

Philomath Montessori School Newsletter

MARCH 2017



A Report from the Refresher Course

By Doni Manning-Cyrus

Although it is a trial to close the school so that we teachers may attend continuing education courses, it is always worthwhile. For one, we are legally obligated to pursue a certain number of hours each year in order to retain our state certification. We accumulate even more hours in order to maintain the 4-star rating that we have achieved in Oregon's online rating system for preschools. And sometimes, the courses are truly valuable and enriching to the work we do, as they were from Friday, February 17, through Monday, February 20, in Austin, TX.

Jessica and I parted ways on Friday. She took a course on recognizing and supporting the child with dyslexia. As you might imagine, it is difficult to identify dyslexia when one is working with pre-reading students or emerging readers. Jessica learned that there is a list of traits, habits and qualities that dyslexic students display in their pre-reading years. The list sounded very much like a list of traits that ALL preschoolers exhibit! I look forward to hearing more from Jessica about what she learned. In nearly 30 years of teaching at this age level, I have yet to identify a dyslexic child or to have one pointed out for me. One student that I know of was diagnosed with the disorder some years after having left my charge. Statistically, there must have been others. I have much to learn on this topic.



Nayla and June getting some sandpaper letters to trace.

Meanwhile, I attended a fantastic workshop. The first half of the day was spent on anti-bias education and integrating it into our thinking and practice. We began by reporting some incidents of children's questions or comments about differences, like "What's wrong with the kid in the wheelchair?" "Why are you wearing that (religious article of clothing)?" "Why do you have two moms?" "This has been damaged. It must have been spoiled by (fill in the blank with a troubled kid's name)." "Why are your hands two different colors (the palms and the backs)?" And on went the list. In no time at all, it was easy to see that children do, indeed, notice differences between us. Even

infants know the difference between a known and unknown person.

But how to address these differences, if at all? That was the question at hand. Our presenter was Dr. Debbie LeeKeenan, the director of the Early Childhood Program in the Graduate School of Education at Lesley University, and a published author on the subject. She offered a continuum of approaches that ranged from "color blind," where differences are ignored and children's questions are shushed; to a "tourist curriculum," which emphasizes differences and stereotypes; to a "non-bias" approach in which both similarities and differences are acknowledged in a way that's culturally sensitive and bias-free; and at the far end of the spectrum we find "anti-bias" education, which is emergent, ongoing and organic. It is present in everything we do. It empowers individuals and encourages critical thinking. It is active, even pro-active.

To examine pro-activity, here in our area, our children are definitely not exposed to the entire spectrum of humanity. How many people of color do our kids know? Do they know anyone with special needs? Do they know people who practice different religions? Or people whose families are composed differently than theirs? Maybe not. But at this very age, the first plane of development, from birth to age 6, is exactly when they should be shown the vast

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diversity of the human family. What we take in through our senses, repeatedly, at this age level, is what we come to know as “normal.” We can expand our kids’ concept of normalcy through exposure. Books are wonderful. They can be “mirrors” that reflect ourselves and our lives and they can also be “windows” that show us others’ experiences: how others are like us and how they are different. Then there are “doors” when we actually go out into the world and see things for ourselves. Take your kid to one of the ethnic festivals offered at OSU. Go to St. Anne’s Orthodox Church’s annual Greek festival. Attend a Special Olympics event. Visit an elderly person. Explore Portland on foot and by public transportation. Diversity abounds if you seek it out.

We also saw an excellent TED talk by Nigerian author Chimamanda Adiche. She told a fascinating story to elucidate the danger of the “single story.” The “single story” is when we only know and discuss one aspect of a person or a people, ignoring everything else that they are. Check it out online. You will enjoy her.

The last half of the day was spent on “Embracing the Possibility of Growth Through Conflict.” Dr. LeeKeenan calls conflict resolution “conflict maintenance.” I liked that.



Lili and Juniper working with the Deconomial Square.

Often conflict is not resolved and “over” but, rather, we learn to live with it. We manage ongoing dissonance and disagreement. We move beyond winning/losing, my way/your way and we look for “the third space”: a scenario in which all parties are satisfied.

The first workshop on anti-bias education and the second on growth through conflict melded together when we looked at a real situation in which an elementary child asked another child if her mom was a terrorist, because she always wore a headscarf. This shined a light on how religious illiteracy results in extreme prejudice. There were, in this class, many discussions and argu-

ments about faith and the existence of God and the teacher wanted to capitalize on this and explore a unit about God in the setting of this secular school. The director of the school (LeeKeenan) advised the teacher to get parent buy-in first and so a meeting was called. The upshot of this meeting is that the teacher got his go-ahead for the study, but it was decided to call it a study of beliefs, not God. The elementary children proceeded by interviewing a Jewish rabbi, a Christian minister, a Muslim cleric and an atheist over the next few weeks. This created a safe and respectful space for the kids to discuss faith and beliefs and showed how all of these religious and non-religious schol-

ars and practitioners all practiced “The Golden Rule.” This group of kids had moved beyond thinking that one religion was right and others were wrong. They moved into that “third space” where empathy, understanding, growth and tolerance were the prizes that everyone came away with.

Friday evening brought the keynote address by Dr. Ross Greene, child psychologist and author. Dr. Greene is the originator of the Collaborative Problem Solving Approach and the author of many books, including “Lost at School” and “Raising Human Beings.” He spoke

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to us about kids who were “lucky” and “unlucky.” “Lucky” kids are those whose response to disappointment is more passive – whining, sulking, crying, withdrawing, etc. “Unlucky” kids were more explosive – yelling, hitting, hurting, destroying property, etc. These are the kids upon whom the heavy hand of authority falls hard. Dr. Greene explained that most problems that kids experience occur in a perfect storm of two dynamics: a child who is lacking certain skills meets the expectation that those very skills be employed. His approach to helping children succeed in school and life is to help them develop those important skills, whatever they might be (organization, self-restraint, empathy, self-soothing, really, WHATEVER they might be) and removing or delaying the expectations that they are unable to meet, whatever they may be (lining up, sitting still, turning in work on time, participating in class, really WHATEVER they might be) until such a time as the skills have caught up with the expectation. He was the best speaker of the weekend. Very funny and compassionate. And successful! In Maine, where he resides and works with the juvenile justice system, more than half the beds in the “system” are no longer needed. They shut down one of two juvenile detention centers in the state. School expulsions were reduced by approximately two-thirds. I look forward to learning more about Greene’s approach. He has a website called Lives in the Balance where we can all learn more about the best ways to help children and (this gets my attention) nothing is for sale on his site.

Now I see how working with materials in both the math and sensorial areas helps the child to study patterns and structures, to order and organize her own intelligence and to make discoveries. I was neglecting all of this! ... From now on, I will have more respect for the creative aspect of the mathematics curriculum.



Gabe, Zaynab and Ames working on an Addition Collective Exercise.

That was all just the first day, folks. The mass of the conference was spent on reviewing the mathematics curriculum. Our presenter was Uma Ramani, an AMI trainer and consultant. I’m not going to lie to you, guys. It was a little dry. I found myself resenting being at such a long and dull presentation, especially since it was a review for us all. I wondered what I would be getting out of this and if it was worth having to repeatedly bite my own cheek to maintain wakefulness. I even had a cup of coffee each day and I’m typically caffeine-free.

But I am so glad that I sat through it! As it turns out, this refresher course will completely transform my approach to the curriculum. Here’s how: Until this course, I had been very progress-oriented. My approach was to take the children through the math curriculum as far as we could in the three years we were given. Master this, move on. Master this, move on. But no longer. Now I see how working with materials in both the math and sensorial areas helps the child to study patterns and structures, to order and organize her own intelligence and to make discoveries. I was neglecting all of this! I was depriving each child of the joy of discovery. I was hurrying on from the red rods and the number rods and the snake game and the strip boards like they were vegetables that we had to consume in order to be allowed dessert. Although I am

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loathe for the kids to think of any material as just a means to another material, wishing for them to just “be here now” with each wonderful piece of work, that is exactly what I was doing myself.

Mathematics, even specifically just counting objects, is a complex mental task which took humanity millennia to develop. It wasn't until the time of the Egyptian and Roman empires that we even had symbols for the numerals 1-9. Zero wasn't invented until 400 C.E.! And the decimal system was created only just prior to the Renaissance. (Thank you, India for both of those latter concepts!) The development of a child's mathematical mind mimics the development of humanity's relationship with numeracy. In other words, it takes a minute! We musn't be deceived by the child who can “count.” We can substitute the word “chant” for what many of them are doing. It is only “counting” when the number represents an object or set of objects in the child's mind. That is complex.

From now on, I will have more respect for the creative aspect of the mathematics curriculum. The child is creating the combinations of addends into sums when he is exploring, exploring, exploring with the number rods. The child is creating the tables of addition, subtraction, multiplication for herself with the snake game or the strip boards. They should be exciting discoveries of which the child has a feeling of ownership. I'm just sad that I hadn't taken an AMI Mathematics Refresher Course sooner. We have all been missing out.

On Monday, we went to a delightful workshop on “Filling the Air with Music” by AMI primary trainer Sarah Werner Andrews. This was pure fun. She taught us some new songs and folk dances and encouraged us to sing throughout the day and not just with the whole group at the end of the day. (I guess this is common practice in some schools.) Sarah advised us to sing with everyone all together, with small



Ella working with cylinder blocks.

groups and even to individuals. She taught us a song called “I Think You're Wonderful,” which has since become a favorite of mine. She said that this is a nice song to sing to someone who is having a hard time. Just take that little someone who is trying your and everyone else's patience with their atrocious behavior and sing them this dear little song.

When I returned home and was telling my husband, Andy, about this activity, I got all misty with the sweetness and compassion of it. Then, when I spoke to my mother, Sara, about it on the phone, I just got as far as the title of the song and we both were weeping! I haven't sung it to any of the individual kids in the class, but I think I must. It seems very powerful.

And although nothing was said on this point, it is just plain awesome to sing in a group with people. As Sarah taught us a song and then we all sang it

together, she encouraged us to harmonize where possible. In doing so, we created a spontaneous moment of such collaboration and beauty that I got tears in my eyes and chills down my spine.

I hear Austin is a hip, happening town with over 250 live music venues. I will have to take their word for it. Our hotel was a \$40 cab ride from anything hip or happening and we had limited time to take on the public transportation system. Jessica had a local connection, though, a high school friend who picked us up and took us to Torchy's Tacos, a famous institution visited by none other than President Barack Obama! Good tacos, outdoor picnic tables and excellent guacamole. And the balmy weather was the jalapeno on top!

Best Regards,
Doni

All for the Love of Learning ...

By Jessica Neebe

An auction fundraiser like ours is a huge endeavor, especially for such a small school. So, we are grateful that our group manages to not only pull it off, but in a big and an amazing way. Our auction co-chairs, **Joy Ueng** and **Leanne Miller**, worked together like a well-oiled machine. It was a beautiful event filled with our dearest friends and family members. Compliments abounded from all corners during the evening and after. And we raised more than \$12,000, which was our goal.

It all began with some strategic planning by the dynamic duo of Joy and Leanne over the summer. Without hesitation, they moved directly toward solicitations – the bedrock of our fundraiser. It seems like letters to businesses were in the mail shortly after school started! Many went out and garnered donations from around the community, but there were some super solicitors that I wanted to give special thanks – because it's the kind of thing that most of us don't like to do! So, special thanks to **Leanne Miller, Joy Ueng, Kathleen Lloyd, Doni Manning-Cyrus, Pauline Tanaka, Liesl Rolston** and **Julie Wiethorn** for putting in that extra effort! **Sarah MacClary** tracked the solicitations and donations and



Doni Manning-Cyrus introduces **Jessica Neebe** before the children's performance.

kept them organized and accessible to all in a mind-blowing spreadsheet. And we deeply appreciate our very generous community of donors – the many businesses and organizations and individuals who have supported us enthusiastically over the years. We truly appreciate their generosity.

Our families also generously donated wonderful items and services: **Leslie Cohen, Nick and Kristen Arzner, Maya Emshwiller, Audrey and James Deatherage, Nico Giftai, Elke Wiethorn, Jonathan Jensen, Doni Manning-Cyrus, Petersen family, Foster family, Meyer family, Pauline Tanaka and Allan Rack, Liz Grant, Liesl and Steve Rolston-Tavano, Sandie and Jeff Hallman, Rachael Oehler, Susan Bourdet (Roen's grand-**

mother), Hart family, and Amy Ward. And our alumni families: **Esme and Jake Weil, Kevin and Kati Albin, Richard and Tracy Choi, Ed Durrenberger and Susan McLaren, Lori and Alex Gholson, Jean Goul and Ken Corbin, Janet and Paul Hochfeld, Dennis Johanson (Kaden's grandfather) of Mary's Peak Pottery, Mathison family, Lohr family and Ruby Moon.**

A big thank you to **Leanne Miller** for securing our generous sponsors who help offset our many expenses. They include **Barker-Uerlings Insurance** (our first ever gold sponsor!!!), **Auto Tech Automotive Service, Integrity Floors, The Corvallis Clinic, Philomath Dairy Queen, Pioneer Telephone Co-operative, DeMoss-**

Durdan Funeral Home, E.D. Hughes Excavating, Korvis Automation, McGaughy's Farrier Service, Pediatric Dental Associates, and Public Good PR. Please do let them know when you see them that we truly appreciate their generosity.

Then came the basket parties! A special thank you to **Katy Mabeck** and **Kai Foster** for hosting these fun and very productive parties and for storing the completed baskets until auction day. And kudos to our basket creators: **Audrey Deatherage, Tara Starr Marvin, Maya Emshwiller, Katy Mabeck, Yalda Asmatey, Kai Foster, Sarah MacClary, Doni Manning-Cyrus, Skye Nielson, Amy Ward, Liesl Rolston, Kristen Arzner,**

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Rachael Oehler and **Elke Wiethorn**, for packaging up so many enticing combinations, and **Dave Williams**, **Pauline Tanaka** and **Karin Hart** for dropping last-minute donations off to the basket parties.

We are very grateful to **Stuart Feldman** for all the website work for the auction, to **Dave Williams** for putting together the cool auction pamphlet, to **Amy Bassett** at **First Alternative Co-op** for printing the color flyers and our black-and-white handbill, to **Mike Ransdell** for tracking pre-admission ticket sales, to **Brendan Ward** for the wonderful slideshow, and to **Karen Petersen** for diligently keeping our Facebook page updated with the latest auction news. Many helped spread the word by posting flyers around town including **Dave Williams**, **Liesl Rolston**, **Julie Wiethorn** and **Elke Giftai**, **Maya Emshwiller**, **Tara Starr Marvin**, **Pauline Tanaka**, **Kathleen Lloyd**, **Rachael Oehler**, **Karen Petersen** and **Amy Ward**.

In another arena, **Skye Nielson** deftly headed up our children's program, bringing back **Kidspirit**, after a year hiatus, and **Lil' Kickers** and then rounding out the evening with a magician, pizza, dessert and even a quiet corner for those who wanted a little less action. **Liesl Rolston** was **Skye's** experienced assistant throughout the process and stepped in to oversee the program at the event when sickness kept **Skye** and her



The students perform "Suzie Snowflake" during the Love of Learning Fundraiser.

family home. Many thanks to **Kidspirit** and **Lil' Kickers**, who provided a powerhouse of volunteers that were quick on their feet to adjust to a power failure in the gym – striking up organized games in an adjacent classroom that delighted everyone! In addition, **Sandie Hallman** prepared the delicious homemade assortment of desserts and snacks, **Little Caesar's** donated pizzas, **Safeway** and **AutoTech** rounded out dinner with yummy snacks, **Special Occasions** provided the plates, balloons and napkins and a host of vigilant parents made sure everyone had a fun and safe evening: **Maya and Zhaohui Emshwiller-Wu**, **Sarah and Matt MacClary**, **Karen and Chris Petersen** and **Liesl Rolston** and **Steve Tavano**. And a special thank you to **Yalda Asmatey** for picking up and delivering all the pizzas!

This year brought the return of the raffle with priz-

es fresh from the farm and filled with fun! **Rachael Oehler** headed up our auction committee along with able assistant **Karin Hart**. **Rachael** made sure tickets and flyers were designed, printed, organized and sold without a hitch! Many thanks to our Board of Directors, **Ed Durrenberger**, **Paul Hochfeld**, **Kim Gratz**, **Sha Sifford**, **Janel Lawrence**, **Kathleen Lloyd**, **Ruby Moon**, **Dodie Wilson**, and **Joan Extrom**, for providing the Gathering Together Farm CSA Box! Thanks to alumni dad **JC Mersmann** for sharing his favorite GTF recipes and to **Leaping Lambs Farm**, **the Corvallis Carrot** and **Midway Farm** for donating our prizes. **Doni Manning-Cyrus** mingled with the auction guest as our irresistible Raffle Queen, selling tickets with passion. Congratulations to our winners!

On the day of the auction, setup went off without

a hitch thanks to **Audrey Deatherage's** keen sense of design and organization. It's always fun to watch how a room can turn from plain to dazzling in a couple of hours. Many thanks to all of you who played a role: **Jeff Hallman**, **Yalda Asmatey**, **Jon Stoll**, **Karin Hart**, **Katy** and **Jeff Mabeck**, **Doni Manning-Cyrus**, **Pauline Tanaka**, **Liz Grant** and **Jeff Siler**, **Sarah MacClary**, **Jacob and Skye Nielson**, **Kai Foster**, **Maya Emshwiller**, **Amy Ward** and **Liesl Rolston**. Many thanks also to **Katy Mabeck**, **Jacob and Skye Nielson**, **Kai Foster** and her dad, **Richard**, for ferrying baskets, tables, decorations, etc. for setup. **The Thyme Garden** supplied tablecloths for the auction tables and **Greengable Farms** taunted us with thoughts of spring by provid-

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ing a plethora of daffodils. How gorgeous!

Warmly greeting everyone at the door this year was **Leslie and Warren Cohen** at will call and **Pauline Tanaka and Allan Rack** at ticket sales – these familiar faces at the door made everyone feel welcome! At the other end, **Leanne Miller, Karen Petersen and Julie Wiethorn** managed the mad rush at checkout. **Leanne** also brought three wonderful women from her office – **Salena Clifton, Amber Grice and Ann Watkins** -- who were a tremendous help! Our runners included **Leanne (lead), Audrey Deatherage, Amy Ward, Karin Hart, Matt MacClary, Lua Siegel, Karin Feldman** and alumni **Madeline Lehman, Shaden Jensen and Anya Panose**. Many thanks to all of you. This was probably the most stressful part of the auction!

Along with her many other duties, **Joy Ueng** polled a target group to carefully craft desirable live auction packages. **Liz Grant**



The basket tables were decorated with color-coded table runners and balloons.

extended her emcee duties to include auctioneer, driving our auction to ever greater heights.

Many thanks to humble **Nick and Kristen Arzner** of **Block 15 Brewing** who treated our guests to a multitude of delicious choices in the fully stocked dinner buffet. **Block 15** kept the food tables amply supplied and looking good! Yummm! **Bespoken Coffee Roasters** donated coffee to pair perfectly with our desserts.

We were delighted to have the Dessert Bake-off again this year, but this time we invited all to participate instead of just alumni – the more dessert the better,

right? **Meagan Johanson (alumni parent), Lauren Sharpton and Pauline** were the lucky judges. Maybe one day I'll be lucky enough to be a judge! We are so grateful to our contestants for baking and creating such incredible desserts: **Liesl Rolston (3rd place winner!), Joan Extrom, Trina and Megan McGaughy (1st place winners!), Doni Manning-Cyrus, Kai Foster (2nd place winner!), Sarah MacClary (honorable mention), Aayenda Asmatey-Stoll, Maya Emshwiller (honorable mention) and Rachael Oehler**. We are especially grateful to **Yalda Asmatey**, who worked so hard to organize the contest and then later presented this beautiful array of desserts to our guests.

The **Space Neighbors** came again to delight us while we bid and stuck around to entertain us even through cleanup with their jazzy groove – loved it!! Thank you to **Rigel Woodside (alumni dad), John Navarro, Melanie Reid and Nick Rivard** for sharing their music and talent with

us. Special thanks to **Doni Manning-Cyrus** for opening the evening with a warm welcome and **Liz Grant** for being the lovely emcee. Doni led (and rehearsed for weeks!) the children in their performance songs, *Suzie Snowflake* and the Italian favorite *Funiculi, Funicula*. And kudos to our outstanding kids who bravely went on stage to give a heart-stopping performance!

At the end, there were many cheerful, capable hands to help with cleanup. It was done in the blink of an eye! A big thank you to **Doni Manning-Cyrus, Jeff Siler, Katy Mabeck, Sarah and Matt MacClary, Lua Siegel** and **Zhaohui Wu** for sticking around until the job was done.

Finishing up on a sweet note will be our thank you note writers. A deep thank you to **Leslie Cohen, Jessica Neebe** and **Karen Petersen**. There are a LOT of wonderful donors to thank!

As I write this thank you for the first time in my new position at our school, I feel moved by the community – how much work you all do, how much you give and give even more. You bring your friends, your family and implore our past families to join us. We have an extraordinary community of parents. Without it such a small school could not pull off such an amazing event. We, the staff, the board, and the children, are so very grateful for your generosity and support for the love of learning.



Trays of baked goods await hungry bidders at the Love of Learning Fundraiser.

Children at Work



TOP: Roen cleans up the hand-washing table.

ABOVE: Aviva and Piper deadhead plants in the garden.

RIGHT TOP: Cassidy polishes wooden jewelry.

RIGHT BOTTOM: Nora paints an oval with green and yellow.

Newsline Spring 2017

❖ We will hold **Parent-Teacher conferences** in April and May. Signups for observations and conferences will be up soon if not already. Please sign up as soon as possible so that we can begin focused observations.

❖ We will be putting **ASQ-SE Questionnaires** in your family boxes on Monday, March 13. Please return it by March 24, earlier if possible. We would like to have the results ready in time for your spring conference. Thanks in advance!

❖ Join us for a **Dine-out Night at McMenamins** on Monroe on March 13 from 5 p.m. until close. A generous 50% of the night's sales go to PhMS!

❖ **Spring Break** begins Monday, March 27. School resumes on Monday, April 10. Enjoy!

❖ Our **last parent meeting of the year** will be Thursday, April 20, from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

❖ Our second **Children's Open House** will be on Thursday, May 4, from 5:30 to 7 p.m.

Friday Art Class

We are in the process of finishing up fish sculptures out of felt, which are stuffed and decorated with beads. This past couple months we have made painted and printed drums, collaged musical shakers, and then had a rhythm jam session to conclude this focus. Using crayons, oil pastels and water color paints, the children created mandalas, with the crayons and pastels serving as a resist to the paint.

— Jennifer