

The Children's School/ 208-343-6840
«GreetingLine»--editor

From the Director

By Cindy Finch

“Children at The Children’s School can say and do anything they want and there are no consequences.”

Last month I wrote about academics. This month I want to continue with the “myths” that some hold about TCS and talk about the social experiences children have in our classrooms.

It is true that some of the interactions that we have with children and that children have with each other are pretty raw. That is the nature of an early childhood classroom. Young children—all 117 of them enrolled in the school—are trying to figure out how to be in a group—how to speak up, how to listen, how to get needs met, how to get what you want, how to give others what they want, how to identify feelings, how to express feelings, how to go first, how to go last, and, even the early childhood classics, how to take turns and share.

You’ve no doubt experienced the rawness as you’ve been in the school—children crying, screaming, acting out physically toward one another, saying less than desirable things to another child, trying out more mature language than we’d prefer children know, refusing to do what they’ve been asked to do, and doing something they were told not to do yesterday. Whew!

And yet, you rarely get the idea that children are “in trouble” around here for all these verbal and physical challenges that occur here every day. Why is that? Are we permissive? Are we indifferent or baffled by these behaviors? Do we think we can talk or reason children out of feeling the way they feel? Are TCS teachers just extraordinarily patient?

Actually, we talk about children’s social experiences often and are very intentional about what we want for children to experience here and what approach will be helpful to them for the immediate and the long run. It’s not guess work for us at all and is deeply embedded in our way of teaching. And while TCS teachers are patient that is not the primary resource we draw from in helping children during rough times. Patience may be helpful, but it could also mean simply tolerating children’s behavior or just putting up with annoyances. We’d be shirking our responsibility as educators if we simply

spent our days with children in a state of patience.

We understand children and their sometimes ragged behaviors in terms of their development and in their roles as learners. They are young and are inexperienced in understanding and dealing with emotions—their own and others'. Many children are just learning how to build relationships with peers and new adults, and learning about the complexity of group life and the conflict that can crop up in groups of young children—if you think about it from the point of view of a young child, being in school is a lot to figure out. What matters in an educational setting when problems arise is that children's attempts at coming to understand themselves and the dynamics of group life be supported and appreciated—and responded to with an eye on teaching.

What does guidance look like when its intended result is teaching? It can look very individualized. Almost always it involves having children talk with each other. Other times teachers remove children from participating in an activity and help the child get involved in something else. You might even see children sticking close to a teacher for a while before re-entering play. You might see children cooling off so that they can deal with a problem. You will likely see children helping others when someone has been hurt. The important thing to remember is that the rules are the same for each child—the response from adults varies depending on the child's age and experience—and some other factors like personality and temperament, of course.

And, yet, the only way to respond to classroom situations individually and be successful in supporting children and protecting the group experience for everyone is to be sure of the foundation that guides our work. That means that when we are working with a child in a challenging situation we are considering two things: 1) what do we ultimately want this child to be able to do and 2) what is our adult response to problems teaching the entire class. Effective guidance of young children is individualized and grounded in broader principles that require that we look beyond the immediate situation.

Consequence is an interesting concept in guidance because, of course, we all face consequences for every decision we make. Consequences just are. What I think most people mean when they talk about consequences and young children and The Children's School is this: adults need to make sure something negative happens so children will learn. That sounds like punishment, and is authoritarian at its core. I am so interested in how embedded this idea is in our culture—even by those who say they don't want this for children on the one hand but really think this is the only way children will learn on the other hand.

What is true about guidance at TCS is that children feel uncomfortable but there is almost always a way to figure things out or make things better. It is problem solving at its core.

That's a consequence that is truly good and helpful—and educational—for children.

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) has ordered 100 more copies of Children and Conflict: An Opportunity for Learning in the Early Childhood Classroom to market online and in their catalog. The Children's School was a collaborator in the creation of these materials (in fact the authoring names on the materials include Finch and Wirtanen--sound familiar?) and TCS classrooms are featured in the DVD. In case you aren't familiar with this work, check out the set of materials from the parent library in the coffee room. It's a classic!

2-3s News: Ramps and Pathways

By Julie Gill

The 2-3s have joined the rest of the school in the Ramps and Pathways project. The materials we're using are simple, and so lend themselves to a great degree of creativity. We are using a golf ball, a marble, and a wooden ball (all of the same size), and two different lengths of wooden interior house trim. The pieces of wood are like long narrow troughs, and these are the pieces that we refer to as "ramps". We decided to contain the activity to our sensory table, include a few soft unit blocks as possible accessories, and limit the use to two children at a time. Because we want the children to be physics explorers, and we want them to make discoveries themselves, we deliberately presented the materials in a way that would not suggest a specific use.

Typically, when the ramps are introduced to a class, very young children will initially place a ramp flat on the floor, and push a ball along inside of it with their finger. Our first two children approached the table; one of them selected a ball, and started bowling with it. She added a few foam blocks to knock over for added excitement. The other child looked at the rolling ball, picked up a ramp, and propped up one end of it on the outer edge of the table, so it was like a slide. They were both pretty happy about what they were doing, and they were respectful of each other's structures. A few other children were eager to try the ramps, so we wrote their names on a list to show whose turn is next. Some were satisfied to know that we'd call them when their turn came up, and left to play in another part of the room; a couple decided to stay and watch. The play changed a little each time one child left and another joined in, but maybe because there was also such close interest and observation, there was a surprising degree of continuity in the development of the play. For a little while they kept adding ramps along side each other on the same side of the table. Then one little girl thought of placing one on the opposing, facing side. She and her friend counted, "one, two, three!" and released their balls simultaneously. The balls came flying down the ramps, raced past each other and knocked into the sides of the table. Laughing, the girls retrieved them and did it again and again(!) Later, one child was playing alone with the ramps. She was dropping her ball down one ramp, then dropping it down the one on the other side. She paused, and looked at the two ramps. She moved the bottom ends of the two ramps so that they were touching each other, creating a "v" shape. She released her ball from the top of one end, and watched it hit the bottom and sail right up the other side! She and I both laughed out loud! Then she put two balls next to each other and let them roll down together. At this point another child joined her, and they both released two, from either end. They watched as the balls clacked back and forth. Throughout our playtime the children thought of more ideas and more variations for the ramps.

There's a social component to this play. Sometimes there's some negotiation in figuring out how to accommodate two ideas, or in collaborating and accepting new suggestions. While there's lots of thinking going on in this activity, the atmosphere is pretty merry. Each satisfying idea they repeat, doing it again and again, laughing with delight to see their ideas in action. We're looking forward to see how this exciting project continues to develop in the 2-3s.

*Ramps and Pathways in the
All Days!*

*PHOTOS REMOVED TO
PROTECT CHILDREN'S
PRIVACY*

Spring Fling

By Cindy Finch

Among all our annual events at The Children's School, one of my favorites is the Spring Auction. Time approaches for the 2009 version, a black and white themed party, capably chaired by Jessica S. and April G.. Join them in event planning, donation gathering, or detail management is your area of interest.

And, no matter what, plan to join us for the actual event: Saturday, May 2nd, 6-11 p.m., Berryhill and Co., \$50 per person.

*Summer Classes Now
Enrolling!*

TCS is proud to offer a variety of classes, full time and part time for preschool and primary aged children. Please check in the office for a flyer or enrollment information.

Programs include:

*Summer Primes with teachers,
Mark Zimmermann and
David Rodenstein*

*Fun for 3s and 4s with teachers,
Patty Head and Betsy
Robinson*

*Immerse Yourself . . . In Spanish with teachers,
Lilia Byrd and Taira
Guerrero*

Limited Spots Still Available!

The TCS auction is a huge school community party, one of the only times we exclude children from the fun! Your entrance fee will buy you a wonderful evening with school families (some of the most interesting and fun people in Boise, I think) with great food and drinks.

Your entrance fee also buys you the opportunity to participate in one of our most deeply embedded traditions at TCS: coming together to raise money for tuition assistance. Why tuition assistance? One of the founding realities of The Children's School was that it was going to be expensive to keep classes small, hire well qualified teachers, and purchase sturdy, long-lasting materials and equipment—and that the resulting high tuition could exclude some families. Therefore, a firmly held principle was established during the school's infancy—that a scholarship fund would provide assistance for families who value this type of education for their young children but find the full cost of tuition prohibitive.

My husband and I have attended most of the auctions since 1986—as parents sometimes, other times as faculty—and sometime we attended just because it was a fun party for a cause we believed important. The focus for my family, and the reason we've returned year after year, is that TCS remains a place we want to support—a special place where our children started their education, a place we've developed important adult and family relationships that have remained strong for years, and a place and an education we value for all children, today and tomorrow.

Twist the theme whichever way you will—from black jeans and white t-shirt to black and white formal attire—there's lots of room for interpretation. That will be part of the fun. Be part of the planning if you want. (Remember the pink notes in your box recently? We're still accepting great donation ideas, so complete the form or email Jessica or April.

But, absolutely, hold May 2nd on your social calendar for some great fun with a purpose, TCS style.

The Children's
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Capital Campaign Update

By Liz Edrich

The Children's School is proud to announce a capital campaign!

The goal: to create a learning environment that matches the excellence of the faculty, the superior quality of our learning program, and the dreams of our children.

The capital campaign will allow TCS to:

- Provide TCS students with bigger, brighter classrooms close to playgrounds.
- Allow our children to have more small-group activities like movement, Spanish, music, and art.
- Provide opportunities for TCS to offer students more indoor activities.
- Bring the school into ADA compliance ensuring the school is fully accessible for all who want to attend.
- Ensure the school remains one of Boise's top early childhood learning environments.

During the next few months, the Capital Campaign committee will be talking to the TCS community, spreading the word, and building support to raise \$1,200,000 so that The Children's School will be a space of dreams and possibility, safety and excitement, flexibility and activity.

If you have questions or want to get involved, please contact any of the campaign's co-chairs (Amanda and John C., April and John G., Henry and Sarah W., Clint and Alison T.), the campaign manager, Liz Edrich, and/or Cindy Finch, TCS Director.

Important Dates

*Thursday, April 9th, P-TCS meeting, See Friday Update for details.

*Friday, April 10th, Last day to have deposit refunded if enrollment is cancelled. Teaching plan for 2009-2010 school year posted in front hall – subject to change.

*Friday, April 24th, Earth Day-Spring Sing, Children & TCS Staff

*Saturday, April 25th, Spring Work Day

*Wednesday-Thursday, April 29th-30th, 4-5s Lunch Program ends

*Friday, May 1st, 3-4-5s Lunch Program ends. 3-4s Lunch Program ends

*Saturday, May 2nd, Spring Fling/TCS Auction, 6:00-11:30 at Berryhill and Co.

*Thursday, May 7th, P-TCS meeting, See Friday Update for details.

***Friday, May 15th, All School Picnic, Sunset Park. Families Invited**

See the next issue of TCS Times for last day of school information.