



OUR SCHOOL TEACHER-PARENT COOPERATIVE

OUR SCHOOL PRE-SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

NOV-DEC 2006

✧ From the Chair ✧



Thank You!

*A great big thank you
for your support and
patience. Thanks to all
who gave extra time
toward moving,
painting, and preparing
the school for the
children.*



Many thanks, on behalf of children, to those who generously supported the school with your much needed financial contributions for the new site. Your support provides a future for Our School Preschool children and demonstrates a belief and a trust that Our School is a worthy environment for young children.

The children, new and returning, have been comfortable in the inside and outside space. They have been moving easily from one area to another without hesitation. A very good sign!

In both morning sessions, children have been interested in playing with the material and making some social contact, even if fleetingly, with their peers. Children in the 2-day morning session come to group time easily, and without fear of talking about what comes to their minds. Impressive! In the 3-day morning session, the returning and new children are already getting integrated as a unit. They know each other's names and have adapted to the routine without difficulty.

The afternoon children have been talking about the "old" school and the "new" school on and off. They speak of this in a matter-of-fact way, without nostalgia, simply making comparisons and articulating differences, and recalling some memories: "Who lives there?" "Why don't they have the sand box?" "They probably don't have children." "I remember the yellow trucks in the sand box, but we have them in the new school now." They all are comfortable with each other, and so far, not a single outstanding conflict has emerged that would prevent learning through social play.



Parents may notice that the pangs of separation have practically vanished, even in the 2-day session. Most parents seem to recognize the children's conflicts between a quest for independence and for preserving the *status quo*. Parents have reduced anxiety about letting the children go on their own and have developed trust in the teachers' ability to help their children meet the challenge of independence and growth.



Reflections

Teachers and Learners by Jim and Yvonne

Perhaps the greatest of pedagogical fallacies is the notion that the person learns only the particular thing he is studying at the time. Collateral learning in the way of formation of enduring attitudes, of likes and dislikes, maybe and often is much more important than the spelling lesson or lesson in geography or history that is learned. For these attitudes are fundamentally what counts in the future.

Experience and Education, John Dewey, 1963

One important role of the teachers at the onset of the school year is to set the appropriate “social tone”, one without favoritism, prejudice or conformity to arbitrary rules of conventions. Rather, teachers provide a climate of positive and individual expectations, models of mutual respect, and discrete guidance through children’s *genuine interests* and *engagement* in a variety of subject matter while they interact with peers. Failure in interaction with the human and object environment is not considered a defeat, nor is success considered a miraculous event either.

In failure, children are encouraged to take the risk in trying again and therefore persevere, or again take further risks in exploring and investigating other related possibilities. (More adult-like logical self-examination from children will have to wait for more maturity.)

When children’s efforts end up in success, their faces shine with self-approval at their growing intelligent competency,

do we clap hands in approval? Do we give special rewards? It is unlikely. In failure, do we make reproaches? Do we avoid the issue by distraction? Do we find excuses for their failures? This, too, is unlikely.

Role of the teacher-recognition and approval

Low key recognition and appraisal from teachers (or other adults) may be needed and tailored to the new competency. Note though, that their success will be robbed from them by too much applause, outstanding approval, or material rewards. Approval and recognition may be silent, as in a smile. It may involve simply listening to the child. Or, may be the child’s clues calls for an evaluation. It depends.

Failure to succeed may be due to inattention or distraction, lack of knowledge of subject matter in relation to material, or a simply accidental. It depends. It might be due to difficulty in focusing, fatigue, and preoccupation or, simply lack of interest. We may not assume we know for sure the cause

without more information and further observations. Perhaps or perhaps not a silent or a discrete partnership can help with re-focusing, perhaps another material is more appropriate for the undertaking or, perhaps the child does not have any clues about the properties or the constructive possibilities of the material in use. It depends.

Role of the teacher-intervention and influence

We have many “it depends.” Teachers intervene, or do not, by having worthy professional information, which includes the knowledge of each child’s development and experience, relevant knowledge of subject matter applicable to early childhood, and a wealth of keen and accurate observations of the child’s interactions with the social and material environment. Each day, each year, each moment children are learning through their play and contact with the school environment, we add to our particular knowledge of preschoolers’ styles and interests in learning.

Our responsibility -which we delight in and are challenged by- is to ensure that the on-going process of learning is positive, creatively intelligent, and worthwhile so that students will acquire a solid foundation for future times. It is a given then, that teachers carefully provide social and object relationships which include variety, multiple possibilities and challenges to children’s imaginations.

Parents have a great influence on the values children acquire, followed by teachers. Though, let’s not forget additional influences: other individuals in authority, the electronic media, no doubt, and even books, practically in that order. All, depending on contact, influence children’s learning in values and understandings, some for the better, and some for the worse. In turn, a young child interprets these influences by assimilation (“it’s *congruent* with my present understanding,”) or, with accommodation (“I have to *adjust* my former understanding to this external demand to find a new stability”) or, distortion (“I have to *change* this external

demand to meet my current understanding”) or, possibly rejection (“It makes absolutely no sense to me; do I memorize this or forget it?”) Once this process becomes established, it becomes the child’s learning style.

Role of the teacher-understanding learners and unbiased observation

Teachers need to be extremely aware of preschoolers’ current state of understanding and more particularly of each child’s actual maturity and experience. Preschoolers need to be challenged but not overwhelmed. Adults often assume that when children are fluent in their native language or when children explain clearly, then their brains accommodate easily. Adults may also assume this fluency gives children the matching *conceptual* comprehension that is seemingly close enough to the adult level. Of course, it can never be.

The young child’s world is *very sense oriented, interactive, concrete and perceptually interpretative, that is, non-objective*. Well-intentioned “lessons” or abstract explanations for instance, may be in great part ineffective, except as memorization exercises. On the other hand, a Platonic approach is more effective as genuine dialogues can give the teachers on-going clues of the young child’s present and accurate state of comprehension.

It is imperative to gather *unbiased observations* for further clues from children in interaction with their environment. These unbiased observations give teachers precise certainty for correct timing as to when to *intervene (or not)*, so the process of self-learning through play is enhanced and extended rather than trivialized, distracted or distorted by inappropriate or irrelevant play *interferences*. Good “teaching” greatly depends on those two factors.





DECEMBER BRIEFS & CALENDAR-AT-A-GLANCE

DEC 9
Dad's Co-op
Saturday

DEC 15
Fundraiser
Biz Donations Due

DEC 21
School is
Closed

JAN 3
School
Resumes

MAR 3
Auction
2007

Saturday Session with Fathers

Both morning classes have had a Saturday session where the family non co-ops, mostly fathers, attended with their children. The relationships between the adults and children at play were unobtrusive and on the whole complimentary. Co-ops were observant which allowed the children to follow their imaginations and explore with freedom. Children did not make strong demands on their fathers by clinging or commanding. The well attended Saturday sessions have been relaxing and without conflict. Four-day session students will have their Saturday session on December 9th.

Fundraiser Thanks and Update

Thanks so much to Shelly and David Scholtz for being the wonderful hosts of this year's Fundraiser Kickoff party. Thank you to all the families that have been willing to do more than the required solicitations. Please bring in any donations that you have received and remember that all business donations are due on December 15th. Please contact Brook Gerace or Connie Campos with your fundraiser questions.

Membership Information

Open houses are scheduled for December 2 & 16 and January 6 & 20. Please come and visit and invite others who are interested in learning about the school. Membership is full in all sessions for the 2006-2007 school year. Please contact Sara Kelly or Liesl Freudenstein if you have any questions about membership or know of any prospective members.



Definitions and Terms at Our School Preschool

Yvonne and Jim have provided us with semantic definitions and educational terms which we hope can clarify some of the content of Our School Preschool education.



Appropriate Social Tone

an environment where every one is respected, teachers have no favorites; conflicts are minimal but always resolved *by* clarifying or stating the *real* issue with the children involved without taking sides. The goal is for children to resolve a problem competently without prejudice but to everyone's satisfaction (including the teacher.)

Children are social learners with an emerging conscience. We always need to remember that "teaching" them the conventions of gratitude and contrition only distract and absolve young children from *concrete* social responsibility. Of course adults should be models of conventions while children should be *participants* of their own process of caring, mediating, negotiating, repairing and reconciliation as these are the foundations for *autonomous thinkers developing self-discipline with consciences of social responsibility*.

Rules, therefore are few and pertain to safety, hygiene, and destructive behavior. These are consistently and positively enforced.

Teaching / Learning

The implication in *teaching* is that an adult is in charge of some academic, technical information or, is full of advice. This is all delivered in forms of lectures, sermons, or lessons to be remembered. With this implication, children are mostly receptors, whether or not the form and content is appropriate for them.



In *learning*, children are interacting through *human dialogues and the manipulation of objects*. They are actors engaged by their genuine interest, curiosity and commitment. The adults receive clues that, if correctly interpreted, will allow them to pursue with children a deeper extension of the matter at hand and at each individual's level of understanding.

We need to remember that teaching is an external activity while learning is an internal process. The former has to be stimulating, but appropriate for young children. The latter, depends on the children's perceptions, the relevance to their actual conceptual understanding to assimilate or accommodate their brain functions, and to sort and reorganize these external demands into a more expanded network of internalized conceptual understandings.



Assimilation / Accommodation

Terms used by Jean Piaget to theorize on the process by which young children's brains internalize and organize perceptions they encountered from the external world.

Assimilation: the process that occurs when the child's information and perceptions *fits* into *existing mental structures or schemata*.

Accommodation: the process that occurs when children *adjust* their schemata or mental structures to *accept new information and perceptions*.

When either process is rejected, the child may memorize without conceptual understanding or distort information to find stability.

Play: the *natural context* for young children learning; it is self-chosen, informal, interactive, social and, of course, concrete. Children use their *senses and physical movement* to develop their own conceptual understanding of their environments, and codify the process of play with their own linguistic ability.

No one can keep children from playing unless the latter want to please adults or, adults think they have to impose their own agendas or priorities to insure or reassure themselves that children are actually learning well.

Because humans are constantly learning, play *content* determines what *kind of learning* is taking place. Teachers have to discriminate between activities that *are intelligently worthwhile* for a child and those that *mis-educate* (e.g. trains need railroad tracks, stations, etc., versus trains that move anywhere) Therefore, play material must have a variety of possibilities and relationships.





Subject Matter Through Play

is inherent in materials and peers with which children interact. Therefore in the school, teachers have to pay attention to their quality of contact. Just like with peers, each material has properties and characteristics that children discover in their interaction (e.g. a particular block has weight and volume, texture size, a relationship to another block or blocks.)

Children do not need to use adult abstract language to have knowledge of subject matter nor do they need, most of the time, an adult explanation. Their senses and the concreteness of the interactions provide them with intelligent knowledge; language only codifies their own understanding. This is true for art, play in the house area, physical activities and social situations, etc.

Observations: The younger the children, the more difficulties they have to assess or reflect linguistically about their experiences unless it's relating a sequence of events. Planning is also described as a sequence of step after step and not likely as an explained logical operation. When asked about their experiences, they may say "I don't know," "because I like, want to do it," "tell me," "because it has to be that way," "my mom told me," and the like. Children's explanations are for the most part circular.

It is to be expected that adults can be biased in their observations of children, especially their own. They mostly want to see what unconsciously they perceive or believe to be true, though they are not always accurate.

But teachers have to be trained to avoid that pitfall and be as objective as anyone can be. Accurate observations are essential to an accurate diagnostic. What is to be observed?

1. What do each child's various body postures and face expressions –cultural or personal- reveal?
2. How is the material manipulated and used?
3. Questions come to mind: why that material? Is it an impulse? Is it accidental? Is it the peer company? Is it haphazard? Orderly? Definite? Can I predict accurately what may happen next? Is it solitary accidentally or on purpose? And many other questions relevant to the present situation.

Simultaneously, past information about the child's usual style of learning, various previous engagements and foci, all come to mind to be part of or outside of particular play patterns belonging to that child.

With the information and observations gathered, then the context and content of the play is clear and teachers are in a position to make a decision of (non)intervention in a form relevant to the context and content of the play. The goal is to have the play constructively and creatively sustained, and if applicable, extended or expanded with material and social relationships.

Unbiased and Objective

Teachers may hold *personal* conventional or cultural beliefs, just like parents do. In teaching, however, they need to be extremely aware that these *may not be professional guidelines for early childhood curriculum practices*. Objectivity derives from accurate and relevant subject matter, and universal knowledge of human affairs that gives an understanding of human conditions beyond one's own sphere. For instance, taking sides or playing favorites in a school setting (what about other environments?) are models for dissent, prejudices, rejection or thoughtless conformity, while educationally knowledgeable models should guide non offensive dialogues, where children do their own learning to offer positive *concrete* possibilities in resolving issues through mediation, negotiations, acceptance and reconciliations. Young children need to experience and witness model situations of social interactions at its best, which they can conceptually and concretely understand. For instance, if we believe that goals of fairness, justice for all, caring for others, autonomy in thinking, competence, acceptance and appreciation of differences, self and social responsibility are worthy goals then teachers and other interested adults have to be clear on what are the *congruent means* to achieve them.



Concept

is an understanding of relations or discriminations among various ideas, situations, events, and objects; an extension of categories, sets, etc. It's an *intelligent* mental operation that can be simple or complex. As the front lobes in the brain develop with the help of interaction in various environments, young children develop ever-greater ability in this regard. As a simple example, a baby makes a distinction between food and non food, then various tastes of food (remember the senses?) such as, sweet, salty, bitter, fruit and vegetable, meat and non meat, various meats, etc. *Simple* concepts are formed.

The classification of related sense experiences in the brain becomes more connected, extended or differentiated as time passes: classifications get re-organized into ever more abstract complex sets and subsets and devise new channels for differentiated experiences. The process of these conceptual operations –done outside the consciousness of young children- allows the emergence of abstracted experience.

As brain developmental maturity increases, the ability to think on thinking, that is, of being conscious of this abstract process also emerges, then concrete interactions with sensory perceptions are less necessary and concepts may develop without the help of external input. With new experiences, for instance new food, foreign food, without any association or relation, the

process may start again from a simple base. To some extent this is what happens to adults as well, it seems, but with adulthood, may come the ability to analyze and synthesize experiences and knowledge with the conscious processes of logic and reason -correct or not- that is beyond the range of especially young children.

Intervention or Interference?

Interventions (actions undertaken by a teacher to enhance what is happening or might happen) in a teaching situation are based on solid observations, information and timing. With this guidance and analysis come the *what and how of the intervention* so the flow of the play has continuity or extension and is congruent with the content of the play within the context of the child and not the adult.

Interferences (hindrances that prevent a natural or desired outcome) do not take solid observation, information and timing into consideration, but follow faulty adults' perceptions, agendas or impulses.

The consequences of interferences are: children pleasing the adult, children letting the adult take over, or children leaving the play saying: "I'm tired." "I'm done," "I want to do something else," or in some instances "I don't like what I am doing.". Though, a gutsy child may say "go away" to the interferer.

Another kind of interference is to interrupt the play by telling something or asking irrelevant questions. In this cases the child's focus and engagement is disrupted. For the co-oper, it is best to do and say nothing. If in doubt, follow the teachers' clues, or just observe a few feet away and share your observations with the teachers.





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OUR SCHOOL PRE-SCHOOL

776 Cherryvale Road
Boulder, Colorado 80303

Our School Calendar - Spring 2007

JANUARY

- 3 School Resumes
- 6 Open House: 10-12 pm (families welcome)
- 9 3 Day Session Meeting
- 15 **No School** - Martin Luther King Day
- 17 4 Day Session Meeting
- 20 Open House: 10-12 pm (families welcome)
- 24 Seminar
- 30 Board Meeting



FEBRUARY

- 6 2 Day Session Meeting
- 7 **Fundraiser:**
Set Up & Clean Up Committee
- 10 Open House: 10-12 pm (families welcome)
- 12 **Fundraiser: Silent Display Meeting**
- 17 Open House: 10-12 pm (families welcome)
- 20 Board Meeting
- 28 **Fundraiser:**
Cashiers, Tickets & Bookkeepers

MARCH

- 1 **Fundraiser:**
Tallying Committee Meeting
- 3 **AUCTION 2006 6PM - 10PM**
- 5 **No School** - Day after the auction
- 8 4 Day Session Meeting
- 10 Open House: 10-12 pm (families welcome)\
Conferences
- 11 Conferences
- 13 Seminar
- 15-19 Conferences
- 17 Open House: 10-12 pm (families welcome)
Conferences
- 20 Board Meeting
- 22 3 Day Session Meeting
- 23-30 **No school** - Spring Break, Conferences

APRIL

- 4 2 Day Session Meeting
- 7 Open House: 10-12 pm (families welcome)
- 10 Seminar
- 14 Open House: 10-12 pm (families welcome)
- 18 **SEMI-ANNUAL MEETING - REQUIRED**
- 24 Board Meeting
- 30 4 Day Session Meeting

MAY

- 5 Open House: 10-12 pm (families welcome)
- 9 3 Day Session Meeting
- 12 Open House: 10-12 pm (families Welcome)
- 15 2 Day Session Meeting
- 20 **All School picnic 4:00-7:00 pm**
- 23 New Family Orientation
- 28 **No School** - Memorial Day
- 30 Board Meeting

JUNE

- 7 Last Day: 2-Day and 4-Day Session
- 8 Last Day: 3-Day Session

All meetings start at 7 pm and are at Our School unless otherwise noted. Meetings are for parents only unless labeled as all school or families welcome. Required meetings noted. Seminars and session meetings are recommended. Board meetings are open to all members