



A Non-Profit Corporation Founded in 1973 756 Cherryvale Rd., Boulder, Colorado 80303 (303) 494-4112

May/June 2005

From The Chair

Goodbye and Welcome

Soon the school will be over for the children in Our School. Soon we'll say goodbye to some families and their children who are on their way to their new venture in Kindergarten. For others it's a temporary goodbye until the Summer Session or the Fall. New families will come with anticipation or a bit of anxiety, for sure. But, as usual, everyone will welcome them and new friendships will develop.

Little by little, new families will absorb what it means, *in practice*, to be part of this school cooperative – its administration, its children and parent educational programs, its fundraiser, and its social events. We try to not give too much information at once, as it can be overwhelming for new members. Still giving too little may also be frustrating. But remember, the school Policies give you some guidelines, Board Officers can steer you some, and the teachers are always available to answer your inquiries and receive your comments.

Membership

At the time of this writing, the Fall Our School sessions are full except for one opening in each session. We predict that these three spaces will be filled shortly. We have had many referrals from our membership at large which greatly helps our Membership Committee. Thank you!

Summer Sessions

These are filling up very quickly. If you intend to register your child, we recommend not delaying any more or the sessions may be full.

Web site

Although you are contacted by your Room Parents by e-mail and phone, remember that you can always consult the Our School web site for upcoming events.

Thank you for bringing bottle caps and corks, and to those of you who bring occasional healthy foods to add variety to the children's snacks.

Library

A special thank you goes to Brook for finding an original version of The Bundle Book, which we had not been able to locate. This is a favorite one for the 2-day session. Please note that the library is closing for the school year on May 20th. Please return all of your books to Jim or Yvonne by that date.

Conversations

By Jim and Yvonne

One area of emphasis in our varied developmental curriculum at Our School is to encourage in children, as they mature cognitively and linguistically, a growing ability and skill in language expression, so they can openly **explore, discuss and exchange** ideas, concerns, events, possibilities, theories and inquiries with peers. This process respects their own understanding and perceptions in their own vocabulary and grammatical structures. The surface expression, such as alleged adult conventional correctness of language, is not a great concern. With good adult models and further language brain development, children make the adjustments naturally without the pressure of imposing corrections. The ability the children need to explore the world meaningfully resides within these young children, in how they can think and understand at that particular time in their lives. The “lessons” provided by adults are reorganized in their heads to make sense out of them. Therefore, children need an environment where spontaneous discussions at their own level can happen frequently. It is even more imperative nowadays than, let’s say, twenty years ago. Why?

Of course, it is the indispensable foundation for later readers. It has to be of great concern to the educators of young children to witness that adult reading, the stimulation of discussing and debating issues thoughtfully with time and knowledge, passion and objectivity, and substantive verbal interaction is becoming a thing of the past. It is increasingly and largely substituted by a variety of electronic media, and in a few written capsules in newspapers and magazines. Are we not becoming as a whole, as some observers have pointed out, a nation of voyeurs and chit-chatters?

Since educators of young children are responsible in developing language and thinking with language, they need to strongly encourage genuine group conversations. Children need peer stimulation to reflect and respect others’ ideas and to debate them without prejudice.

Furthermore, young children cannot be just brain recipients of adult information. When adults and media sources are dogmatic, children often recite back sophisticated information

with adult-like vocabulary and rigidity. They are reluctant to be challenged by others or explore other possibilities (the brain channels are psychologically and cognitively closed) because, naturally, the information they have thus absorbed is “supposed to be correct and true.” They have come to believe these sources are infallible ones that cannot be challenged. This gives them a veneer of knowing, but not an understanding. Adults do that too, don’t they? But adults, if they wish to use it, have the power of analysis to correct perceptions and information, as they realize that knowledge is an infinite search for further understanding. Young children don’t have this ability yet, but need to develop it. Fortunately, within an environment that is open and interested in young children’s own level of maturity in understanding, they quickly become **explorers** of ideas. This means their

brains get stimulated and, through this process, grow channels of thinking possibilities articulated verbally in a language that is **their own (they are not miniature adults, after all)**. Eventually, given this opportunity early, children, in their own maturing time, can develop the ability to reflect on, research, analyze and critique their own and other sources of information.

For this segment of curriculum to be successful, what do we need to mostly consider for open discussion to take place with young children?

First of all, **the level of maturity**: the younger or less mature the child, the more naturally egocentric the communication. A typical “conversation” may go like this: child one, “I have a truck”; child two, “I went to the zoo”; child three, “My shirt is red.” The teacher-facilitator has to assess which topic is the most likely to be of general interest, therefore, away from egocentricity. Then it may be extended, even for a minute, to engage children to participate spontaneously. No rising of hands – for they will fail to listen to the child speaking in their eagerness to be self-gratified. The facilitator again has to quickly assess as to when a speaking turn is needed. Equal time is not as important as a worthy contribution.

Second of all, to encourage **openness of exploration**: a) there is no taboo topic; b) the discussions emerge from a child’s or children’s comment or observation and are not dictated by the teachers; c) there is no judgment of “right” or “wrong” from



the teacher/facilitator, so discussion can flow and children are not second guessing the adult; d) children are encouraged to avoid the categorical “I know” and “I have a good idea,” in favor of “I think” and “I have an idea,” so explorations of perceptions, ideas, etc. are not stifled; e) as they are coming close to four years old and egocentricity is less intense, they need support in exploring others’ ideas by asking questions on those ideas, by challenging their own or another’s information and not just making statements of their own; f) it is wise for the facilitator to start interjecting reflective “shades of gray,” that is, various ways of looking at issues, possibilities, solutions and consequences, because at four-and-a-half they may still perceive the world in black or white, right or wrong. This challenge starts as a foundation to the reflection process.

It’s not unusual around that age to start hearing topics discussed with passion, but without rigidity, and for children to be focused for over twenty minutes at a time. Then the teacher-facilitator helps with keeping children in focus and still takes into account warranted tangents, keeping the tone of voices conversational, balancing passion and uncontrollable excitement. The facilitator has to assess when to slow the flow of the conversation and when to let it go. The facilitator may do so by interrupting the flow to ask for a repetition or some clarification or again by introducing a non-judgmental but necessary challenge to an idea put forth by wondering and inviting other possibilities.

We want to reemphasize that there is no taboo topic. Most often, besides current events, children’s topics deal with theories on birth, death, sickness, trips, rules and punishments, the universe and more. For instance, a child may say, “My goldfish DIED!” Many questions and comments about how and why will then be put forth. Typically another may ask “Where is your fish now?” The frequent answer is, “In heaven.” Teacher, “What’s heaven?” Some may say in outer space, in the clouds, there’s no such thing, it’s special for goldfish, etc. The child may strongly reiterate the goldfish *is* in heaven. The teacher may say, “How did it get there?” Children may explain means of locomotion – spirit, angel, ghost, rocket, fly, etc. in a variety of ways. Teacher may ask, “What does the goldfish do there?” Again, children are not short of ideas – swim again, play with friends, watch me, etc. You know it’s going to be concrete (even spirits are) and related to the experience they know, and, in this example, always coming to a full cycle because physical death is not (fortunately still for their mental health) forever.

We hope this can somewhat complement your understanding of conversation with children: its seriousness, complexity and the need to enjoy their intelligence.



Board of Directors Update

Our School’s fiscal year runs from July to June. Our last Board meeting for this year is at the end of May. Our Executive Board was elected last April at our Semi-Annual membership meeting. These officers need interested individuals to complete the Board of Directors for the 2005-2006 school year. **Contact the Chair (Yvonne) if you are interested in getting involved.**

The Executive Board is comprised of the Chairperson or President (chairs most meetings, makes Board agendas, makes sure the Policies, Bylaws and the procedures and consensus are respected), the Treasurer (keeps the finances in order and prepares a yearly budget for the Board of Directors), the Secretary (keeps record of meetings, writes letters as needed), and the Membership Officers (two people, membership chair and assistant, who recruit and contact prospective families.)

The full **Board** includes the Fundraiser (chair(s) oversee all activities relating to the Our School Annual Fundraiser), Newsletter (add information to be communicated to the membership, edit staff’s article, and format the newsletter in a readable and attractive fashion, add other features with Board or Chair approval), the Web site (maintains school’s website, updating as needed) and each session’s room parents. The Room Parents’ responsibilities for their session are: scheduling co-op days, contacting parents for various meetings and socials, and regularly communicating with their session’s families to pass along information, inform them of coming events and meetings, direct them to the appropriate Officer for any issue, concern, etc. or for any help their families may need for car pools, exchanging baby sitting for younger siblings for co-op days, and making those parents comfortable with each other so they may develop friendships if they so desire. They make a report to and seek advice from the Board to keep their families accurately informed. The Board may add other officers as the need arises.

All board meetings, normally held the last Tuesday of the month, are open to the membership; except if there is possible confidential matter to be discussed. The Board Minutes are kept in the Parents’ Room for anyone’s inspection.

C A L E N D A R

May

- May 17 Orientation Meeting for new families for fall 2005 and those who missed it in 2004-2005 (no children)
- May 22 School Picnic – 4-7 p.m.
Leaving, returning and new fall 2005 children and families welcome. Takes place in the school yard. It's a pot luck (bring food enough for your family and 4 more. Bring your own drinks and table setting; school toilets and water available.)
- May 26 2-day session meeting
- May 30 Memorial Day, no school
- May 31 Last Board meeting

June

- June 3 Last Day of School

Summer session

July 18 – August 5

Fall Session Start

- August 29 — Sept. 2 Orientation week for Our School students— more info to come
- September 5 Labor Day Holiday
- September 6 Regular school session begins

- All meetings are from 7:00 – 9:00 pm at Our School Preschool unless otherwise noted. Please plan to attend the whole meeting.
- Meetings are for parents only unless otherwise noted.



Hot Off The Press

The 3-day session visits the
Cherryvale Fire Department—
May 16.