



OUR SCHOOL

teacher-parent cooperative

A Non-Profit Corporation Founded in 1973

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November/December 2001

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From the Chair

The fall semester is, as usual, but still to our constant surprise, moving along very quickly.

All children in all sessions are engaged, in their own fashion, at their own tempo. In the very young session, separation is a minor affair, and we hear, "My school!" "No, mine!" rather than "When is Mommy coming?"

Now their exploration of things and people is getting more focused, constructive, creative and varied. They are starting to shift their strong connection with adults and, as one would expect, are intrigued by people like themselves. In the three-morning session, even the new children are getting more socially responsible and still autonomous. We believe this is due to the modeling of the children that attended the younger session last year, the vigilance of the teachers and also the increasing knowledge of the parents. Teachers can nurture the constructive observations these young children are making about

the properties of material and how they see other children play with this variety of material. Children's dramas in play have more continuity and expansion. Their social contacts are increasingly complementary; therefore, they mutually stimulate one another in taking creative risks. The older children can now plan their activities for days at a time and follow through—expanding interactively with substantial concepts, cooperating with others and negotiating. We'll discuss this in more detail at the session meetings.

Parents are always welcome to come observe the growth and continuity of this educational setting and how the children are engaged. Observe how teachers may or may not set limits and how they encourage further exploration and investigation in all aspects of curriculum. Be ready to ask any questions and make comments, because they will professionally answer with your understanding in mind.

Fundraiser Update: Thanks to everyone's cooperation and the diligence of the steering committee, our fundraiser is moving along well. The kickoff party was not only well attended, but parents seemed to enjoy it as well, even the "mini-fundraiser," which brought in about \$140. Thank you all!

We would like to reiterate that the fundraiser is very important to Our School, and everybody's cooperation is crucial. Let's not forget: there is great satisfaction in meeting the

school's financial goals and having an enjoyable time that evening.

Please remember:

1. The final composition of the committees will be posted soon in the Parents' Room. A few people may have been shifted to a different committee than what you signed up for. These adjustments are not done capriciously, but to ensure we have the resources each committee needs. If you have any questions, contact Yvonne or Ruth Johnson.
2. The **required training meeting dates** for the fundraising committees will be announced soon and posted in the Parents' Room. **We ask that you attend the required training meeting. If you're unable to attend, you may have to be shifted to work on another committee, and you'll still be required to attend the training meeting of the committee you have been shifted to.** These meetings are important for organization, collaboration and the smooth running of the event. They do not last more than 1 hour.
3. **Business solicitations are due by December 14. Personal donations are due February 1.** Respecting these deadlines greatly helps the process of collecting and cataloging items and services. Any questions? Ask Ruth Johnson.

4. We are still looking for one or two popular items for our raffle. Contact Yvonne or Ruth if you have something in mind as soon as possible.

(You can learn more about the fundraiser on our Web site: www.ourschoolpreschool.org.)

Thank you: We profoundly thank three Our School families who each donated \$1,000 to buy needed items. Most of this will go towards a new refrigerator, an ultraviolet machine to keep our water safe, some art brushes, kitchen blinds, and much needed new shelving for children's material.

Thanks very much to all of you who have provided fruit and bread to supplement children's snacks.

Let's not forget the outside table in the sandbox! You've seen the new cubes and ladders in the playground. Many, many thanks to James Johnson. See the children building confidence and muscles out there! Thanks to James again for keeping our plumbing in good order.

Class Meetings: Do you want to know what is going on with the children and ask us some questions? Plan to attend the two-day session meeting on Wed., Dec. 5; the three-day session meeting on Wed., Dec. 12; and the four-day session meeting on Thu., Jan. 10.

Membership: Please respect the deadlines for returning children and siblings to ensure they have placements for next fall. We have "reserved" these spots, so if your child is not returning, we need to know NOW. After the deadlines, we contact prospective families on the waiting list. Any questions? Contact Yvonne.

Web Site: Visit Our School's Web site at:
www.ourschoolpreschool.org

The Web Committee did a great job. Also, when shopping on the Web, don't forget to visit www.ShopOurSchool.com. The merchants listed give anywhere from 1-20% of online purchases to Our School.

Share-a-Gift: Our School participates in this secular program every year. The organization accepts toys, things on wheels, books, etc., anything for infants to teens, for children in need. There is a box in the Parent's Room for your donations. Items may be used or new, but should be clean and in good condition. **Think of things your children have outgrown. It will give hours of pleasure to children who otherwise will do without during the holiday season. The deadline is Dec. 12.**

School Needs: Soft wood for nailing, hard wood for gluing, underpants, and mat boards.

Teacher's Reflections

by Jim Heaney and Yvonne Mayer

The Infinite Artichoke

Many years ago, a parent who had several children in the School, participated in many seminars and was an active Board member remarked, "Early education at Our School is like an artichoke. No matter how many petals you remove, there are always more behind." We have found it to be a relevant metaphor.

Children are as complex as adults are, if not more. But to make sense out of their logic, their child questions, their intelligence and how they interpret what their environments provide is an infinite task—a few petals of knowledge are removed, but there are always more beneath.

Adults often believe children think and act more or less like adults but in a more primitive form. Therefore, all we need to do is

break down the adults' concepts in more simple elements and a young child will "understand." Or adults often believe that a child who can repeat an adult's explanation "understands" its meaning. So adults' descriptions bombard a child with verbal information. Does it mean that by diminishing our reliance on verbal interaction with children that we are permitting "nature" to do the job of raising and educating children? Does it mean a child is left to his or her own devices? Of course not! It means that adults can realize that there is a difference between a child's cognition and an adult's, and that an adult can potentially respect that difference. The acknowledgment of that difference leaves room for a child to construct her own understanding, to discover, invent, theorize and blossom in her own way. This is the same as respecting the physical differences, skills and limitations of growing children. Here is an example:

Two children are using wooden attribute blocks (small trapezoids, exagons and triangles) expanding from four circles in the center into six directions, all matching lines. Apparently, it is a 'spider' with a 'head' at the center.

If you're a three-and-a-half-year-old child, it makes *absolute sense*. However, adults may only see the geometry or the lack of accuracy in the "real" design. While the adults are technically correct, they may be tempted to point out the "error" or comment on the design. After all, these blocks are arranged in a perfect relationship and matching fashion. But the teacher has to think, "Is it the appropriate *time* to intervene?" and say, "How many legs does the spider have?" or "Do you know spiders are not insects?" "Where are the eyes of the spider?" or again, "I'm a fly, you're a spider. Catch me!" "What kind of spider do you have? Some sting, some have webs," etc.

All of these are opportunities to inform or give drama to the play. But have the children given clues to that effect? It is imperative to have observed, or interventions will break the children's focus, and the adult's focus will take over. Didn't the children's minds demonstrate—through play—a basic understanding of the general structure, characteristics and aesthetic of a spider? Remember these are not five-year-olds! Doesn't it make child-sense that the attribute blocks were representing a spider creatively according to a young child's understanding? Why abstract it for them? Why add drama? Why add information now? These kinds of questions and more are in the minds of teachers when evaluating if, when and how an intervention is necessary.

In the spider example, the children used the material creatively because they had observed the geometric possibilities (in a sensory way) and created their own notion of a spider. With more experience, maturity, further observations, and appropriate timing of teachers' interventions, these three-year-olds will be able to integrate more abstract "spider" subject matter and dramatic inventions without stifling their curiosity, interest and creativity.

For such young children, nothing could be more intelligent and original as this thinking and doing, just a single petal of the artichoke, among many others, for adults to discover.

Another aspect of early childhood curriculum—another petal to uncover—is social learning, young child's style. Human beings are a biological and social species, which means newborns require much love and nurturing from adults to survive. At birth, they open up to their first experience with a particular social environment. At first, they need to be relieved from distress immediately. As their needs are physiologically and emotionally

met on a routine basis, and their nervous system matures, very young children can gradually delay gratification. From experience, they know their needs will be met eventually or be restricted consistently. Though this socialization process is not quite understood, we know it is one that slowly evolves and reaches its peak during the early childhood years. This provides a foundation for more sophisticated social development.

The baby, and then the toddler, confronts the reality of his social world, the life struggle in this society between autonomy and social responsibility, how one is "supposed to" behave, and the "rights and wrongs" of his immediate environment. Then, during the preschool years, his social development demands a variety of peer contacts to satisfy this need of an expanded socialization, together with other pertinent early childhood experiences.

When teachers are educators, another process needs to be part of a well-designed curriculum. Socialization that started with the family becomes intertwined with that of being socially educated.

"It has to be recognized that in the every day life of a young child no arbitrary distinction can be made between activities tending to educate and those tending to socialize. The same activity may involve both processes. The inseparable nature of the two processes in practice, however, does not mean that the concepts are inseparable. It is most important for the teacher in fact, to separate these concepts and appreciate the implications of each; for...conceptual confusion can lead to extremely dubious practice."

This quote is from Lesley Webb, the only educational philosopher who has examined and researched this

important aspect of education for young children. To understand these two concepts—acculturation and education—we'll quote her at length:

"[Socialization is], like education, a process; it involves the child's introjection (or internalization) of attitudes... Its aim appears to be the child's appreciation of morality as is understood by the existing society. This learning is 'monitored' to the child via parental attitudes... it is, in fact, from the tone of voice, facial expression, what is not said, and from blame and praise from some specific behaviors that a child learns to be a 'good' member of society or a 'bad' one. A child is set in a particular matrix of custom, manners and belief according to where (he/she) is born... Being successfully socialized will depend not on any objective criteria but solely on the standards of those judging you. A socialized man, however, cannot be other than fitted to his own society, and it is obvious that that society can be primitive, sophisticated, or downright immoral by objective evaluation and its citizens still very well socialized within its terms."

The aim of socialization is instrumental. It serves any given family and/or society, and of course, children need society as much as society needs them. This gives individuals a sense of roots, of belonging and cultural continuity. In a democratic environment, where a balance between individual freedom and social responsibility is a prevailing value, one has to expect contradictions, rebellions, testing situations, questions and challenges. Therefore, the task of socializing and educating children is a most difficult one. In an authoritarian family or society, the educational process is minimal.

The purpose of education, one would hope, is to open children to the variety of subject matter—to a constellation of possibilities, investigations, examinations and understandings as soundly objective as possible. For teachers developing a social learning curriculum, it means that they *have to be very knowledgeable* to be credible about what develops a universally moral person, because as Webb writes, "...there are totally immoral societies, and immoralities within most societies." They have to examine, criticize, accept or reject their own integrated behaviors, attitudes and values while they do the same for other social expressions foreign to their own. From sociological, anthropological, psychological, linguistic, early childhood and other research, some universal human standards guide teachers to educate children away from prejudice, especially in the early years when the world is perceived in black and white, and social attitudes get integrated.

"Teachers of young children have a greater responsibility than most for attempting evaluation of their society, for it is they who are its first official representatives to be in daily contact with children outside their families."

Preschool teachers need to follow

children's social development readiness and question society's dictates. They have to persistently keep in mind, even in the most mundane children's activities, these questions that Webb poses: "What kind of society are we preparing them for?", which implies, "What kind of social individuals are they becoming?"

For example, a boy spills water at the snack table. "I'm sorry," he says and resumes eating. Another has the same accident: "I'll get a towel to wipe it off." A girl is shoving another girl to get through the hallway. The latter protests by crying, "You are not nice." The first girl says, "Sorry." Same incident: the second girl says, "Go around me. That will work." The first girl replies, "Sorry. Did I hurt you? Do you need some help?"

From these simple examples, it's easy to see who is merely being socialized and who is getting socially educated. In an open society such as ours, which prides itself on educating its children in a variety of subjects, the process of socially educating children is quite neglected in preschool centers.

This is in great part because teachers have not reflected on these two different social concepts and therefore their importance in developing attitudes toward the self and the world.

"Attitudes, reflected in and reinforced for the next generation by child-rearing practices, can be more important than any naive, ignorant or unsophisticated customs and 'quaint' artifacts. Attitudes toward the other sex, towards certain forms of work, in regard to property, the place of individuality and one's appropriate place as rival, equal or superior with (a) group of peers are deep-seated and rarely rational—probably because (the attitudes were) internalized in very early childhood. Yet these attitudes can dictate a whole lifestyle, and give rise to rationalization of a highly complex order, which seems to justify it."

As is often demonstrated at Our School, differentiating these two concepts and acting upon them is an important focus. Failing to do so and still call it "education" would be cynical, dishonest and irresponsible.

Calendar

- Dec. 5**, 2-day session mtg., 7-8:30 p.m.
- Dec. 8**, Open House, 10 a.m.-noon
- Dec. 12**, 3-day sess. mtg., 7-8:30 p.m.
- Dec. 18**, Board meeting, 7-9 p.m.
- Dec. 24-Jan. 6**, Winter recess
- Jan. 7**, School resumes
- Jan. 10**, 4-day sess. mtg., 7-8:30 p.m.