

CHILD'S PLAY

By Lisa Hildebrand
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Play comes naturally to preschoolers, so Miss Bonnie makes sure the children in her classroom learn through their play.

"I design the environment so they can learn no matter what they choose to play with," said Miss Bonnie (Bonnie Lueck, director of the Children's Center at St. Norbert College). "Science, math and literacy are everywhere in a child's play."

Learning is part of almost every experience at the Children's Center,

Lueck finds a way to make learning relate to every child at the Center. It can be difficult, however, because 3- to 5-year-olds live in a much different place than the world around them, which is filled with abstract concepts and ideas.

"They have no concept of more or less, day or night," said Lueck. "It (a concept) needs to relate to them somehow."

Recently, the preschoolers anxiously awaited an upcoming field trip and asked Miss Bonnie when they were

can be successful. They can feel it and they love it."

Lueck puts her students' social and emotional well-being at the top of her curriculum.

"I can teach them all kinds of things to make them ready for kindergarten, but if they can't resolve conflicts they won't like learning," she said.

If necessary, Miss Bonnie will call a group meeting like she did one recent winter day. The 3- and 4-year-olds knew she was unhappy because some of them had made a mess of the dramatic play area the student-teachers had created.

"I let them know that I was extremely disappointed — not in them — in the decisions they made," said Lueck. "I said, 'I know you can make better decisions.' These are the kinds of discussions I want to model."

So she called a group meeting of the children involved.

"I asked them during the group meeting to decide the consequences," she said. "They come up with amazing suggestions and then they have ownership of the idea."

Lueck realizes that conflicts will arise every day, and she tries to turn them into positive experiences. "We work a lot on them helping each other," she said. "Then they feel good because they get to help."

Along with about 60 preschoolers from the De Pere area, Lueck supervises more than 100 college students each year. Most of the students are education majors fulfilling the lab portion of their curriculum and instruction course.

Lueck tells the student-teachers: "Curriculum is everything a child does from the moment they get up to the moment they go to sleep."



Bonnie Lueck, center, turns play into a learning experience for Katherine Wentworth, left, and Lauren McLester-Davis at the College's Children's Center. Photo by Mike Roemer

even snack time — a perfect opportunity to learn math. She'll sit with the children and talk about how many pretzels they have left after eating some of their snack.

Lueck is particularly fond of teaching in the Center's kitchen. "Cooking and baking, that's math at its best," said Lueck, who focuses on making the children's learning fun.

going. Her answer: "You have to sleep three nights." The next day, when they asked the same question, she answered: "If I said it would be after you sleep three nights, and you have slept one night, then what?"

Without knowing it, the children learned subtraction.

"It has to be something they can understand," said Lueck. "Then they