



May 21, 2009

THE CHILDREN'S DAY SCHOOL Weekly

Words from Rick

Empathy in Action

In response to last week's article "Send Us Your Stories," one grandparent wrote:

One of your kindergartners accompanied his parents for a family visit to the grandparents where they stayed at the home of his aunt and uncle and two younger cousins. At one point he saw the typical sibling bickering that often occurs among brothers—especially at the ages of 2 and 4. In this case, however, he sought out their mother and made the observation that the older brother seemed to be excessively bullying the younger one. The mother, a patient and understanding soul, asked him what he thought should be done about the bullying. To her delighted surprise he had a ready answer. He proceeded to suggest that she engage the boys in some games that would have the purpose of teaching cooperation and empathy. It was wonderful to see the emergence of my San Francisco grandson's ultimate personality and wonderful ability to connect with others, no matter what their age or station in life.

There are programs for "Teaching Empathy." They focus on how to read people's emotions, to understand why they might be feeling what they are feeling, and to develop strategies for helping other people feel better. My experience at Children's Day School has taught me that this is natural but disciplined work. It is true that some brains are wired so that empathy is not easy, but in most brains, by the age of two, feeling what the other person is feeling is quite easy. Experiencing empathy is natural; the expression of empathy needs discipline, practice and work.

Here is another story of empathy in action from Ms. Emilie:

Crying in loud gulps, Alie (age 5) was sitting in the preschool yard with Ms. Jen, kindergarten teacher. It was Alie's first visit to CDS as a prospective student. She had felt a bit fragile as she was dropped off that morning, but a conflict in the sandbox had sent her over the edge. I took her inside, hoping music would help, but Alie continued crying. The other children stared at her with a mix of wonder and trepidation.

Someone asked, "Why is she crying?" Ms. Jen explained that she was feeling sad and asked if they knew what it felt like to feel sad. The Starfish nodded collectively. Suddenly, Lula asked, "She's feeling sad?" I nodded. Lula thought for a second, and then got up and slowly walked over to Alie, sat down beside her, gently reached out

Hot Dates

Friday, May 22

8:30 a.m.

Friday assembly

Leaping Lizards presenting

Friday, May 22 & Saturday, May 23

7 p.m. (Fri), 1 p.m. (Sat)

The Comedy of Errors

Middle school

Shakespeare performance

Dolores Park Church

455 Dolores Street

Monday, May 25

Memorial Day observed

No school

No extended program

Dates also posted on CDS website
www.cds-sf.org/news/calendar.html



Thank You!

- A big thank you to Shermalee Nicholson and Rafael Guillen, with help from Danielle Gutherie, for providing fabulous coffee and pastries last week. The coffee was made with Panamanian coffee beans and the pastries (empanadas and pineapple and cream-filled pastries) were heated up in CDS ovens during the wee hours of the morning while we all still slumbered. Thank you for the extra work and creative contributions.

her hand and rested it on her knee. “I’m sorry you’re feeling sad,” Lula said as she leaned in to her. “I would like to have a play date with you. I would like you to come over, and we can play and then when you leave you can have one of my stuffed animals. Do you have a Hello Kitty?”

Alie, taking a deep breath for the first time in ten minutes, nodded. “AH!” shrieked Lula, in complete and utter delight. “You can have mine!” A few minutes later, Alie asked to go back outside. Lula turned to me matter-of-factly and said, “I’m going to go outside and play with her.” She turned to Alie: “Can I play with you?” Alie nodded. Lula got her coat, took the girl’s hand, and off they went, together, braving their way back to the sandbox.

All of the students experienced Alie’s sadness. Ms. Jen named it. Lula used sadness in a sentence, then acted so that Alie’s sadness could be shared, and then diminished. She showed that she had a variety of strategies for addressing another person’s sadness. Similarly, our kindergartner was able to analyze an emotionally fraught situation, and take action to ameliorate it. The students had not been taught empathy, but social skills.

Left “to develop naturally,” the normal human wiring for feeling what the other person is feeling can develop in all sorts of random ways, some of which might be dysfunctional. Normally, people can read a face and know whether the person is mad, sad, glad or afraid. My experience is that what needs to be taught is not empathy, but what to do with empathy. Starting in preschool, kids need to be given the words, behaviors, skills and most of all, the experience of expressing empathy effectively. We should not be teaching empathy, but kindness.

But here is the most important thing: the CDS *genius* is that, here, children learn that kindness is not self-sacrificing, but self-serving. The main characters in these two stories enhanced themselves by helping others. Their experience of employing their empathy for others and their practice of deploying their problem solving skills for others made it more likely that they will keep doing it, and if they keep doing it... well, there actually won’t be too much for us to worry about.

From the Classrooms

From the Green Task Force

Only a few Earth Friendly Fridays remain to try out a novel way of commuting to and from CDS. If you haven’t yet asked a CDS neighbor if they would like to carpool on Friday, today might be a good day to ask. Members of the Green Task Force will be at the main gate on Friday to decorate Earth Friendly commuters with “I GO GREEN” stickers to highlight those who went out of their way to get to school by foot, MUNI, BART, scooter, skates, skateboard or carpool. A big green thank you to all who take the extra time to reduce the CDS carbon footprint.

Strawberry Baskets

Please bring empty green plastic strawberry boxes to CDS for re-use. The boxes will be picked up each Thursday and brought to Eatwell Farm to be filled with luscious organic strawberries. Thanks for re-using, recycling and going green.

From the Office

Staff Transitions

Unlike businesses, many independent schools employ teachers and staff on year-by-year employment contracts that can be renewed each spring. This is how CDS operates and it means that behind the scenes, spring is an important time in the life of the school. It is the time of year when teachers and administrators, in consultation with Rick, Rebecca and Josée, finalize their decisions about what positions they’ll hold and whether or not to renew their contracts.

This means spring is also the time of year when we start the hiring process. When an opening is confirmed, we look first to our current faculty members; changing roles within CDS can be a great opportunity for an employee to grow professionally as an educator. If we do not have an internal candidate, we post the position on our

website and in many places in the community. A hiring committee led by Rebecca or Josée and made up of teachers and administrators helps to recruit, identify and interview candidates; one of our top priorities when hiring is to increase the racial diversity of our staff. Hiring recommendations are then made to Rick. Our policy here at CDS is to announce teacher departures, hires and roles for next fall in the last *Weekly* of the school year. Teachers may choose to tell their colleagues they are leaving when the decision is made, but we try to communicate all staff transitions to the larger school community at once.

Our number one priority is that each student feels safe and secure that their teacher is here for them for the remainder of the school year. It can be distracting and detrimental to student learning (especially for the younger students) for students to be concerned about a beloved teacher not being here next year. For this reason, we ask for your patience in learning about our staff transitions, and if you hear of something through the grapevine, please don't share this information with your child yet. We are in the process of hiring new staff for several positions and look forward to sharing our new hires and fall teacher line-up with you in the final edition of the *Weekly* on June 4.

Family Farmer Dates

Experience farm fresh eggs during our San Francisco summer! Contact Misty Cummings at mistyc@cds-sf.org to sign up for the following dates:

- August 17-21, 31

Events

Class of 2009 Graduation

On Tuesday, June 9 we'll hold the Class of 2009 graduation ceremony in the CDS yard. Graduation will run from 3:45–5 p.m. All middle school students are strongly encouraged to attend. Middle schoolers will sit with their classes and teachers and can be picked up after the ceremony at 5 p.m. Students in elementary and preschool are invited to attend with their families. All CDS parents are invited as well. Please note that there will be no extended program available that afternoon. Stay tuned for more graduation information. We hope you'll join us in celebrating this year's graduating class and all of their achievements!

Upcoming Dates

Friday, May 29

9-10 a.m.

Step-Up Day: students visit next year's classroom

Sunday, May 31 – Sunday, June 7

Eighth grade trip

Monday, June 1 – Saturday, June 6

Sixth grade trip

Monday, June 1

Last day that, with written notice, you may withdraw your child from the 2009-10 school year without incurring the obligation for the total tuition

Tuesday, June 9

9-10 a.m.

Passing the Torch ceremony

3:45-5 p.m.

Eighth grade graduation

Last day of school

Dates also posted on CDS website
www.cds-sf.org/news/calendar.html

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