observed this action they too joined in. We then gave the toddlers simple shapes cut out of paper such as ovals, circles and a shape that looks like a dog's nose. Together, with the educator we labeled the shapes and talked about how each shape could represent the different dog parts on a dog's face. The educator then encouraged them to put the shapes together to make a dog. The educator stated, "look at the oval, it looks like the dog's ear. Where do the dog's ears go?" This activity challenged their creative abilities, thinking in abstract about how the shapes resemble the different parts of a dog, as well as how shapes can be put together to create something.





Figure 6: Calvin's dog creation using simple shape

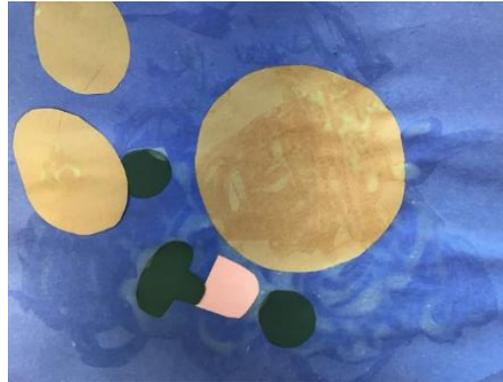


Figure 7: Everly's dog creation using simple shapes

D Is for Dog! a literacy and facial parts recognition activity: While listening and singing along to the BINGO song the toddlers created their own D for Dog face using precut shapes, which symbolized a dog's eyes, nose, ears and mouth.

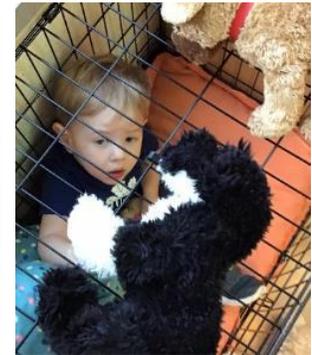


Doggie Faces! - A comparative creative experience: Our toddlers love to pretend to be dogs so Krista Ann thought of a creative activity that would turn the toddlers into just that...visually of course. Pictures were taken of each of the toddlers, with the focus being on their faces, then with precut shapes of ears, a nose, mouth and tongue the toddlers glued those features onto their faces and voila they all turned into dogs! Dogs have a nose like we do, dogs have ears like we do, dogs have eyes like we do!



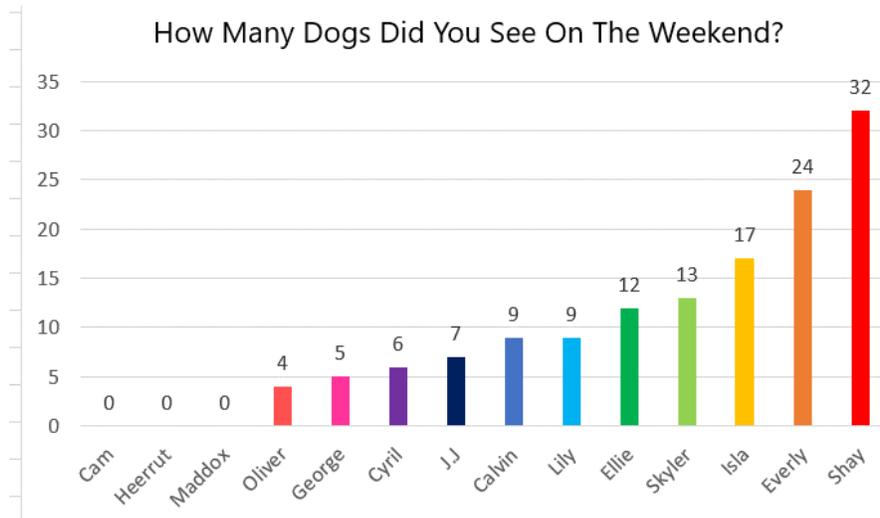
Creating a Dog Friendly Environment

A dog crate, two dog beds and some stuffed plush dogs were introduced into our classroom and the toddlers were very curious about them. Most of our friends were eager to get inside the dog crate and considered it another space to relax and lie down with some pillows. They also enjoyed relaxing on the dog beds and cuddling with the plush dog toys.



Project Survey: How many Dogs did you see on the weekend?

As we moved forward with our project we sent out some homework for our families, asking them to count how many dogs they could spy during their weekend. Here is a graph showing each family's results:



Some of our families communicated to us that they had taken a walk in the park that weekend and as a result they saw many different types of dogs. Others took notice of how many dogs they saw as they were in the car traveling.

We also asked our families through email and our messaging app, if they had any pet dogs of their own. If they were any families with a fur baby of their own then we encouraged them to bring in some pictures. Here is a picture of our pet board the toddlers were very excited to show and share their loveable pet dogs with all their friends. Our pet picture board was a main focus throughout the project as they often referred to them when we would talk about dogs.



Figure 8: (Top Left) Oliver and his dog Lola, (top middle) Cristina's Dog Moose, (top right) Isla and her dog___, (last to the right) shay's dog Kiwi, (middle left) Krista's dogs Molly and Zoe, (middle right) Cara's family and their Dog Lola, and Roxy below, (bottom left) George and the Neighborhood dog Tux

Exploring Question 1: What do dogs eat?

With this question in mind we Introduced real dog food and treats that gave the toddlers an interactive activity to engage their senses, the toddlers had the opportunity to manipulate dog food by using their sense of smell, sight and touch. Using resources such as books, the iPad and the educators own experience of having dogs as pets, they assisted the toddlers in their research skills such as inquiry. Afterwards, we concluded that dogs are Omnivores. An omnivore is an animal that eats both meat and plants, just like we do! The educators brought in some different types of food, that we were able to explore with and look a bit more closely. Dogs like to eat a variety of foods, including meat, like chicken, vegetables like carrots and grains like rice. We noticed that the dog food that the educator had brought in looked different from the foods that we eat. A dog's food can be round and pellet sized and very crunchy when they bite into them. Other dog food that we observed in our dog book comes in a can and is called "wet dog food" it is usually is brown in colour and again is not very colourful or yummy looking like our food is. When a dog is ready to eat their dinner, it is usually served to them in their very own special dog bowl. One bowl is usually for their food and another bowl is for their water. After we had looked and inspected the dog food and treats, we painted our very own dog bones, adding sand and the spice of cinnamon to yellow paint. This gave our dog bones the same kind of sweet scent that we had experienced from the dog treats that we were examining earlier that were flavoured with pumpkin and cinnamon spices.



Making edible dog treats for us to try as well: Frozen Yogurt Doggie Treats

After exploring dog food and treats the educators decided to make treats suitable for children and dogs through a baking experience that we can expect to build learning and development in numeracy, following instructions in sequence and turn taking. There is one thing we know about our toddlers and that is, they love to eat! As well as favor particular activities that involve opportunities to use their helping hands to make, create and explore.

This recipe only required two Ingredients which consisted of fresh blueberries and plain Greek yogurt. We first measured, then mixed the two Ingredients together, each friend taking a turn using the spatula, combining the Ingredients until it was a purplish colour.

Cara brought in some doggie bone shaped ice cube silicon moulds, and suggested that doggie treats shaped like doggie bones would be a fun Idea...and all the toddlers agreed! Once the Ingredients were mixed together, the yummy mixture was poured into the moulds, then placed in the freezer so that they could harden into a solid piece.





We were hoping that the yummy doggie treats were ready for taste testing the next day and they were! Our toddlers sat together outside on the playground enjoying the delicious frozen dog treat.

Making dog bowls

The question was brought up again during one of our group activities, and using our recollection skills the toddlers recalled the dog food and treats that Cristina had brought in earlier in our project. These samples of food were placed inside clear sandwich bags, and taped on one of the classroom's shelves, so that when the toddlers wanted, they could get a hands on and up-close look at them, throughout the project they were available. Krista-Ann explained that for this particular activity the toddlers had the option of making their own dog bowl, which is a special bowl only for dog food. Each child chose a colour of their own but Instead of gluing dog food we used Cheerios to decorate our bowls. We encouraged our toddlers to use their fine motor skills to stick the Cheerios to the glue but it was much more appealing to eat the cereal instead.



From our observations while out on our walks as well as having dogs of our own, we already knew that dogs love to go exploring while out on walks as well. But what else do they like to do? We did some sharing and brainstorming and came up with some ideas on our own. We shared that from our own personal experiences we know that dogs like to go on walks just like we do! But how else do they spend their free time?

Feeding the Dog - A fine motor activity

Krista-Ann taped a picture of a dog's face on the side of our dramatic play fridge, and the mouth was cut in an oval shape, so that it had the appearance of being open. We then laid out some rectangular plastic shapes that could be used as treats. The educators then stepped back and observed the toddlers as they became aware of the puppy face, and proceeded to feed him his treats. This activity provided the toddlers with the opportunity to do some care taking and role playing of their own, as they pretended to feed the dog some yummy treats by inserting the plastic toy treat into the dog's mouth. "Yummy, Yummy doggie" said George and Isla as they took turns placing the toy treat into the dog's mouth. Once they were all gone with no other treats to feed the dog, they walked around to the front of the fridge, opened up the door and collected them back up then proceeded to feed the dog all over again.



Exploring Question 2 What do dogs do all day? They Go In their house

During a group activity which included reading, "How much is that doggie in the window?" and "Clifford's Family" the educators also shared that their own dogs like playing with dog toys, playing in the mud, jumping in leaves, going for hikes in the forest, eating treats, snuggling with their family and lots of sleeping! Some dogs sleep in a crate like the one that we have in our room. While other dogs sleep and spend their time when they are outside in their backyard in what looks like a doggie house. Throughout this discussion we discovered that Dogs are a lot like us, in that they enjoy doing the same type of activities that we do. They have lots of energy, love to play and are full of love just like toddlers!



Dogs Playing In the mud: a sensory experience

For this outdoor sensory experience, the toddlers explored buckets full of mud, as they dipped, rolled and splashed their toy dogs inside of the thick mud. Once they were ready, they could then give their toy dogs a bubble bath in some clean water, which soon turned murky in colour as well.



They Bark: Colouring to dog sounds

During our project we would often play "Sleeping doggies" which had the toddlers using their imaginations pretending to be Dogs but one day we decided to try something different. We know that dogs love to make noise and communicate to through barking but they make other sounds as well. One day through a creative activity and using the same dog shaped silicon moulds, the educators melted down some crayons, turning them into small dog shaped crayons for the toddlers to explore and create with. As they coloured together on a large piece of canvas paper, the educators played some soothing music to help their creative juices flow. We then switched up the playlist and began playing some dog sound effects, which took the toddlers by surprise! "Doggies" they all cheered as they continued to make larger strokes across the collage paper. Some friends even had their tongues out as they created, mimicking that of what dogs do with their tongues when they are panting, playing and running. "Look at my doggies" said Everly excitedly. "I'm a doggie" said Calvin barking "woof woof" and soon others were joining in on the role playing as well.



Dogs go for walks

Another creative experience that had the toddlers using their imaginations and recollection skills was when we were making snow covered (white paint) dog prints using toy dog figurines. During this group experience we talked about how dogs love to go on walks and everyone including dogs, make footprints as they walk in the snow. We compared with the paw prints that we were making, that larger dogs leave behind bigger paw prints and little dogs leave smaller paw prints.



Exploring Question 3 What types of dogs are there? their size, colour?

Before addressing this last question, we again as a group came together and shared what our own dogs look like, their colour of fur/ hair as well as their size. But are all dogs the same? no they look somewhat different just like us. With us having some understanding of dogs and what they look like, we thought we would do a group activity that focused on sensory and design, in which the toddlers would be able to express visually, how a dog feels to the touch. We introduced a large white piece of paper with an outline of a dog. Then using different samples of carpet and yarns we encouraged our toddler friends to create their own BIG dog. First, using paintbrushes they spread the glue throughout the dog's outline, working their eye hand coordination and fine motor skills. Then It was time to place the "Fur/hair" onto the sticky glue, which covered up our large dog with hair!



Sensory tactile experience:

Krista-Ann brought out some different faux furs for the toddlers to explore with one day while she created touch and feel images of dogs. These two samples of the faux dog hair displayed that some were longer in length and was soft to the touch, while the other faux fur hair was shorter in length and felt brittle and coarse, like that of different types of dog hair. Ellie seemed to enjoy the feeling of both these samples, as she would go back and forth between the two, running her hands across them both.



Creating dogs with different textiles

As we progressed on with our project we learned that dogs can be different colours such as black, different shades of brown, white and beige coloured. We identified that some dogs can be more than just one colour, as well as come in different sizes - some small and some tall. We revisited our own dog pictures that the toddlers and educators brought from home, referenced dog book resources as well as the noted other dog pictures that were on display throughout our classroom. Visually we could see that there were differences in them but the facial similarities were the same. For example, they have 2 eyes, a nose, 2 ears one mouth and a tongue. For this next activity the toddlers were provided with a paper cut out of a dog's face, a paintbrush for applying glue, as well as small pieces of fabric, that had the appearance and colour of a dog fur/hair. Using their fine motor skills and hand-eye coordination they placed the pieces of fabric on their paper dog, creating a dog unique to them.



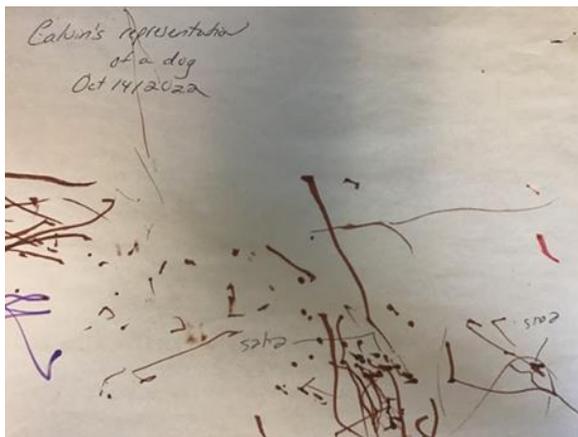
Our 3D model of a Dog

We constructed our 3D model of a dog by using recycled materials such as a large cardboard box, wrapping paper rolls for its four legs, long strands of yarn for its tail, plastic lids that represent its paws and a face. But before these parts could be added onto the body of our dog, we first had to add some fur like material to give our doggie that life like look. The toddlers were encouraged to spread lots of glue throughout the surface of the box and then added fabric pieces and fur like material on top of the sticky glue. During this 3D experience the toddlers used their recollection skills and Identified the dog's body parts as the educators helped add the legs, tail, paws and face. There was a lot of social and Imaginative play happening as the toddlers engaged in working together to put their 3D dog together. Many of our friends pretended to be dogs too, as they would make dog like noises by barking and panting as they have previously experienced, these actions were expressed as they glued and Interacted with their peers throughout the activity. The final step to this model was to give our furry friend a name, so when the educators asked the toddlers what our dog's name should be George exclaimed, "Doggie!" and his friends agreed. Creating this 3D structure together helped to develop the toddler's coordination, communication and collaboration skills. When children are provided with Interesting 3D objects, both large and small, they help to stimulate Ideas and develop their awareness of form and shape.



Final Drawing A Toddler's Perspective

As in the beginning of our project the toddlers were once again asked to draw their own representation of what a dog looks like as their final drawing. Isla and George pointed out their dog's eyes, nose and ears when they were asked by the educators. And when they asked what the dog was doing in their drawings, Calvin responded by saying, "Sleeping" George said that his dog was "Running" and Isla and Oliver both responded by sticking out their tongues, like that of a dog and made panting sounds.





A Special Visitor

The day that we had so anxiously been waiting for had finally arrived our special visitors had come for a visit to help us conclude our Dog project. Amber a veterinarian from Mitchell Animal Hospital and her dog Toffee came in to offer the tod squad an up close and interactive visit. The veterinarian came with a variety of hands on materials for the toddlers to explore with. We were able to manipulate bandages, and she modelled how to put them on dogs by using stuffed animals. Explaining that these bandages are used at the hospital for animals that have hurt their legs or even after having surgery. We learned about the different bugs and fleas that can live on a dog's fur, looked at a model of a dog's jaw and learned that they have 42 teeth. That is a lot more teeth then we have in our mouths. We even looked at special pictures called x-rays that are pictures of a dog's anatomy including their skeletal bone structure. In the x-rays we were able to see images of babies in a mother's belly, broken bones and even squeaky toy balls that one dog had swallowed whole! The toddlers did a lot of inquiring about what Toffee eats, curious as to how Toffee's curly hair feels and mimicked some of Toffee's behaviours like sticking out their tongues and panting.





Phase 3: Concluding the Project

Our Dog project concluded upon returning back to the center after the Christmas holidays as their attention seemed to be a bit more geared towards the excitement of returning to see their friends and getting back into the routine of schedules, routines and re exploring our open ended toys.

Teacher Reflections

Cara: Our toddlers thoroughly enjoyed this project. I truly enjoyed watching our toddlers engaged with Amber and Toffee, they would want to pet Toffee which was very exciting for our toddlers to be able to do! They were able to explore a variety of materials like how to bandage a dog, a few stuffed animals of a "flea and a tic" and most of all exploring with each other all the different X-ray's that Amber brought in. The toddlers got to observe a pregnant dog, a dog that swelled some objects that were not good for them and a broken leg. This project gave our toddlers the opportunity to have someone come in from the outside and be able to be hands on with an animal they all love!!

Krista-Ann: Being a dog owner, I thoroughly enjoyed re-discovering all there is about dogs through a toddler lens, through them I have learned how to appreciate seemingly normal furs, plush, and crafts and turn it into something extraordinary- as if I'm seeing it for the first time, by taking the time to explore every detail. I have noticed that toddlers are very inquisitive and curious with every material presented to them. To me a piece of fur fabric was simply long orange fur with a bit of grey, but to a toddler they notice that the deeper grey fur (was shorter and softer and the orange surface fur wirier. We saw the toddlers using their sense of touch and comparison to explore the different craft materials, fur fabrics and fur from plush dog toys, we saw the toddlers getting up close to and finding camouflaged eyes and noses hidden beneath the fur of the dog toys, this discovery would excite them. Wanting to know more the toddlers would gesture for an educator to label or label it themselves. I saw how exploring a common interest really created an excitement for labeling and wanting to know more which boosted language development. As our toddlers move on I hope they never lose that

sense of Inquiry with everyday objects which I am now re learning how to do in adult hood as a co-learner.

Cristina: For this project it was nice to see that all our toddler friends enjoyed taking part and engaging in most of the experiences. The topic of Dogs was also very relatable, in that most families have a dog of their own at home. Because of this so many of the materials such as the crate, dog bed, dog food and stuffed plush toys were already familiar to the toddlers, having had previous experiences with at least one of these things. Our visit with the vet tech and her furry friend Toffee, tied everything that we had learned and talked about quite nicely together. For those friends that hadn't really had any experience with dogs beforehand, were able to do so at this visit if they felt comfortable enough to do so. This field study gave the toddlers an up close and interactive look at how dogs appear, behave, act and are so playful and loving, just like a toddler is!