



## Garden Notes for October 2017

### FROM THE HEAD OF SCHOOL

One of my favorite parts of my job is the conversations that I get to have with the children who attend CGMS! The other day, while working in the Studio, one of them informed me proudly that she gets rewards when she is a good listener at home.

“What does it mean to be a good listener?” I inquired.

“Sometimes, I am a good listener and sometimes I am not!” she admitted.

“What does it mean to be a good listener?” I repeated.

“Hmmm...I don’t know...I think that it has something to do with sharing?” She answered, not so confidently.

Her response got me thinking. The truth is, being a good listener isn’t as easy to define as we all would like to think. What does it mean? As a parent and as a teacher, we often prompt our children to “be good listeners” or to “listen carefully.” What we usually mean is do what I am asking you to do, or pay attention to my words. However, it is entirely possible to listen to what someone is saying and not do what they want us to do. As adults, we do it all the time.

As the Head of School, I spend a lot of time listening. It’s an important part of my job. I listen to what the children tell me about their world and their interpretations. I listen to parents who come to me with ideas, questions, concerns, and complaints. I listen to staff members who approach me with suggestions, solutions, and struggles. When I say that I listen, I mean that I hear what people say to me, I think about what they are saying explicitly and implicitly. Then, I respond. Sometimes I agree. Sometimes, I do not. Either way, I don’t just do what people tell me to do. I pay attention to their words, and make my own decisions. And, if I am going to be honest, like the above child, sometimes I am a good listener, and sometimes I am not.

This year, as a staff, we are actively working on communication and collaboration. In our school, the two go hand-in-hand. So many strong, intelligent, passionate, independent staff members! Maintaining one’s autonomy while simultaneously collaborating on a team is a tricky endeavor. Not only do we need to express our needs clearly, but we also have to take the time to listen to each other’s responses empathetically. Then, we have to decide if we agree or disagree, and figure out how to move forward. Because we have deep respect for each other and shared visions, we are happy to take this work on. Nevertheless, it is work and coming together to create shared visions is an extensive task.

This last week of September, I will be out of town attending a Leadership Conference in Colorado Springs. The purpose is to help me to become a better leader, so that I can help our teams to function in the best way possible. I look forward to bringing back what I learn to share with my staff and all of you! Maybe our young charge was not so far off when she connected listening and sharing. There is definitely an element of sharing that goes into being a good listener!



