



OUR SCHOOL

A Non-Profit Corporation Founded in 1973

756 Cherryvale Rd., Boulder, Colorado 80303 (303)494-4112

February, 2001

Disclaimer: Views expressed in this newsletter are provided for informational purposes and do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of Our School.

In this issue...

Notes from the
Chair.....p.1-3

ShopOurSchool.com
.....p.3

"Relax, it's only
Kindergarten.....p.3-5

Calendar.....p.6

From the Chair:

We are already into the Spring semester! All those who started in September are eager to renew social relations and activities, and the two new children in the 2-morning session are adjusting extraordinarily to their new situation. This bodes well for the new semester.

The big surprise for all the children was the two new **baby guineas**. We had some

very definite conditions (two females to avoid reproduction and a gentler disposition than males, short fur to minimize possible children's allergic reaction, and still small as they grow so their environment stays to their scale). After a long search, with the help and recommendation of Greg and Tammy Collins, we bought and adopted (thanks to Greg and Tammy for donating one of them!) two females around eight weeks old from a reputable small business, with short fur, from *Critters Corner* in Louisville. They have no names or many names; the guineas don't mind.

We need to have "rules."

Guineas as living creatures are fragile, especially in their lungs. They can not be treated like toys – but need nurturing and respect for understanding another species. The "rule" is NO one under 8 years of age can hold them. (The reason is young children have a tendency to squeeze to hold and let go rather abruptly as their fingers and wrists are

still developing). This means *only an adult in school can pick them up*. They can feed them, observe them, stroke them (with one gentle finger!) without reaching into the guineas' house (while an adult holds one), and may rebuild the "house" with adult's help. Well treated, just like other domesticated animals, they are gentle but somewhat easily frightened.

The **fund-raiser** is on it's way. Rebecca had a slow down because of illness, but is getting back on her feet now. Our best wishes to her. Soon **training sessions** are coming up (see calendar). Please do attend: it makes Rebecca's and everybody's job *soo..much* easier. The **personal donation's** deadline is up –Feb.!st. So get your's in if it's not already...Again, this keeps Rebecca's job from being overwhelming on the computer.

Last but not least, **tickets!** **We are confident that you can sell your tickets, of course. Please do not return them till your have exhausted all possibilities of**

selling them. You only have a few to sell! And, please, don't be shy about **asking for more tickets to sell, of course!** People not connected with the school but who have attended our fund raising in the past have enjoyed the atmosphere, the food and drinks, dancing and the auction itself. They have been impressed by it's quality. However, ***the ticket deadline is Feb. 21, 2001 –or before-for returning stubs and money..*** Any difficulties? Talk to the parents who have attended and have been successful in selling tickets or talk to Jim and Yvonne. When stubs are all returned, then we'll be ready for making **table reservations** with your names and those of your guests for the evening.

Why all that trouble?

Like so many other educational institutions, funding by tuition is not enough. In our case, it is to fulfill the requirements of our By-Laws and preserve our quality program, and still keep tuition fees at a reasonable level. As you know, preschool education at its best helps a child construct fundamental attitudes about the excitement of learning – interest, commitment, continuity and expansion. We have, though the years, improved our fund raising so we would only have one per year!! This comes through cooperation and

participation of the families *without overburdening their time, still having an enjoyable evening and making friends through the process.*

However, as you no doubt realize, we still need extra financing. In our case, it is to fulfill the pledge stated in our By-laws, and preserve program quality.

As you know, basic attitudes about one's abilities to learn, about appropriately developing one's body, about differentiating emotions, integrating positive relationships with others and constructing one's own evolving conceptual framework is fundamentally making solid channels in the child's brain in the early years. Still, it is widely ignored or inappropriately attended to. *We can't neglect what we know.* Our annual fund-raiser greatly helps in nurturing this important education.

With our current membership, alumni and some friends of Our School, we know we can accomplish this fund raising goal again. The children in this environment not only deserve this insistence on quality, but their various and unique accomplishments are, every year, a demonstration of potentials fulfilled.

Congratulations to the Litt family on the birth of their new baby Keynian. We wish

them all well and enjoyment of their new baby.

Also **best wishes** to the Braccio-Prinster family who just came back from China with their little adopted son, Christopher.

Thank you: To all of you for bringing breads and fruits which add festivities to the children's snacks; to Libby and Kate for art supplies and books; to Shelly for putting back the shower curtain in the back bathroom; to James for donating a broken toilet seat; for all the faithful classroom co-ops for assisting and cleaning so well (you are making our teachers' job so much easier!).

Many thanks to Lisa for putting out the newsletter in such a clear format and timely fashion. To all parents for being there on their co-op days and assisting very well indeed.

A **very special thank you** for the generous unexpected cash bonus to us (i.e. Jim and Yvonne). We feel very gratified and humble at the same time that our professional knowledge and dedication are so well supported.

On co-oping: When a room parent is making the coop schedule, **only tell her/him the day(s) you absolutely can not coop**, not the day(s) you can, please. Otherwise

the room parent spends a lot of time checking and re-checking with you. The room parent will be very thankful for this cooperation.

Membership: at this point of writing all the sessions for next Fall are practically filled. We only have two openings in the two day session, and two openings in the afternoon session. Tell your friends to call now! **Summer Session Dates are:** July 18 – August 7th.

Additionally, we want to remind you that **Spring Conferences** are coming up... Sign up sheets will be in the parents room early February for **Conference dates** (see **calendar, page 6**).

ShopOurSchool.com: the website set up by Mike Feiman has, to date, generated roughly \$200.00 through online purchases for Our School. Thanks to all of you who are using the site. We encourage you all to use the site. **Remember to shop at ShopOurSchool.com** and tell your family and friends as well!



Board news...

The Our School Board meeting held on January 30th discussed the following items:

FundRaiser updates, i.e, solicitations to date, D.J.options, and ticket sales. Summer Session reminders that if your child attends the summer session (from the four-day class) that he/she will be attending with new children coming up from the three day class. However, it is an option to have your child attend as a precursor to the fall and kindergarten. Student internships which include Amanda Weisberg and Jaime Bremmer.

Teacher's Reflections...

By Jim and Yvonne

Relax, it's only Kindergarten

Kindergarten entrance is traditionally based on chronology, not on development. This poses a problem for parents. What is the sound perspective on which parents can support their child? Development or tradition? What is in the best interest of the child? Obviously following the child's development; because all healthy, comfortable, appropriate school learning resides in the particular

learning tempo of the child's development at all levels, including when and how experiences are integrated within that tempo. A wise and knowledgeable teacher knows that. However, decisions are often made on the basis of myths, on the influence of factors that have nothing to do with a proper assessment: legislators, bureaucrats, and yes, sometimes unwise parents who listen to "expert" relatives, friends and neighbors. After all, the child is five years old and that is all that one needs to know. Or is it?

Every year, starting sometimes even in late fall, parents get anxious about Kindergarten, especially in these last few years. Parents' anxious talk to their children and other adults makes their children anxious, of course. Parents' preoccupation with decision making does too, of course. Then parents visit the new "big girl/boy" school with their children. Or worse, sometimes: they drag them into various schools and put an unwarranted decision making responsibility on a young child still unable to make a reflective judgement on education. "How do you like the school?" some may ask. They may answer, usually with very irrelevant judgements, such as "I like that kid's car, doll..." or possibly "I don't like the

kids,” because they are unknown to them or one yelled, etc. This *child’s* perspective makes sense in terms of their social and cognitive development, but is certainly not a basis for parents’ decisions to enroll their children in any particular school! What do children *understand* about curriculum, its presentation and application? Nothing, of course. It’s hard enough for parents to do, but it’s *their responsibility, isn’t it?*

This kind of preoccupation and anxiety can be intense because of the many choices in the school district, public and private. Understandable. However, young children respond only to their parents’ anxiety level and the enormous fuss about “going to kindergarten”. The more explanations, the more some children have *constructed*, for better or for worse, a model of an experience to come while others memorize the adults’ explanations. The rationale is that it is meant to “prepare” the children for this future experience. From an adult’s point of view, it makes sense. From a child’s, it’s confusing at best or destabilizing at worst. Why? From a developmental perspective, it’s mostly from two interrelated reasons.

One has to do with **experience**, the other with

time. Preschoolers and even most older children make sense of the past and future through **concrete present** experience. It’s as if they lived in a constant moving present because young children’s conceptual ability to analyze and synthesize, (brain abstract constructions), demand a **conscious** reflection of comparison, interconnections and relationships among a variety of observations of events, situations, etc.

Of course, their brains have the potential for that, but the channels are barely emerging in early childhood. For instance, an adult may ask, **“When two marbles go down a slant at different rates of speed, why did that one arrive first?”** A young child may say it’s because of its color (so many experiences with color marbles may follow rather than given her the reasoning to memorize) or she may give a self-centered answer, such as, “Well, she likes it.” An older preschooler with good experience in being able to explore, may still may still explain the phenomenon with a sense perception, such as “because it’s bigger.” He is not yet development ready to analyze subtle comparative properties. **If he is told, he passes the test, his memory is fine. But let’s not be fooled.** To paraphrase

Gardner*, *wise, real knowledge comes from understanding from one’s own construct.*

It also follows that children’s notion **time** is very different from the adult’s. They can grasp accurately a past and future in close proximity to each other, or as a sequence of events.

The more sophisticated balance of thinking is an abstract memorization exercise, not an understanding of the complex, deep structure of time. But the anticipation of far away events (vacation, pregnancy, etc.) is confusing and frustrating for them. It’s somewhat like many adults trying to understand the theory of relativity. The notion of human time takes time to evolve for children. They have a vague notion of long ago, far away, soon. Around four, as they accumulate vocabulary at the speed of light. They may ‘know’ the names of the months, of the week, for instance. But they are memorizing sequences, just like the alphabet or counting to a hundred. Nothing wrong with that.

They have the conventions of ‘knowing’. Let’s not be misled by their marvelous developing linguistic ability. Language is just a series of labels unless content is added.

The wonderful ability to use or manipulate language does not mean one knows what one is talking or writing about! So what's hidden behind the language of time will eventually get to be understood as children gradually move away from their egocentric present in a process similar to what has been described above.

What does this have to do with the Kindergarten's concern? *It means children will know what kindergarten is when they **are in kindergarten!*** It does not mean you should not prepare them to anticipate this new experience. The question is when and how. With *their* notion of time, minimize it now by refraining to talk in front of them or to them. It's enough to say, once they have been told that it's not for a l-o-o-o-n-g time, when summer is almost over.

Emphasize the present, the preschool time, event coming up within the next two or three weeks (just like you do for a forthcoming trip, the announcement of a pregnancy, or any other special event). Avoid making it the event that tops all events. They'll get erroneous expectations. Avoid telling them that they'll learn how to read, write and compute: they'll think they'll be competent in a few days. Imagine the let down! You may mention that they'll learn new things, make new friends.

That is what's most important for them.

“Remember, it is their experience. Yours is that of support and guide.”

Let them play on the playground, visit the bathroom and the cafeteria, see some classrooms. **Then listen to their questions. Listen to their answers to their own questions. Reflect on those with them so you open other possibilities rather than correct them. Listen to their comments, so in turn you may ask questions that are open-ended rather than testing them for the 'right' answers. Remember it is their experience.** Yours is that of support and guide. Then you won't have to re-assure them, or correct them, which may make them more anxious. Try to get acquainted with families that frequent the school before school starts. Children can go together walking or riding.

Custodial tidbits and minor expectations: They are expected to tie their own

shoes and dress themselves. If they can't tie yet –and quite a few can't - get velcro. Get zipping down jackets (not those with zippers stopping at the upper chest!), mittens (forget gloves). Sing the alphabet and count to twenty (most can do that easily). Most can write their names and remember their phone numbers. Play realistic games - not drills- and they will learn quickly. **BUT, PLEASE DO NOT PRESSURE THEM AT ALL.**

In the meanwhile, let's them concentrate in **their present experience**, so they can be committed for the remainder of the year. This is important. Through the years we have seen quite number of children so confused and preoccupied by this distant future that they could not put energy, interest and engagement into their own present. This is wasteful. This is sad. This is not fair to them. Somehow, a part of their constructive childhood is denied to them.

Please, do evolve gently into this new experience.

Preserve their present, because their present is their future.

* John Gardner, Excellence: Can We Be Equal and Excellent

CALENDAR:

Fund raiser meetings (required): All meetings are 7:00-8:30 pm.

Tallying/gift certificates - February 7

Silent Table Items - February 8

Verbal, auctioneers, runners - February 13

Set up/clear-up - February 15

****Fund raising tickets deadline: February 21, 2001**

Open Houses: February 3rd, March 20, April 24, (10:00 to noon)

Seminar/workshop: March 8 & March 14, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

Conferences: March 11, 18, 18 23, and 23rd through April 1st
(a sign in sheet will be available beforehand)

Semi-annual meeting (required) April 11, 7:00-9:00 p.m.

School recess: March 5 (day after auction clear up for teachers)
March 23-March 30 (Spring break)



OUR SCHOOL

Teacher-parent cooperative preschool
756 Cherryvale Road, Boulder, Colorado 80303
