



From the Head of School

Judge Not...

At Children's Garden, early December means Parent-Teacher Conferences. It is an exciting time when parents and teachers come together to talk about the children who attend our school. It is a time to share funny anecdotes and observations of developmental growth. It can also be an anxious time as parents worry about what teachers might say and teachers worry about what parents might hear. Both sides worry that they will be criticized, judged, or looked down on.

We live in a society of judgment. As humans, we are hard-wired to judge. This is no doubt a helpful survival trait, one that grew out of a need to choose a suitable mate or to assess potential threats as early humans came in contact with strangers. Judging situations at the blink of an eye is essential to our survival. We are always assessing our surroundings and reacting to stimuli based on past experiences. As we go through life, we learn that icy roads can result in accidents, so we slow down and give other drivers space. We learn that putting popcorn in the microwave for too long can result in a fire, so we stand close by and listen for the kernels to stop popping. We change how we behave based on our experiences, and work to impart our knowledge to our children, hoping to shorten their learning curves.

However, judgment can also have a negative impact. We judge those around us, sometimes just to boost our own feelings of importance or confidence. As we strive to improve ourselves, we judge those that follow different paths. Our culture has changed, pushing us away from judging based on ethnicity, religion, or gender. Instead, we judge others by what they eat, how they dress, or even how they behave in public. We carry expectations for ourselves and those around us, locked quietly inside. Because we hear the internal voice, judging strangers, friends, and even ourselves, we know that others are judging, too. And in the end, we feel judged.

However, parents and teachers judging each other during conferences does no good to anyone. It is

DECEMBER 2014

Dates to Remember

- 12/4 NO SCHOOL
Parent-Teacher
Conferences**
- 12/5 NO SCHOOL
Parent-Teacher
Conferences**
- 12/19 WINTER BREAK
BEGINS—Students
return JAN 6th**



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

unfortunate that these meetings are called 'conferences.' Maybe it would be better if they were called conversations. The purpose of these conversations is to come together, not to judge each other. The goal is to share the child we see at school, and to discuss whether this is the same child that parents see in the home. Teachers are experts on development. They have vast knowledge of where your child excels. They know what her favorite works are, who she spends her time with, and what areas in the classroom she avoids. They are also keen observers and notice developmental growth as well as areas where your child might struggle or need a little extra help.

Parents, on the other hand, are experts on their child. Having watched your child grow from the being he was to the being he is, you have special insight into why he has become who he is. You have seen your child develop in all environments and have a deep understanding of her personality, her frustrations, her fears, and her goals. You know what his routines are, his sleeping habits, and of the experiences that have impacted him most. In order for us to know where your child is coming from, we ask you to communicate news of events in your child's life. That said, it is easier to share that your spouse is out of town, that you recently started a new job, or even that the family dog just died than it is to share that you lost your job, maxed out your credit cards, and have spent the last week screaming at your entire family.

Perhaps the best way to approach each conference is with the mindset that it is a meeting of the minds. No child is perfect; each one has strengths and struggles. The goal of all the adults in his life is to discover how best to help him to achieve his dreams. This seems so much easier if we all come together to support him and help him to follow his own path. Even when the conversation gets difficult, which it can be, we all need to remember that it's about coming together. As we share our insights and work together, we can only help in the end. These children are the most important people in all of our lives, our goals are the same, and we all want what's best for them.

So, next time you are sitting on either side of the conference table, if you begin to feel judged, try postpone reaction, take a deep breath and remind yourself, we all have the same goal. Ask for clarification. Offer insights of your own. After all, your child's best interest is the goal and this conversation is the first step in getting there.

RE-ENROLLMENT FOR 2015-2016

Re-enrollment forms will be sent out in early January. Sibling applications will be included with these forms. All **forms** and **fees** must be returned by **January 31st**.

LAND, AIR, WATER

by Vida West 440 AM and XP teacher



Did you know that water always travels downhill? Did you know that you can stack up soil to make a hill but cannot stack water or air? Did you know that you can tell which side of your body the sun is shining on even if your eyes are closed? If you are a parent reading this article then the answer is probably yes. But to young children these are magical discoveries.

This year I am researching a new approach to Geography. We are studying biomes, some might call them ecosystems. A biome is a community of plants and animals that exists in a specific type of soil and

climate. The parts of a biome are life (plants and animals) and things that support life (air, water, soil, and energy from the sun). Here in Colorado we have grasslands, mountainous areas, and deserts.

We started our study this year by going into the backyard and noticing the elements of our own biome. We noticed the grass beneath our feet and the rich soil beneath that. The children pointed out the pumpkins in our garden, the fat squirrel running by, a butterfly. They even noticed the sand box soil, the river running, and the mud puddle that always forms by the grape arbor when it rains. I mentioned that there was one more element and asked the students to close their eyes, then point to the sun. They could feel which cheek was warmer, then we stepped into the shade to feel how cold our whole bodies might get.

After studying land, air, and water for the first few months of school like we always do, I introduced three little fish bowl environments... one with sand, one water, and one with "snow". We talked about what it might be like to live there and sorted little objects into the different biomes. Where does a fish live? What about a cactus? Where might you find a polar bear? How much sun do you think each of these places sees?

Now, as I've introduced the political boundaries of continent studies (which we usually tackle after land, air, and water) we have some context. We don't just talk about Africa, we can talk about the Sahara desert or the Congo rainforest. I always felt a little too generalized when I said that elephants are from Africa, when what I mean is that they live in the grasslands of Africa (the Savannah). After all, polar bears do live in North America, but not in the wetlands of Florida, but the polar regions of Canada.

Sometimes the simplest questions and observations yield the richest answers and deepest learning. I am so glad that we began this year with: What do you see? What do you hear? What do you feel when you touch the ground? Already our answers are simply fascinating.



Mother's Night

Tuesday, January 13th

AM Primary Classes 5:30—6:30 pm

PM Primary and XP Classes 6:00—7:00 pm

Mom's or other special friends, please join your children in their classes and Zach's Place for a fun-filled evening of sharing and exploring. The children love the opportunity to be the "teachers" to their special adult guest.

Need a Nanny?

A former Children's Garden family, the Bennets, is helping their nanny of 8 years find a new family. If you are looking or know someone who is, contact Susan Daggett at 303-249-3123 or susanddaggett@me.com.

Thank You to the Children's Garden Board of Directors for providing lunch for the teachers and staff; to Brooke B. for the fruit and veggies for the staff; Beverly J. for bringing pizza and salad for the staff; Christina D. for organizing the studio volunteers and to those volunteers who have filed the children's art in their portfolios. Special thanks to all of you for all the love and support you bring to our community.