

* *From the Chair* *

by Yvonne & Jim

It's amazing to witness the cooperative support generated to make Our School Fund Raiser successful. Not only does it meet its financial goal, but when all the working efforts come together on Auction night, it turns into a lovely party for all: good friends, good food, good wine and beer, and good company ~ all make bidding easy and worthwhile.

On behalf of young children *all deserve a great big thank you*: member families including teachers, relatives and friends, alumni and the business community. It demonstrates that advocacy does not stop at one's child but touches all Our School children.

Most schools have fund raisers. Some get subsidies from other sources. If they don't, or do not do fund raising sufficiently or at all they end up with a low quality program. This is true for college education all the way down to that of preschool. For some, quality early education is not viewed as an imperative priority no matter what studies and research demonstrate, so they opt for lower cost settings. Our School is devoted to the best quality program and does not get subsidies, ergo fund raising. No one is naïve enough to think that tuition rates are financially enough to cover costs. *Thus our fund raiser can keep tuition costs at a reasonable level for all, still with provision for further financial assistance for families in real need and a few items costs not covered by the yearly budget.* Consequently, Our School is fair to all, does not accumulate debts, has a diversity of population, and provides rich material to stimulate children with teachers who know their field thoroughly: Our School Fund Raiser benefits all.

If you have not seen the financial results yet, look on the coat room window.

A list of Donors are included in this newsletter ~ please patronize our very generous donors!

Sunscreen Reminder:

We are going to be able to go outside longer, weather permitting! Whether sunny or not, either bring children with sunscreen already applied (Tell us or have your driver tell us. Do not ask the children to tell us: their notion of time is not an adult's; therefore their reports may not be reliable!); or if not possible, leave your favorite sunscreen at school with the child's name on it. Otherwise, we will have to sunscreen her or him before they go outside. To be safe, only adults are authorized to sunscreen children.

Please... please... hats that shadow the face: protect head and face skin and especially eyes from future diseases: enough studies show that prevention from the Colorado sun (visible or not, hot or not) from babyhood on resides in parents' responsibility for the future health of their children.

Reflections by Yvonne

Why Not A Model?

Many prospective parents ask: "What is your philosophy and pedagogical *model*?" Sometimes they mention some. "No," is the answer. Why?

Once there is an *educational model* the assumption is that this is the definite one from which children learn best and is rarely challenged. It's reassuring. It relieves parents' anxieties, as it seems that the model has the all the answers. Does it take into account the many individual ways, styles, tempos and interests of individual children? It's hardly possible when it is fixed in a locked box with specific pedagogical compartments in which children need to, or have to conform to be molded in a particular way of learning and thinking within the box. Models' advocates have convincing rationales unless one is inclined to sort out the reassuring conventions from contradictions. Some model boxes may expand more than others thus attempting to meet some individual differences, but the model is philosophically and pedagogically fixed and needs to prevail. Most children are easily influenced and eventually fit into the model box. When a given child does not fit in, that child or the family is often blamed, but not the model.

Many preschool models claim to be child-centered, and they may be...within the confines of their boxes. Curricula and observations are colored through a fixed perspective; even sound research is rejected, or twisted



to fit in the box. Even elementary schools have boxes: chronology is the main criterion; a child is five years old, she goes to kindergarten with other five years old and all are "taught" the same subject matter at the same time and same way whether appropriate or not for any given child. Does Our School reject models? Not totally; some may have some genuine idea to retain. Are these models harmful? Yes, when they channel the learning direction restrictively. Some still adhere to the erroneous fact that a young child is a miniature adult with an empty brain to be filled by adults' didactic information, and thus ignoring that children have different perspectives, understandings and logic from adults ~ hard for those adults to reckon with and respect.

Is any education a science? To a certain extent as many studies and surveys have come to light since the 1950's and on, including now brain research. Therefore we need to be cautiously skeptical of models because early childhood educators (and all education) need to be open-ended, on the alert to examine new research and studies, and be adaptable to objectively reassess their philosophical and pedagogical premises.

Is it an art? Yes, *if* the educators know relevant subject matter well; *if* they are open to let children explore infinite possibilities, and have diverse interests in interaction with play material used creatively and intelligently, not as a series of isolated tasks that restrict imagination and connections, nor "projects" that short change process, or superficial play activities; *if* they respect each child's own pace and understanding as their guide is general and specific in child development; *if* they have learned themselves that socialization is acculturation, while education in the social context needs to transcend the socialization process to avoid the pitfall of bias and prejudice of one's society; *if* the quality of the process of doing and interacting determine the quality of learning.

With these general guidelines in science and art, one precise and factual, the other open-ended and extended in knowledge and practice, we include David Hawkins' thoughtful reflection that teaching is "teaching values." What are they?

Advocacy

Our School first value is a total *advocacy* for children. It follows it would be a contradiction for us to adopt or clone set models and methods because they distort the growing individual's intelligence of a child; that Our School has resisted fads in the past and now outside academic oriented pressures from many quarters that proclaim teaching "academic skills" in the preschool years will assure academic success in the later ones. Preschool age is a time to gradually discover what it is to be human among other humans, the world of nature and objects. It is the time they learn about various environments according to their own theoretical and interactive understanding. Do those people out there believe that they have the right to violate this early part of development and box young children in a narrow box of academic training on the erroneous assumption that it is all that counts? When then is the time for young children to evolve into -cognitively, physically, socially and emotionally- individuals, when we *know* the early years are the most opportune time to support these various developments? When early childhood is gone we can't go back for a re-play, ever. Advocacy is to know this and act on it.

Play

A second value is respecting *play* as the legitimate

creative context of learning for young children to make sense of the world around them. It follows that at Our School, the environment abounds in material that offers a great amount of creative possibilities for singular or peer interactive stimulation. An astute observer can detect how much children's play informally includes a hidden foundation of academic nature: oral and written language connections, number sequences, subtraction, additions, sets and patterns, quantity, size and volume, objects' properties, theoretical assumptions, etc. that meets each one level of ability, skill and understanding. It is not abstracted from play; it is in the core of the play without drill or adult lessons.



Observe

A third value is *observations, observations, and constant observations* of children to understand how each one thinks, interacts and evolves in their continuous present. All phases of developmental growths are integrated in teachers' observations. It follows that these present observations derive from the clues children reveal in play; from them teachers reflect and assess whether interventions or guidance is needed: in ability, skills, opportunities for further exploring their own possibilities, or positive interactions. Observations can guide teachers to leave things alone as the play is flowing smoothly: children are self-directed, autonomous and responsible in their initiatives and provide creative extensions of their own.

Social

A fourth value which is of the utmost importance in the early years (as touched upon in the second paragraph) is the social aspect of development of a young child, an evolution from birth on and at its peak between 2 1/2

and 6 years of age. It follows that teachers need to know, understand and practice the interwoven aspect of both *socialization and social education*. They need to know cultural anthropology and social psychology to examine the various possibilities in being a social human in a world of human beings, both destructive and positive and shades in between. After all, each society lives in its own box of prejudice and biases. Teachers recognize that children perceive the social world in two boxes, black and white and their educational responsibility is to gradually introduce in play and informal discussions shades of gray so children may reflect on the value of positive interaction. No topic is taboo. Teachers always weigh the balance of each child's autonomy and that of social responsibility that is valued in a democratic educational setting and society as well.

Many more values are included but these primarily ones for developing an appropriate *curriculum in retrospect*: most of the teachers' thinking and eventual structure are off stage, so to speak, to be ready for the children's coming present which everyday brings continuity or change, extension or surprises. Yes, it's complex, but we never forget that part of our responsibility is to support parents in this understanding so they may be the best advocates for young children's educational needs.

We do oppose models with didactic premises and set objectives which attempt to *mold* children in a particular adult academic training or pedagogical closed perspectives that stress various accumulated isolated tasks with adults in main control and exclude fantasy, expressive art, impromptu music and insight. We oppose also the custodial view of play labeled "fun" that is chaotic, repetitive and superficial with little regard and understanding of play as a real learning medium. Both devalue the profound, serious, humorous, enjoyable, at times elating and at times frustrating aspect of play as envisaged at Our School. We are most concerned with young children building a foundation that is more than likely to evolve into autonomous but still socially responsible and caring individuals, cognitively and emotionally healthy, with solidly grounded creative personalities who enjoy creating their own learning for learning sake.

To back up our perspective, here are recent findings by Rebecca Marcon* which confirm previous studies, such as a longitudinal one by Weickart (Michigan State), among others:

"Children's school success appears to be enhanced by more active, child-initiated learning Experiences. Their long term progress may be slowed by overly academic preschool experiences that introduce formalized learning experiences too early for most children's developmental status. Pushing children too soon may actually backfire when children move into the later elementary school grades and are required to think more independently and taking on greater responsibility for their own learning processes."

Moving up the Grades: Relationship between Preschool Model and Later School Success. Full text available at Our School with a load of references (please: do not take home)

* a developmental psychologist and professor of psychology at the University of North Florida



Membership:

Sessions are filling. So far we have three openings in the 2-day session, three in the 3-day, and one in the 4-day session. This only counts families that have signed membership agreements for 2008-2009 school year. It does not include families who have filled applications, but have not signed membership agreements so far. At this point, it's first come, first served; Open Houses and chance encounters have been successful: please send prospective families.

Thanks so much to those family members who have come to the Open Houses. They have been great advocates for the school and their children have enjoyed coming.

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

Thursday, April 17th is the Semi-Annual Meeting. It's a Required meeting, and at least one parent from each family needs to attend.

Wednesday, May 14th is the Orientation Meeting. This is a Required meeting for all New families, and Current Families with new children starting in the fall.

Sunday, May 18th is the annual Potluck Picnic at Our School. Bring your picnic blanket, enough plates and utensils for your family, drinks for your family, and a dish to share, enough to feed your family plus 4!

Yard Sale!

This year, Grand Rabbit's was an especially generous donor to our Fundraiser. They donated many toys and books which we had for purchase in the Group Room during Spring Break. The items that weren't purchased that week will be sold at a yard sale, benefitting Our School, at Peter and Christa Grundy's home in Erie on Friday and Saturday May 30-31. Stop by for more great shopping, and if you'd like to donate any other items to the yard sale, let us know!. Please have all items priced and ready to sell!

Volunteers are needed to help out with set-up and helping out during the sale!!!

Christa Grundy ~ christa.grundy@gmail.com / Brook Gerace ~ danbrookgerace@msn.com

Thank You!

... for the donation of snack food (cereals and special items), for the bathroom paper cups, puzzles, garbage can, and the various beer and bottle caps for the children's collages, and books.

2008 Spring Semester Calendar of Events:

APRIL

- 17 **SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING - REQUIRED**
- 19 Open House (Families Welcome!) 10a.m.-12p.m.
- 29 Board Meeting

MAY

- 3 Open House (Families Welcome!) 10a.m.-12p.m.
- 5 3-Day Session Meeting
- 8 2-Day Session Meeting
- 14 **ORIENTATION ~ *REQUIRED** of *New Families & Returning Families with New Children*
- 17 Open House (Families Welcome!) 10a.m.-12p.m.
- 18 **ALL SCHOOL PUTLUCK PICNIC** (All Families Welcome!)
- 20 4-Day Session Meeting
- 25 NO SCHOOL - Memorial Day
- 27 Board Meeting
- 31 Our School Yard Sale
Open House (Families Welcome!) 10a.m.-12p.m.

JUNE

- 5 Last Day of School: 2-Day & 4-Day Sessions
- 6 Last Day of School: 3-Day Sessions

All Meetings start at 7:00p.m. and are at Our School unless otherwise noted. Meetings are for parents only unless labeled as All School or Families Welcome. Required meetings are noted. Seminars and Session Meetings are recommended. Board Meetings are open to all members.