



## From the Head of School

### Raising a Socially Competent Child

Social competence is the ability to initiate and maintain mutual, reciprocal relationships with others. Mutually satisfying relationships involve commitment, and are strong enough that they can withstand conflict.

Socially competent people are able to argue with each other and still be friends. Being socially competent involves social understanding and empathy - being able to tell how someone else is feeling, as well as having the social skills that enable you to approach someone else. It also involves being able to regulate your emotions. That last characteristic alone - being able to regulate emotions - shows clearly that young children are in a period of their lives during which great learning occurs.

This description of social competence comes from Lilian Katz, an early childhood expert who spoke recently in Denver about how to help young children

develop the skills needed throughout life to maintain healthy relationships with others. The groundwork for social competence is laid very early and what happens during the first years has lasting



**"...infants develop a pattern of reaching out socially, being responded to socially, and then reaching out again."**

effects. Dr. Katz cited research that shows that if a child has not obtained a certain level of social competence by the age of six, they have a high probability of being at risk into adulthood in several ways. She cites further evidence that the single best indicator of adult adaptation is how a child gets along with other children.

Although teachers and schools can help, parents have the most influence over the development of social competence, according to Katz. The very first months are critically important as infants bond with their caregivers, and the oft repeated, contingent interactions are important. When a baby cries and a parent responds, the pattern of reaching out to another person and getting a response is established. When one of our children told me last year, when I asked for advice about being a grandmother, that I should look at my soon-to-be-born grandson's face, because "babies like to look at faces", she was absolutely right. Babies must connect. By starting at a friendly human face, and then, as the weeks go by, seeing that same face warmly respond, infants develop a pattern of reaching out socially, being responded to socially, and then

reaching out again.

That example of social behavior with infants is an example of what Katz calls a "Recursive Cycle". Humans use recursive cycles all the time. If you smile and say "Good Morning" to an acquaintance, it is likely they will return the greeting, which will make you feel a bit better. If you receive no response, it's also likely that you'll remember and  
(continued)

#### Dates to Remember

- |             |   |
|-------------|---|
| 12/3        | NO SCHOOL<br>Parent/teacher conferences |
| 12/4        | NO SCHOOL<br>Parent/teacher conferences |
| 12/9        | Fathers' Night for Primary Classes      |
| 12/18 - 1/5 | WINTER BREAK                            |

**HAPPY HOLIDAYS!**

Details for these events are included within or on the attached calendar.

## Parenting Program

Kathryn Ross and a group of parents are meeting on Wednesday mornings for discussions on the challenges of parenting. They are using the *Early Childhood STEP (Systematic Training for Effective Parenting)* book which is presented as an eight week program. You can still join the group - they have only met once - starting Wednesday, December 2nd at 9:30 am.

If there is interest, Kathryn is willing to have an afternoon or evening session with a new group who cannot come in the morning, beginning in January. Parents, grandparents, caregivers - anyone who spends time with children - are welcome to come. An eight week commitment is required and the cost is \$55 which includes the book.

Please call or e-mail the school to let us know if you are interested - 303.322.0972  
kross@cgmontessori.com or cramey@cgmontessori.com.

## Thank You

We would like to thank **Erin Williams** and **Mike McGawn** for carving pumpkins with the Ward-Hobbs classes; **Ann Reidy** for reading in WHAM; **Lisen Kintzele** for the museum passes; **Jessica Fitzgerald** for the cookies for the staff; **Amy McPheeters** for subbing in 440; **Kari McDonald** for the art supplies; **Jeremy Kramer** and **Amy McPheeters** for "space stuff" for the studio; **Tram Kramer** for the teacher treats; **Susan Gowen** for reading in WHAM; **JJ Johnson** for cookies for the staff; the **Bertrons** for the Office Depot coupons; **Rachel Brown** for reading in WHAM; **Olivia** and **Carla Ooms** for reading in WHPM; **Colleen Baz** for organizing the children's photography; **Sarah Alijani** for the CD's for the studio; **Gretchen Kurtz** for reading in 440; **Tom Filippini** for making cookies with the 440 class; **Heather Johnson** for the bagels for the staff; **Amy Birner** for the treats for the staff and for reading in WHAM.



Thanks again to our Extended Primary lunch volunteers - **Lisen Kintzele**, **Cat Fagelson**, and **Kari McDonald**.

## Re-enrollment

Reenrollment information for 2010 - 2011 will be sent in early January. Sibling applications will be included with the re-enrollment forms. All forms are due along with fees by January 31st.

The parent-teacher conference is a good time to discuss appropriate placement for next year.



## Garden Arch

**Matt Pierce** has again blessed the school with his craftsmanship. Please take time to see the lovely arch he made as an entrance to the raised beds he built for the children to begin gardening in the spring. Thanks, Matt for the great additions to our outdoor environment.

## *Social Competence continued*

feel less inclined to approach that person, setting up a negative cycle that takes conscious effort to change. If the Nuggets win a game, it may be more likely their confidence will rise and they will win the next. (I realize I'm on thin ice with that example.)

Children, who are just learning those skills, have even more difficulty than do adults. A child who has poor social skills can approach other children and will sometimes be ignored or actively rejected. One the other hand, a child with good social skills might approach other children, be welcomed, and thus have an opportunity to further polish those skills. Katz suggests that usually children in a negative cycle cannot break it without help. Katz termed the right kind of help "optimal intervention" - just enough that a child isn't trapped in a negative cycle, but not so much that the child doesn't learn. Montessori said it this way - every unnecessary help given a child is a hindrance to development.

Katz gave many examples of ways to help just enough with our children. One is modeling appropriate behavior. Adults model behavior all the time for children, whether we are conscious of our modeling or not. If you say "please" and "thank you" regularly, they will notice. If you listen carefully to what they say, and then wait for them to respond to you, they will notice. Although sometimes it is appropriate to remind a child about those common courtesies, I believe our own modeling is the most powerful teaching tool. Our adult relationships with others serve as models to children. That kind of modeling happens more

or less unplanned as we go about our daily activities, but at Children's Garden we also employ another kind of modeling called *Grace and Courtesy Lessons*. Not all of our *Grace and Courtesy Lessons* are about getting along with others, but many are designed to give children information they can use in a social setting. I think of the Queen of England when I think of *Grace and Courtesy Lessons*. If you visit the queen, do you curtsy first? What do you call her? Do you shake her hand? Is it acceptable to touch her? You would definitely want to be coached before you stand in front of Her Majesty the Queen! During *Grace and Courtesy Lessons* for young children, we talk very little, and act dramatically. We show them the acceptable way to do something rather than the unacceptable, taking advantage of their great desire to be just like us, adults in their lives whom they admire.

Katz spoke of building a relationship with the child, and said all relationships must have content. People don't just relate - they have to relate to each other about something. Occasionally we have a child at school disruptive enough that one could fall into the trap of developing a relationship with the child that is all about power struggles, redirection, and setting limits. As you can imagine, that would be discouraging for the child, and exhausting for the teacher. So we try to find little openings into the child's protective armor, toughened by multiple encounters with adults who have told the child what to do. We watch to see what the child likes to do, what he or she talks

about with other children. We watch for smiles and fleeting moments of interest. Then we slowly try to build a relationship with the child that is based on content rather than conflict. It is a remedial process we would prefer not to have to go through, but sometimes it's necessary.

Every educator develops a bag of tricks to use with children that contain special projects, certain approaches, and certain words that work well, and we go to workshops and lectures to add to the bag, and Katz had many tricks to share. One was the question to ask of a child who is struggling with a social challenge - "What have you tried so far?" Children who have a good relationship with an adult will usually ask for help. They often know what to do, but need some support. "What have you tried so far" has lots of positive hidden messages. It tells the child you have confidence in their ability to solve a problem. It tells them that you know they are trying, and that you are interested and willing to support them. It is a coaching approach that enables the child to still own the problem and use it as an opportunity to learn.

Dr. Katz spoke for several hours, giving us much more information than can be conveyed in a short article, but if you are interested in knowing more about what she has to say, we purchased her book entitled *Fostering Children's Social Competence: the Teacher's Role* for the parent library, and you are welcome to borrow it to read. The parent library is upstairs, and is available to any parent.

## Fathers' Night

Dads or special friends of the are invited to join the children in their classrooms to experience some of the "works" they have told you about. The children delight in giving an adult a lesson on their favorite work. Be prepared to sit on the floor and in our child-sized chairs. If Dad isn't able to come, uncles, friends or moms are welcome. The toddlers do not participate in this event.

**Wednesday, December 9th**

**5:30-6:30 pm Morning Primary Classes**

**6:00-7:00 pm WHPM & Extended Primary**

## Community Outreach



Thank you to everyone who donated food and money to the Bridge Project's Thanksgiving food drive. A special thanks to Kristen Miner and the Community Outreach Committee for organizing the drive and delivering the donations.

## Nanny Available

If you are a mother who needs to go back to work, or would like a Mom's day out at least once a week, I can help you. I am a former elementary school teacher, mother of three and grandmother of eight. I have worked with a number of families in the Denver area, many who were associated with Children's Garden. If you are interested, please call Ruthie Brown at 303-941-9746.

## Lost & Found

The items from the lost and found basket that are not claimed before winter break will be donated to Good Will. We know you must be missing something that can be found in our collection. Also, to keep items from disappearing, it helps if your child's name is on them. Conferences are a great time to check!



## Playground Improvement Update



Your generous support of the school at our recent auction has already been put to good use! We're sure you have noticed the pergola, constructed by Beaver Builders, in front of the school. This gives much needed shade in the afternoon for the toddlers and the studio.

The tricycle path around the hill in the backyard is just about ready for a test run. When you have a chance, take a peek at it - it's quite nice!

Along that line, we are in need of some new bike helmets. Both toddler and preschool sizes are needed to keep the children safe on the path.