



# Sewing Project

Owl - St. Matthew: School-age Group 3

## Background

Our sewing project started as an extension of the children's interest in string that began in September 2015. The children who participated were in School Age Group 3 and the children's ages ranged from 6 years to 11 years old. The staff involved in the project were Shannon, RECE and Heather, RECE. The project wrapped up in the Spring of 2016.

## Phase I: Beginning the Project

Our sewing project started after the children showed an interest in string. In September we started doing activities that involved string such as beading, playing cat's cradle, string webbing, yarn sculptures and pom-pom monsters. After completing many of these activities, the oldest girls in the group mentioned that they would like to start sewing. At group time, Heather asked the rest of the children if they would like to try to sew. One of the children mentioned that she remembered they had done sewing the summer before and everyone had really enjoyed it. Another child mentioned that her grandmother and other family members sew and she has a lot of knowledge about sewing. We began to brainstorm questions we had about sewing, and projects that we could attempt to make. After our group discussion, we brought out fabric, thread and needles for the children to start to create something. Peyton realized that she was very good at threading needles and became our "designated needle threader." She helped many of her peers thread their needles. Charlie decided it would be a good idea to make a poster asking parents and staff for fabric donations so that we could get busy making our creations. Once our project had really taken off the children started expressing interest in getting a sewing machine. This is when Heather decided to ask one of her friends who is a quilter to come in and speak to the children about sewing and quilting. We worked together as a group to come up with questions that we could ask her and other people in the sewing profession so that we could obtain more information about this craft.

### **What do we know about sewing?**

- "You go in and out you can make lots of things" -Alex (age 7)
- "My mom has a sewing machine and she sewed my dad's costume" -Charlie (age 9)
- "You use a thread and needle" -Chantal (age 10)
- "Sewing can fix up patches. It is not for kids under 5" -Chantal (age 10)
- "you can fix up patches"- Kylie (age 9)
- "My mom uses a sewing machine", "I am making a pillow" - Noah (age 8)
- "This is a funny fact: grandmas do it all the time. My grandma sews everything that is broken of mine, she sewed my cuddly" - Claudia (age 8)
- "There is cross stitch" -Abi (age 10)
- "You can poke yourself with a needle" Hannah (age 8)
- "You need to make small stitches and you need to be very specific with your stitches because it could rip open" - Tessa (age 10)
- "It's fun" - Adam (age 7)
- "Stitches go in your arm" - Peyton (age 7)
- "Be careful with the needle" - Kayla (age 8)

### **What do we want to know about sewing?**

- "How can people sew fast" - Adam (age 7)
- "I don't need to learn anything" - Tessa (age 10)
- "How to use a sewing machine" - Alex, Kylie and Claudia (age 7,9,8)
- "How to do more stitches" - Abi (age 10)
- "How to stitch your arm" - Peyton (age 7)
- "I can learn from my sister and grandma" - Kayla (age 8)
- "How to sew clothing like a t-shirt" - Liam (age 7)

### **Experts we can talk to:**

- Michelle (Quilter)
- Helen (Quilter)
- Heather (Casual sewer, School age 3 staff)
- Doctor
- Grandparents
- Rukmanie
- Tessa (School age child)
- Quilting or fabric stores (Lens mills, tailor)

### **Formal definition of sewing**

The action or activity of sewing

- Work that is to be or being sewn

Sew- verb

To join fasten or repair- to attach something to something else by sewing

### **Informal definition**

"Sewing means sewing" - Charlie

"Putting thread through a needle using a needle and thread to make a pattern on fabric or other substances" - Abi

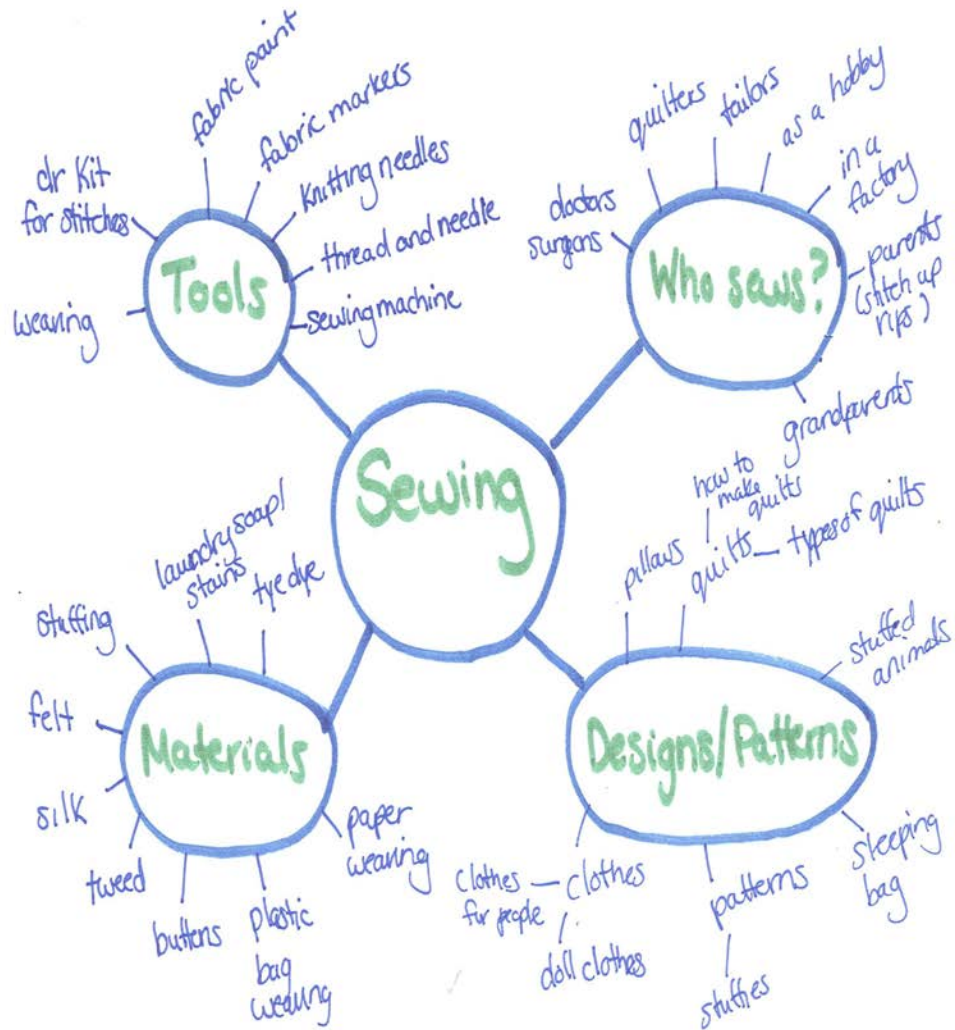
"Using needle and thread to make a craft" - Sophia L

"Fix something on fabric or clothes" - Kayla

### **Sewing Vocabulary**

- Needle
- Fabric
- Thread
- Sewing
- Sewing machine
- Pillow
- Teddy bear
- Quilting (traditional or paper piecing)
- Quilting bee
- Bobbin thread
- Knitting
- Hemming

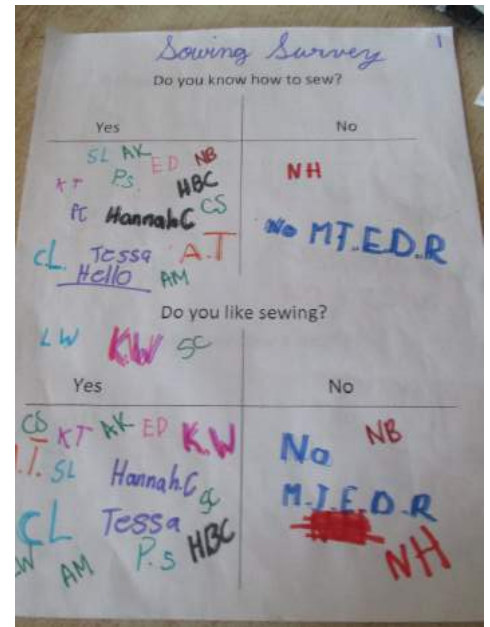
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## Phase 2: Developing the Project

### Sewing Surveys

As a group, we conducted surveys. We came up with the questions and everyone who was surveyed signed the appropriate opinion spot on the paper. The survey questions included: "Who has hurt themselves sewing?", "Do you know how to sew?", "Did you ever sew a cuddly?", "Have you ever used a sewing machine?", "What would you like to sew?", "What is your favourite thing to sew?", "Do you know how to sew?", "Do you like sewing?", "Do you think sewing should be for under 5 years?".



### Fabric



Peyton just finished staining her fabric!

As a group, we did a survey on fabric and stains. The goal was to figure out which detergent worked best on getting out stains and which stains came out the easiest. We used ketchup, salsa, soy sauce, grass, paint with soap and paint without soap. We used 3 different detergents: PC brand, Tide and Purex. As a group, we voted on which soap would work the best and which stain would come out the easiest. Most children said that Tide would work the best and that salsa and grass would come out the easiest. We then conducted the experiment. Kylie, Liam, Peyton, Kayla, Tessa, Hannah and Claudia got a piece of fabric and put each of the different products on it. They were given a detergent and a bucket of warm water to get the stain out. They began to scrub each stain out of the fabric using the detergent that they were given. When finished they voted on which product was the best. They said it was the PC brand of detergent and that salsa and soy sauce were the easiest to get out of the fabric.

## Pull Test

We worked on various activities that involved fabric as an extension of our sewing project. One activity tested the strength of the fabric. We tested each material in two different categories, strength against scissors and strength against pulling. Kylie and Abi worked as a team to attempt to pull each fabric apart. Their findings included that tweed was the strongest fabric followed by cotton and polyester. They found that the weakest fabric was cotton batten. All fabrics were easily cut by scissors. After, there was a discussion about why some fabrics were torn more easily than others. They concluded that felt was made from a thinner material than tweed which is why it pulled apart more easily.



Abi and Kylie working together to pull the fabric apart during the pull test.

## Tye Dye

Another activity that we did involving fabric was tye dying. The children were asked to bring in a piece of clothing that they were allowed to tye dye. Tessa, Kylie, Peyton, Claudia, Hannah and Kayla all participated in this activity. While doing these activities the girls followed the directions that came in the package and created designs by following instructions, while the others decided to create their own tye dye patterns.



Hannah is dyeing her shirt

## Clothing

While sewing some clothing for our stuffed animals, we decided it would be fun to dress up in different kinds of clothes as an extension of our exploration of fabric! We brought in extra clothes and used spare fabric to create our costumes. Marek and Vaughan dressed up as vampires/superheroes. Peyton loved one particular hat and was constantly using it to portray different characters. Liam often changed his costume to play different roles in imaginary games. Everyone enjoyed posing for silly pictures in their costumes. During dress up some of the children wanted to be mummies. That is when we decided it would be a fun activity to have mummy races. Nolan and Hannah volunteered to be our first set of mummies and Peyton and Autumn were next. They were given a roll of white streamer to dress the "mummies" and then the race was on! They really enjoyed having the opportunity to be silly and design the mummy outfits. Nolan thought it was "super funny" to act like the Hulk while getting out of the mummy costume.



Vaughan, Adam, Marek, Peyton, Liam and Kylan are becoming different characters while dressing up in costumes.

## Hand Sewing

The children starting hand sewing many different creations when a sewing table was introduced to the group. The children started sewing with felt. Abi selected several pieces, placed them together and began using her embroidery techniques to create a picture on the fabric. When stuffing was added to the table, many children were inspired to sew their own pillows or pin cushions. Chantal wanted to add to her pillow to make it a pillow person with arms and legs. When Remembrance day came, she was inspired to add felt poppies for eyes and that's how her Poppy person was created. Kayla practiced her new skill to make pillow people! She would sew a basic square shape and then using her artist abilities draw a face on with fabric markers. Many children in the group made pillow people. Throughout this time the children practiced different hand sewing styles and techniques. They attempted to make fabric books, pillows, doll clothing, stuffies and more. During this period, they learned how to thread their own needles and tie off their projects. Peyton loved helping others by threading needles so they were ready for her friends to use. She was very proud of her new skill.

When more fabric was added to our collection it sparked the children's interest to create more complex projects, including a cow that was made by Alex. He sewed his own mini stuffy with careful stitches to create its shape. The skills that the children developed while hand sewing allowed them to come up with more complex ideas and projects. They were then able to explore using more efficient methods of sewing.

Chantal with her finished “poppy” project.







Left- Kayla and her hand sewn collection of "pillow people". Right-Autumn, Adam, and Peyton all working at the sewing table making pillows!



### Visit from a Quilter- Michelle

With the children's continued interest in hand sewing and their willingness to learn more, we decided it was time to invite an expert into the room. Heather's friend Michelle is an avid sewer and quilter. The children took the opportunity to interview Michelle and ask her their many questions including personal questions on why and how she started making quilts. Our special guest brought in many examples of her creations. These included a bag, several quilts, a pillow and more! Immediately everyone was drawn to the large super Mario quilt she made for her son's bed. Everything was perfectly placed and looked exactly like the game character. This intrigued our group and they started a conversation with Michelle about her many pieces, especially this particular one. Michelle then took the opportunity to explain the types of quilt making and her favourite "paper piecing".



Exploring the quilts Michelle brought in. Everyone's favourite was the Super Mario quilt.

Shannon and Heather also wanted to learn more. This was new information to everyone in the room! We were also in for a huge surprise. Michelle brought a large bag of cool fabric scraps and a sewing machine to donate to group 3! Wow! During the rest of her visit, the children sorted through the scraps to make personal projects. Michelle gave some children and the teachers a lesson on how to use the sewing machine. They learned how to use the foot pedal, set the machine up to sew a project, use the button to sew backwards, thread the needle and more. Heather learned how to use this machine as it had been a long time since she had sewn on a machine and Shannon found out how to rethread the bobbin thread. Tessa paid close attention to the lesson, and found that it was much like her machine at home. She used her previous knowledge to help her friends continue to learn how to use this particular sewing machine. Many of the children were intrigued with it, including those who were not interested in hand sewing like Nolan and Liam. We all thanked Michelle for a wonderful and informative visit and couldn't wait to get started on our next step!

## Sewing Machine

After the generous donation of a sewing machine to our group project was made, everyone was interested in learning how it worked and what could be made using it. Most of the children were intrigued by the new equipment and needed lessons on how to use it. Tessa informed her classmates that she has a personal sewing machine at home and a grandma who is a sewing expert. She volunteered to assist others in learning how to use the new machine. As each child was learning, a teacher would sit close by to assist with the process. First projects included many pillows! Kayla was excited to use the sewing machine since she often borrowed her sister's at home. She started by making pillows, then mini quilts and then moved on to more difficult projects including a backpack. Liam and Nolan found the sewing machine more fun than hand sewing. Both made fat pillows by using the reverse method to see less stitches. Autumn also found this method helpful and made a few pillows of her own. They were very proud of their projects and their newfound skill. Liam insisted on travelling with his new grey pillow for at least a week. Noah and Ben teamed up and assembled a mixed fabric quilt. Over several weeks they changed the pattern and added diamonds to the design. Noah also completed many individual projects like his mini book bag, sleeping bag and several pillows. Hannah picked out many different types of fabric and put together a quilt in one day to obtain a Girl Guides badge. Tessa decided to do a solo project and make a very detailed quilt. It started as a small quilt and over time as she found more materials she liked it became a large detailed project.



Quilting guest Michelle assisting Liam and Abi with pulling off the paper backing of the owl quilt piece.

Tessa's project lasted several weeks and inspired those around her. When Abigail brought in her school "baby egg" project many of her friends became involved in caring for it. They used the sewing machine to make mini quilts and "baby" clothes. Sofia, Paige, Chantal, and Abi worked on these items. Everyone was so intrigued by the sewing machine and there were many projects made over the months including pillows, quilts, doll clothes, sleeping bags, backpacks and so many more!



Left- Abi's baby egg box that her friends help decorate. Right- Nolan with his pillow that he made using the sewing machine.

## Quilt Patches

We sat down together on the carpet to brainstorm ideas that would involve everyone in a group project. There were many great suggestions but the idea that won was to make a group quilt to display. Each of the children got his/her own piece of white fabric and some fabric paint. Everyone was able to create and design whatever appealed to them. Ben had no plan in mind when he started but ended up painting a person in the snow. It was extraordinary! Nolan decided that he would create an angry bird painting on his quilt patch. He wondered how he could get the background red without wrecking his masterpiece until he decided he would paint the other side of the quilt patch red. Peyton decided to paint Star Wars on her quilt patch (this was just after the movie had come out). Kylan painted herself and the things that most described her, Paige painted a bumble bee. Liam decided to do something a little different by painting abstract art on his quilt piece. Kayla and Claudia came up with an excellent idea to put their handprints on their quilt piece. Kylie, Tessa and Hannah tie dyed their quilt piece. Abi decided she would do the letter A for her name on her fabric. Each child came up with a unique idea on for their quilt patch. We started putting them together and were very excited to see how great they looked!



Autumn, Claudia, Alex and Nolan admiring our group quilt. It's almost done!

## Paper Piecing with Michelle

Long after Michelle first visited our group, everyone was still talking about the visit, sewing their own projects and working on the group quilt for our room. Michelle was invited back to assist with the children's group quilt. She talked about the different types of quilts and how they are made. The different types included traditional (sewing one piece beside another), applique (sewing pieces on top of other pieces) paper piecing which is Michelle's favourite (backing many small pieces of fabric onto paper and then removing the paper). Before the visit, group 3 compiled ideas for the middle quilt patch and voted for their favourite. Liam wanted a hockey themed patch, while Claudia wanted a bear. Alex and Adam both liked the idea of a monkey. After the final tally, the Owl won! Paige thought it was a great idea that we make an owl quilt patch and couldn't wait to get started. Soon everyone involved found out that paper piecing is a complicated and detailed way to make quilts. Our **quest** showed them how to sew the fabric to the paper matching the lines up on the paper to the edge of the material. Abi, Sofia, and Paige were all involved in the sewing process. Liam was excited to join and help rip the paper off the back of the fabric. Once the afternoon of sewing and ripping was done we had several sections of an owl. When the pieces were sewn together the blue owl was complete. We heard comments about how it was easy to sew each piece to the paper, but getting all of it done was a long process. Even so, it was well worth it! In the end, the children learned so much about quilting and were very proud of their work.



Paige working on our “paper piecing” owl quilt patch.

### Visit from sewing expert Helen

Many of the school age students loved the visits from Michelle, so we decided to ask another expert to come in and share her talent and quilting style. One of our casual staff, Barb, asked her friend Helen to come in and share her creations and fabulous style. Helen came prepared to be interviewed by the children. She also brought in examples of her quilts. Our group prepared some very good questions for our guest. After seeing the quilts that Helen brought in, and examining her traditional but extremely detailed style, Liam just had to ask "Are you famous?" Helen was, of course, flattered. He also asked her "What was your favourite project?" Helen mentioned that once she made a quilt for a sick friend using scraps of material. The quilt meant a lot to the both of them. After hearing about her many quilt projects over the years, Abigail wanted to know "How long have you been sewing?" and "What got you into quilting?" Helen started sewing when she was in the 7th grade and started quilting after getting married about 40 years ago. Her mother-in-law taught her how to make traditional quilts. After our guest left, a few children took part in a discussion comparing Michelle's more modern paper piecing style and Helen's more traditional quilts. Abigail noticed that Michelle took more of a "cut apart and then sew together small pieces" approach to make several pictures on her quilts, like her Super Mario quilt. Whereas Helen used slightly bigger pieces and sewed them together to make one large picture, like her "stormy waves" quilt. Other children talked about how Helen had people write on individual patches to put an anniversary quilt together. We all agreed that our experts had very different styles, but both had talent and beautiful projects from which we could learn. With all these great ideas we were now more enthusiastic than ever to work on our group quilting project!



Abi and Kylie admiring our quilter Helen's quilts.



Autumn attempting to learn the steps of knitting. She is so determined!

## Extensions of sewing

When group 3 was sewing, everyone wanted to sew and learn new skills. We found fabric scattered on the floor after a group had been looking for their perfect piece. We had to start sign up lists to use the sewing machine because it was in high demand. The project grew and expanded into other areas as well. Knitting was introduced and immediately Autumn took an interest. She worked very hard to learn the steps. She admitted it was difficult but never gave up! With help she completed a few rows on the knitting needles. She still expresses an interest in it today and would like to make something usable with the yarn. Tessa and Kayla shared with others their grandmother's talent for knitting. She taught them how to use the needles and Tessa helped others "cast on" to start learning. Abigail tried her hand at finger knitting. In a short while, she was proud to be the new owner of a finger knit scarf! We soon discovered knitting, like sewing, could be done several ways. Hand, arm, finger, regular and circular knitting needles could be used. This was a very informative experience for many since we learned about all of these methods from experienced knitters. Finger knitting was compared to the rainbow loom, a past fad that many of the children had experience with. Plastic canvas and cross stitch were briefly explored as well. Chantal mentioned how peaceful it was to spend time doing cross stitch and that she sometimes does this at home. Weaving was attempted as we tried to make plastic bag mats for the homeless. Kylie and Liam gave it their best shot, but found it was a lot of work for just two people. Weaving was again tried on a smaller scale at Easter. We used construction paper to



make our own baskets. Heather showed everyone the step by step weaving method to make and design the Easter baskets. Many added their own individual decorations. Alex had a bunny popping out of his handle and Claudia added her favourite animal to the design. This experience with weaving was more of a hit with the group.

Making clothing was a topic we discussed. Videos were watched on dyeing clothing and clothing production. We talked about how some people have careers that allow them to sketch and design clothing lines. Some children attempted to sew clothing for their cuddlies and dolls. We also had a pajama day to show off our own comfy clothing. Then we brought in a variety of costumes and dress up clothing. After, Marek, Vaughan, Peyton, Liam and Adam changed into some of the costumes, they immediately went into character. Some found favourite items in the clothing pile and went back to them again and again.

Kylie trying out plastic bag weaving.

At Christmas our sewing expansion helped with our Christmas gifts. We sewed our own sock snowmen! Some even added hats, buttons and clothes to their gifts. This gift gave them the chance to increase and show their knowledge and skills with sewing. Some children learned how to sew hats. Some found different ways to sew different types of buttons on fabric. They also began to learn how to make small stitches so stuffing would not fall out of the project. This gift for their family gave the children a gift as well, new skills and a great self-esteem boost. They showed more self-confidence after completing their snowmen. Afterwards they moved on to more difficult tasks without looking back.

## Phase 3: Concluding the Project

We started to notice a decreased interest in sewing activities so we thought that it would be a good idea to wrap up our project. Consequently, we asked the children what type of party they would want to have to wrap up the project, and some suggested we should do a quilt with our families. That is when we thought of doing a "Quilting Bee". The children all took their own role in the quilting bee. We had door greeters, information guide, and children assisting with the button cookie "dunkaroo" snack. We also had a great door prize of a sewing kit. Parents were encouraged to come in and help their child develop a quilt patch that was all about their family and things that they liked. They were also encouraged to browse through the picture boards and read the blurbs. Everyone was able to sit and enjoy a nice cookie treat with their children and chat with one another. Some families opted to put their quilt patch on the group quilt by working on the sewing machine that was available for them. The children enjoyed participating in the event but they also really appreciated being able to play a role in developing the event (eg. baking cookies, playing roles, making welcome board, and displaying their work). The event had positive feedback from the families as many of them expressed excitement in their children's work and pictures that were displayed.



Both left and right pictures- Our display boards that were up for the "Quilting Bee".





Alex and his mom working on their quilt patch.



Adam and his mom at the "Quilting Bee" making their hockey themed quilt patch.



Kylie, Liam and Abi with Group 3's Owl quilt!!!

## Teacher Reflections

### Heather's Reflection

Looking back on the many months and activities we did together in group 3 for the Sewing Project, I would say that the introduction of the sewing machine made the biggest impact. I myself haven't used one in a very long time, so it was a reintroduction for me. Some of the children were already familiar with this piece of technology, but most had never had the opportunity to use one before. We consistently had a group of hand sewers putting together personal projects at our sewing table and picking up new skills like new stitches or threading the needles. But before the sewing machine came in there were children that did not have much or any interest in this topic. The sewing machine changed that. I loved seeing their faces light up as it was placed in our room. Children were asking questions about it and very eager to learn. I myself was taught again how to use this piece of technology by not only our visiting expert Michelle but also Tessa, one of the children in the room. Tessa shared her knowledge with me and the rest of group 3. Liam and Nolan didn't show an interest in sewing until our topic took a twist and added some technology. Watching them get excited to learn a new skill, wanting to create usable projects and broaden their knowledge from this introduction was amazing! I was excited to see where this would take them! Immediately a sign up list was started and a sewing machine table was established. The children's abilities grew as they practiced almost every day. They learned how to thread the machine, where the bobbin thread was stored, how to use the foot pedal and push the fabric through as they stitched it together forwards and backwards. So many parents came to me happy that their child was learning this life skill. I also had many jokingly say "Now they can stitch up their own pants at home!" or "I can put them to work at home sewing!" But all jokes aside, this skill helped boosted the children's self confidence, self esteem and gave them a new ability. I'm proud of all their attempts and can't wait to see what they do with this skill next!

### Shannon's Reflection

I appreciate that I had the opportunity to participate in the sewing project that we did in group 3. I was very excited after my project approach training to jump into a project, as the idea of what a project was and how to go about it was fresh in my brain. Little did I know my coworker already had the idea to turn our sewing into a project. We started out doing string activities in September and I was amazed by how much we could do with just string! Then when the children became interested in sewing, the "string" idea took a whole different direction it made me nervous but also very excited. I thought to myself how can we go any more in depth on string? There can't be much more than what we have already done! Boy was I wrong. When we started sewing with the children I was very impressed by how much knowledge the children already had, as many of them knew more than I did! We did so many interesting projects and activities that gave the children opportunities to show us their independence and their own creative abilities. That made me appreciate the idea of doing a project so much more. My favourite sewing activity was the hand sewing, as each child got to show their own creative side and their abilities through this activity. They were able to design and make anything they liked! One thing that I really liked about doing this project was how much I learned. I never really knew anything about sewing before. All I knew how to do was thread a needle and do a



quick patch. I had no idea how much work and effort it takes to do a quilt or be a quilter. I didn't know how much patience it took to thread a sewing machine or how many different types of sewing, threading, and quilting there are. It amazed me how beneficial this project was to me. I believe we should be co-learners with the children and learn as we go based on their interests and through this project I did exactly that - I learned as they learned. I look forward to being a co-learner in many more projects in the future. I can't wait!