

December 2006

TCS Times

*The Children's School/ 208-343-6840
Nicole Shaddock--editor*

From the Director

By Cindy Finch

Holiday togetherness. Parents off work. Children out of school. Grandparents or other relatives visiting. Gatherings with friends.

Sound wonderful? Almost certainly there are moments of true joy around the winter holidays. I love the rituals of the season (the lights, the cookies we make only once a year), the long break from school that is so relaxing for my whole family, and the deeper connection I feel with friends and family, far and near during the season.

A recent conversation brought back memories about the other side of less-structured family together times. A parent in the school mentioned that it was during these less structured times that she worried about her children in a different way. She noticed that her children were exposed to more TV—both shows and news. Because the ones who were bringing this more mature TV viewing into her home were guests and family and very positive and helpful to have around in many ways, this parent felt hesitant to put her foot down too hard. But she still worried about her children and how to talk with them about what they were seeing and hearing.

First of all, the urges to supervise, protect, and shelter young children from exposure to danger, mature situations, or too much TV are good ones. It's probably among the most important things we can do for our children.

The Bank Street Graduate School of Education Journal, Thought and Practice, printed an article in 1987 called "Choosing Priorities for Young Children" by Nancy Balaban. In it a researcher, Zimiles, says that while children growing up with television appear more independent and verbal, "Television allows children to hear and see news of world conflicts, violence, and danger at the same time and in the same manner as their parents and not when and how their parents choose to communicate this information to them." Balaban goes on to say, "Many parents are unprepared for their children's early and rapid movement into the adult world and may misinterpret their children's sophisticated language for real knowledge."

Two other cautionary notes come to mind: one from a parent at the school who often shares interesting pieces of professional information he runs

Doctors:***Kids Need To Play***

Excerpted from The Idaho Statesman, December 11, 2006

American Academy of Pediatricians report

Play, by the academy's definition is not watching TV, playing video games or even sports when run by adults. The play it endorses is the kind directed by the kid.

For young kids this may be blocks or dolls. For older ones, it's a spontaneous game among friends.

Studies show that when children get a play break, their brains store academic information better. . .

Children at play also learn all that social stuff with other kids—how to negotiate who goes first, what's fair....

Parents can even join, they just can't run the show . . . When the parents take direction, they get more connected with their kids.

across. He told me almost two years ago that he'd read some brain research that indicated that if a child's brain made connections—say watching something scary on TV, that those connections were used up, not available to be used in other ways. (Sorry, I can't tell you where to read this study, but I should probably find out since I'm repeating it!). And from the TRUCE, publishers of the annual Toy Guide (available in the coffee room), comes this: violence is stored in the brain as if it were a real experience, thereby affecting children's behaviors in the same way that real exposure to violence will.

That's all pretty depressing and leads to my second point. *Try as we might, we can't always control our children's every experience involving media.* I can remember at extended family vacations when my children were little, being very uncomfortable at what was on the TV—which was inevitably in the center of the living room and all too often on. And here's the other side of protecting children: when they see something that makes us uncomfortable it becomes our responsibility to help children make sense of what they do see/hear in media form. I like Jim Greenman's summary of children's understanding of world events in his book, [What Happened to the World?](#), published right after September 11, 2001. He says that children under 3 "know something is up," children between 3 and 5 "know more than you think, and much of it is incomplete or misconceived," and children over 5 "know much more than you think and want to know more." Knowing how children think can help us know how to respond.

I learn so much from talking with TCS teachers about children and families they work closely with, and here are two things that come to mind that have come up in recent conversations. If a child is using more sophisticated language and an adult needs to gage their understanding as part of an appropriate response, asking, "What do you think that means?" or "What does that mean?" can give you great insight to their level of understanding. Often a child's answer to that question will give you a sense of relief at its innocence and a place to start a very brief discussion. And the other TCS teacher gem is this: if a child tells you something that is from the media or reflects mature concepts, your answer does not and often should not involve giving new information. I have seen teachers masterfully discuss something in a very satisfying way with a child that corrects and confirms an understanding without adding a thing to their knowledge. We all had to put these techniques into practice around 9-11 and Hurricane Katrina. There was so much that we were thinking and learning about in terms of these terrible events, but when a child in one of our classrooms said something about bad guys or airplanes crashing or buildings falling down or people drowning or people hurting other people or water coming into houses, our adult responses were almost all reflection and clarification rather than information.

A great and powerful way to help children build mastery of scary images or information they've learned too early is through play. We talk about play often at TCS, and finally it is getting some great press from the American Academy of Pediatricians (see sidebar). One of the eight points the TRUCE Toy Guide (available at www.truceteachers.org) authors make is this: toys have enhanced play value when they allow children to be in charge of the play. As

Joan Almon says, “Real play is child-powered and child-initiated—like social “let’s pretend” play and the rough and tumble of outdoor games and adventures in nature. It evolves and changes over time. This is play that children can dive into with zest. It’s active, fresh every day, never runs out of batteries, never breaks, and needs no warning labels about graphic visuals or audio. . . . A good toy is 10 percent toy and 90 percent child. Give children simple play materials such as logs, stones, clothes and ropes, and they will create worlds. They play out every possible situation from birth to death and everything in between. In the process they gain mastery over themselves and the world around them, and they discover the joys and intricacies of human relations.”

Altogether—there are lots of gifts to give children this holiday season and only some of them come in a box.

Enjoy the season and your family’s own way of celebrating together. See you in 2007!

TCS Building Improvement: Building a Model Environment for a Model Program

By Kim Rene’

As many of you have heard by now, TCS has been researching and developing a plan for a long overdue remodel and addition to our current building. This has been a 2+ year process and we wanted to share with you where we are to date. Currently, we are undergoing a feasibility study of nearly 450 current and alumni families to update alumni information, gauge enthusiasm about the school, get feedback on the proposed design, generate ideas for other funding sources and finally, to assess support for the campaign so that we may more accurately determine a timeline and financial plan for moving forward.

At present, the feasibility study is 50% complete with nearly 200 families yet to be reached. All of you should have received a brochure with information and pictures of the proposed design including information about estimated costs and options. If you have not received this brochure or you have not had a chance to take our short (5-10 minutes) feasibility study, please contact Kim Rene’ at 433-9491 or Pam Solon at 761-1575.

It is our goal to have this study completed by mid-January at which time, we will present a plan and recommendations to the board for how to proceed. Once this is complete, we will be sharing the results of this study and recommendations with the parent community and soliciting volunteers to serve on this committee moving forward.

Thanks for all your patience and support as we move through this very exciting process! Have a Happy and peaceful Holiday!

Looking Ahead!

By a child, age 6

“Did you know that The Children’s School was the first school and I never want to leave it. But I know I can’t stay here forever. I want it [my next school] to be like this school--and monkey bars.”

Parenting and Conflict Resolution—Can they co-exist?

Upcoming workshop from the Parent Education Committee at TCS

Lisa Wirtanen, teacher in the 3-4-5's class, and parent to a current Primes student and a TCS grad, will be leading a two-part discussion. Lisa gave us a presentation on Conflict Resolution last year that was so popular we received several requests from attending parents to have her give it again in an expanded format. To this she graciously agreed, so mark the following dates on your calendar: **January 18th and 25th, Smith House, 12pm – 1pm.** Childcare provided; please bring a lunch for your child. The first presentation will be similar to last year's 'basics in conflict resolution'; the second will focus on solving specific problems. If you attended last year's presentation, you may be most interested in attending the Jan. 25th event. For more information contact Nancy Cole, 426 0384.

Look in the January issue of TCS Times for a recap of Toilet Learning by Megan Jones.

Director's Corner

By Cindy Finch

Lunch: Act II

Who has a sandwich—or two? Who drinks soy milk and who drinks juice? Can we sing that name song?

The 31 (!) children who participated in the seven (!) week lunch program this fall from the 3-4s, 3-4-5s, 4-5s, and 4-5-6s classes came to anticipate lunches at school as part of the Friday routine. Everyone came to feel comfortable with their extended day, combined group experience, and the new way of relating around the lunch table. You may have noticed that we are offering a 15 week lunch option on Fridays this spring beginning January 26th. The cost is \$180, payable in advance. Sign up in the office.

Lunch group begins when the 3-4-5s class is finished at 11:15, and ends when the 4-5s begins at 1:00. We anticipate that most children will be part of the group for 90 minutes. We plan again to offer two groups, if enrollment numbers hold steady this spring. Lunch dates are: January 26, February 2, 16, 23, March 2, 9, 16, 23, April 6, 13, 20, 27, May 4, 11, 18. Thanks for your participation in this popular option.

NAEYC Conference Highlights

Three teachers from TCS attended the NAEYC Annual Conference in Atlanta, GA in early November. This conference is huge for early childhood educators. It is THE annual gathering spot for educators, teacher educators, authors, and the biggest, most current ideas about teaching young children. It is also huge in numbers. I once heard that it is only slightly smaller than the Democratic and Republican National Conventions (I've never checked this statement out for accuracy, but when you are there it is totally believable.)

Here's what our TCS teachers had to say about their experience there:

Megan Jones says, "Talk of the new accreditation standards was definitely the focus. I look forward to the next national conference I attend when the focus can return to children and families."

Sherri Lauer says, "I heard this great quote about testing children. Lilian Katz said, 'Food is to nourish your body not to produce the outcome.' I think the same for education: school is meant to nourish your brain not to produce a certain test score. I was never so happy to be from a state "so behind." Other states, particularly Georgia and Texas, have given up recess to prepare children for testing. Hopefully trends in education will change before these kids (at TCS) go too far in school."

Mary Griffin says, "It was inspiring to be with so many people from around the country who are working to make kids lives better."

Alumni News

These 19 and 20 year old TCS alumni are near and dear to my heart. Patrick is my son. Emily and Clare are good friends from TCS days. Emily attends college in the San Francisco area, Clare in the Seattle area, and Patrick in Chicago. But do those distances keep them apart? Not with email and cell phones and trips home. (Clare actually moved with her family to California in 4th grade, but several family friends keep beds available to her when she comes to town). Patrick and Clare met in the All Days when they were three; Emily joined them from TCS half day preschool programs in the Primes. The photograph is from this past summer when they hung out together for a few days in Boise. We talk about enduring relationships among TCS alum, and I thought you'd like to see what that can look like over time. I'll bet there are others. If you know of them, let me know. We are always looking for news about our alum.

Photo removed to protect children's privacy.

Parenting Young Children

Join Carla Jensen, our school consulting counselor, and Cindy Finch for discussions about being a parent. What do we talk about? Whatever is on your mind and in your most immediate experience. Topics have ranged from sibling issues, to wanting more and more toys, to toileting, to wanting lots of mom's attention—and more. We meet in the coffee room from 9:30-10:30 once a month. Spring dates will be January 26, February 23, March 23, April 27, and May 18. Please join us!

Thanks to ...

Everyone who brought bag after bag of food in the front hall during our recent food drive. What a great success for our school community—and for the families who will be fed during the holidays and beyond. We delivered 383 pounds of food to the Idaho Foodbank!

Phil Arendt (Emma in the 3-4-5s), Ted Maybach (Nathan in the 3-4-5s), Stephanie Wicks (Amelia in the Parent-Toddler class), and Valerie Ray (Lila in the Parent-Toddler class) for offering to organize a recycling system for TCS. We'll regroup after the holidays and get this started. Thanks for the support.

Photo removed to protect children's privacy.

Needed: A Parent Library Organizer

If you like to create order where there is little, please help us get books carded and back in alphabetical order in the coffee room's parent library. We have a great assortment of books (and probably could use a larger shelf—oh well, later) that need some help to make them more accessible to families. This could be the project you've been looking for—it could almost certainly be completed during one class time. If you need a project to begin and finish and stand back and admire, this one may work for you. By the way—we've added three new books recently about parenting 6, 7, and 8 year olds. If you have an idea about a book to add to our collection please let me know.

Good news for families in 4-5s, 4-5-6s, and Primes: After the holidays we will have two teachers in our Extended Day Primes program on Wednesday afternoon (Mark and David!).

Recently we have been running very full in this "after school" program. For families who want this experience for their children on an occasional use basis, I hope you will find these additional hours (3:30-5:30 on Wednesday) helpful. Sign up in the office, as usual.

Parent Survey Results

Thank you for completing 34 of the recent informational surveys. We are thrilled with the rate of responses and with the seriousness with which you responded! Thank you!

What will we do with the information collected? The purpose of this survey is to guide our practice as we move forward in accreditation as a school. Additionally, part of our upcoming work is to make revisions in our parent handbook. We will now work—on accreditation and on handbook revisions—with better knowledge and understanding of what you want and need from your child's school experience and how we may better communicate our practices. I take your willingness to complete this survey as an interest in the accreditation process and a commitment to helping us meet the new criteria of the accreditation system.

We've not had time to fully process what you told us, but here are some early understandings:

--many parents identified "asking about family backgrounds and beliefs" and building curriculum from what we know about family backgrounds and beliefs as an area that they have not experienced at TCS.

--there were lots of yes, no, and don't knows about assessment. What it looks like at TCS, how it is used, etc.

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See us at:
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--it is not clear how to get involved in volunteer and leadership opportunities as a parent at TCS.

--we could do better at communicating community resources, community projects, and opportunities for involvement community-wide.

--additional comments and questions (in each of these areas one or more parent indicated a need for more information) involve questions about our verbal and written communication about children, having a voice in planning for program improvement, understanding nutritional requirements for foods brought to school, receiving written reports about children, moving between home and school, and knowing the rules and expectations of the classroom.

Again, we'll get right to work on these issues—refining our practice and clarifying our communication—right after the holidays. How's that for a New Year's resolution?

3-4-5s News

By Megan Jones and Taira Lee

Recently, we have been exploring families in our classroom. We have created a "family book" which includes each child's current understanding of what defines a family. This project has extended into a further discussion of self and feelings. In addition, we are working hard on the complexity of friendship. Children are making discoveries about appropriate social interactions as we provide a safe and nurturing environment for them to express their feelings to others. They are beginning to build an understanding of the content and meaning of words as they have a variety of experiences with other children at school.

Important Dates...

*Wednesday, January 3rd, All Classes Resume

*Friday, January 5th, P-TCS Meeting, 1:30-3:00, Lisa Wirtanen's home

*Monday, January 15th, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, **SCHOOL CLOSED**

*Thursday, January 18th and January 25th, Parenting and Conflict Resolution: A Parent Education Event, Facilitated by Lisa Wirtanen, 12:00-1:00 at the Smith House. See this month's article for more information.

*Friday, January 26th, Lunch Group option begins for 3-4s, 3-4-5s, 4-5s, 4-5-6s. Space limited, sign up in office, \$180

*Tuesday, January 30th, Enrollment information for 07-08 school year mailed Tuition Assistance Applications, www.nais.org/financialaid/sss, TCS school code - #4112

A Supplement to TCS Times: To Our In-School Community

Holidays with Young Children, part 2

By Jane Dunbar (1981)

Thanks, Jane, for putting these thoughts on paper almost twenty-five years ago. I have referred to them often while parenting young children. The ideas and activities truly exemplify what we value for young children at TCS: experiences that nurture and stimulate thinking; accommodate and support children's development; and, provide a comfortable, reliable, and predictable environment to help children clarify, order, and make sense of the world!—Cindy Finch

Choices! Choices! Choices! As we head into this holiday time we are, as parents and teachers, bombarded with the need to make decisions that will shape the experience your child has this holiday and the feelings that will color his memories. If our goal is a rich, meaningful, joyful experience for the child, it behooves us, I feel, to take a few moments to look at the season from the point of view of your young child.

First I want to stress “your” young child. If the season’s activities are to meet your child’s needs, they must be structured according to what you know of your child. An activity that is meaningful and rich for one child may very well be overwhelming, disinteresting, or exhausting to another. There are not set models that work. Each of us, using our knowledge and sensitivities, must build a series of experiences, step by step, continually asking ourselves questions that focus us back to our own child, his needs, his wants, his unique ways of experiencing. Next I stress your “young child,” this time with the emphasis on “young child.” It is awing to really think how little experience three, four, and five year olds have with this holiday . . . perhaps two year’s memories and even those are hazy. This insight gives us lots of permission not to feel the weight of tradition. The child has had very little “tradition” and I imagine most memory focuses more on those things rich, meaningful and joyous in an activity rather than on the particular activity itself. With those thoughts in mind, perhaps some of the following questions will be helpful when choosing holiday experiences:

Involvement. Three, four, and five year olds naturally are active and involved participants. How much of a doer can my child be in this activity? Does the project or activity match my child’s ability level? (Often those wonderful memories we have of an activity we enjoyed as a child was one that we enjoyed when we were older than our own child and we might do well to save it a year or two).

Pace. What pace does my child prefer? Slow and methodical? Active but brief? Settled and quiet? Several short activities?

Routine. Will an activity disrupt my child’s sense of order to the day? Will the disruption delight (add spontaneity)? If one activity fits, will two? Are two brief activities preferable to one long one?

After all this talk about realistically assessing your child’s needs, let me balance these thoughts with strong vote for humor. Treat your family to the best releaser of tension

there is: laughter shared and fun together as you prepare for the magic of the season. Keep things simple and relaxed. Fill the moments with music and candlelight, laughter, gentle hugs, unexpected smiles. Let home reflect each family member with decorations made and put up by each member. Share tales of childhood traditions from the family grown-up(s), blending the old with the new. It may not all be like out of House Beautiful but it will be meaningful for each of you. That's what the holidays are all about.

Some Holiday Activities for Families with Young Children

*Frosting cookies: These cookies are the ones that Grandma or a loving (child-oriented) neighbor receives with delight. Emphasis here is on the process, not the product. Special candies and sparkles to decorate gingerbread men with eyes, nose, mouth, etc. can be fun.

*Collage cards: Provide trays of special holiday materials, paper, and a glue bottle that is manageable. Your child can sign her name, if that is a skill she has developed. You may do the addressing with the child but she will love the walk to the mailbox to send it off (the sense of closure that comes from mailing them right after completion can be marvelous for a child—if it fits!).

*Paintings as gifts: Using a school painting or one done at home, the child can choose a ribbon to roll it with or may help you pick out a matting and frame. Perhaps she can tell you about her picture and you can write down her words to enclose with the gift.

*Playdough: Children love to make playdough and can do much of this themselves. Put a ball of red or green playdough into a baggy, tie it with a ribbon and you've made a wonderful gift for a friend.

Playdough Recipe

Bring to a boil: 1 cup water

3 Tbsp. oil

1 oz. Food coloring

Remove from heat. Stir in and mix well:

2 cups flour

1/4 cup salt

1 Tbsp. alum

Cool slightly, knead like bread to make smooth.

*Snowflakes: Show your child (older preschoolers or primary age children) how to fold white paper and cut the folded edges. These are fun to add to the tree, to decorate a mirror, or hang from a string to float on midwinter breezes near a door or window.

*Dictated stories: A story can come spontaneously from your child or can be prompted by an interesting picture you child draws, a carpentry project, a collage. These stories make fun gifts and can be read back at a special family time.

*Drawn pictures: Children capture the magic and wonder of the holiday season in their art. Pictures can also be drawn (by older children) to go with traditional stories or songs about the holiday your family celebrates.

*Taped songs: Songs sung by your child and taped for gifts or for memories. ("I sounded like that? That's not me!!").

*Community trees: Take time to look at the ornaments on the City (Grove) or State (Capitol steps) trees. Lie under the tree and look up. How do you think this tree got here? Where did it come from? How old do you think this tree might be? How many people do you think decorated it? How long would it take?