



Philomath Montessori School

December 2015



Oh, my! Can it be December already?! I would say that the year is just flying by, but that will no doubt come back to mock me in May. All of you parents probably feel rather in the loop right now as we recently had our parent teacher conferences. Our unit on Kenya is wrapping up at the end of this week. We are so blessed to have Jenny Braxton scheduled to come in on the last day of the unit and lead us in some Afro-style dance moves! We will then begin a study of Sweden on Monday, December 7. Santa Lucia Day will be our winter celebration this year. Lucia was a martyred Christian girl and her sainthood is celebrated on December 13 in Sweden and Italy, especially. We will learn more of her sacrifice and some of the practices and beliefs of Christianity. On her saint's day, the oldest daughter in the family dresses in a white dress adorned with a red sash. She wears a crown of candles upon her head and rises early to serve the family Santa Lucia buns (Lussebullar) which are shaped like curvy S's and flavored lightly with saffron. There are processions of all the girls dressed in their Lucia garb and "star boys" wearing white gowns and pointy hats with stars upon them. It is said that to survive the dark of winter, one must celebrate Lucia Day with vigor in order to absorb sufficient light to carry one through.

Today, we discussed how there are many, many celebrations of light at this time of year: Hannukah, St Nicholas Day, Santa Lucia Day, Solstice, Christmas, the New Year, Kwanza, etc and that such celebrations have gone on for millennia. To cheer us through the dark days (with sunset right around 4:30 pm now!) we light candles and plug in strings of light. To remind us that life is eternal and

that spring will surely come again, we bring green branches and even entire trees into our homes. The customs of one religion, one culture co-mingling with those of another until we often don't know how, when, where or why they began. What unifies them all is humanity striving for the light.

Speaking of striving for the light, let's talk about our children's social lives, shall we? Quite regularly, there is a conflict between two or more kids in class. Or we hear of a conflict that took place after school between classmates or at home between siblings. I was recently having a casual conversation with an acquaintance with a one-year-old son. She said that she intended to homeschool this child because she didn't want him exposed to bad behavior in a preschool. I didn't say anything. She wasn't asking my opinion, but my inner monologue was something like "so you're going to rear him in a social vacuum? Keep him isolated rather than teach him how to navigate a world where people sometimes behave in an unwelcome manner?!" It's true. Sometimes our children spend time with others whose behavior is unacceptable to us. I think we need to view these interactions as opportunities for growth rather than problems best avoided.



Kaden and Auni building with the twig blocks

Here at school, we see children act out in ways that are unpleasing. Someone may use “potty talk,” expose private parts of their bodies, use physical violence against another, pocket items belonging to the school, willfully damage materials, tease others, etc. The list goes on. We have wonderful, well-meaning parents here, many of them highly educated, peace-loving and socially conscious. That doesn’t prevent their children from making some critical social errors. These kids are exposed to so much, such as, other kids, either here at school or in the neighborhood, older siblings who themselves have seen the vast spectrum of abominable behavior at their elementary schools, Aunt Vera who may have had too many glasses of pinot at Thanksgiving, TV shows in which, it seems, sass and attitude is taken for cleverness (even the kids’ programming), and the moments of frustrated venting that we adults sometimes give in to.



Harper, Zirk and Lili in their giant nest

In the age of The Absorbent Mind (3-6) in which everything, good and bad, is taken in by the child’s filterless brain, I understand the desire to keep the child’s influences under tight control, but there is a lot to be learned from a bad example, too. When exposed to something fascinating, like a violent movie (and make no mistake, there is a lot of violence in “family films”) or an elaborately rude friend, the little one has no choice but to process what he has seen. This may involve trying out the behavior within the bosom of his family or acting it out in the schoolyard. Guardians may try ignoring the gaffe. Say, a child tries out a powerful new cuss word to see what kind of reaction it garners. If we ignore it, give it no power, it may never be repeated. Or, then again, it might be! Well, then comes the

opportunity for learning. “We do not use such language. You may not either.” Or “if you need to _____ (fill in the blank) use words like that, play games with your bottom (I actually said that to a kid today!), stick out your tongue, etc., you may do it in the bathroom, in private with the door closed. When you are finished you may return.”

Maybe your child has a dear friend/mortal enemy, known as a “frenemy” whom she likes to invite over to play. It rarely goes well. There is bickering, a lack of sharing, tears, rudeness to the hosting parents, etc. It really matters not which child is the bad influence here. A stand must be made. “Sylvia, I’m going to drive you home now. This is going very badly.” Later, “Mummy and Daddy have noticed that after Sylvia comes to play, you speak rudely to us. Sylvia will not be invited back for a long while.” As for Sylvia’s parents, let them know that your child’s behavior suffers when the kids are together and therefore, you will be opting out of playdates for a while. In a month, try again with the caveat that the invitation will be rescinded if the hosting child fails to use the good manners you have so assiduously instilled in her. Remind her of your expectations. “We expect you to share your toys, speak politely and come directly to us if the play becomes rough.” (Or whatever the behaviors are that you are trying to encourage.)

If your child is having a social conflict away from your presence, at school, daycare, or a friend’s house and they report to you about it afterwards, I suggest advising them to report the situation immediately to the adult(s) in charge in that setting. They can help the child maneuver the situation immediately and will know what works best in their world. It is good to teach children to access their resources!

And do you all know how we do conflict resolution? It is quite simple. It may seem too simple to be impactful, but I am sold on it. We learned it from a very fine child/family therapist, a local, named Monnie K. Smith. It goes like this:

Child #1 - “I feel _____ (sad, angry, hurt, afraid, left out, etc.) when you _____

(push me, break my toys, scribble on my drawing, laugh at me, etc.)

Child #2 - "You feel _____ when I _____.
(merely repeating back what child #1 said)

What can you do to feel better?"

Child #1 - "I am going to _____ (hug my dog, play by myself, go back to our game, etc.)

This serves multiple purposes. It lets the offending child know that his actions affected another negatively. It lets the offended child express their feelings. It lets the offended child know that he need only feel badly as long as he desires and that ultimately, he is in control of his own emotions. People can only make us as miserable as we give them permission to do so.



Jovi washing his boots

You may have noticed that there was no debate about what happened, who did what to whom. This is a rabbit hole from which you may never emerge, so we avoid it. It takes some getting used to. What, no arguing? No evading? No, thank you! There is, however, sometimes a need for the offending child (Child #2) to initiate conflict resolution himself. Perhaps he acted badly toward his friend because his friend did something untoward earlier. Then we reverse roles and start again with a newly excavated grievance. This process seems to satisfy the children. Feelings are exposed to the light rather than festering in the dark and we move forward.

This, over the years, has helped me in my personal relations, too. I detest conflict, but I sometimes screw up my courage and tell my husband how I feel. I'm not usually asking for a change from him. I find it is easier for me to decide how I can change than to demand change from others. But, now, he knows how I feel and if he persists in that certain behavior, at least it is with full knowledge of how it affects me. And I can decide what I am going to do to "feel better."

To end on a dour note, I will say something that, hopefully, does not need to be said. That is, that children under the age of 7 should not be exposed to the news of the day. Nor should they be witness to conversation about mass violence. It is imperative that young children have a sense of trust in the world and that it is a safe place in order for them to do their work of moving through it and impacting upon it. There have been over 1,000 mass shootings in our country just in the lifetimes of my youngest students. Knowing about these incidents will harm our children's development in ways we cannot even foresee. Please protect them.

With that, I wish you all a very joyous Winter Break and a festive holiday season. If you are a little bit concerned about having your darling little dears up in your grill day in and day out for 2 weeks, who could blame you? Please read my blog post from December 2010. It is full of fun, free ideas to help kids occupy themselves AND contribute to the celebrations. Just go to philomathmontessori.org, click on anything, then News and Events, then Our Blog, then Love of Learning and select 2010 on the lower right of the screen. I hope you enjoy it!

Wishing us all peace on earth,

Doni

Friday Art Class

With all the beautiful fall colors, we focused on leaf prints and tree collages with painted papers. For Halloween, the children made painted 3-D masks and then we moved into reinforcing the pattern of under and over weaving with warm and cool colored paintings that were woven together. We just moved into printmaking and after Thanksgiving we will be doing printmaking on pillows, then stuffing and sewing.



Newsline

- ✿ There *will* be art class on Friday, December 18. **Winter Break begins Monday, December 21.** School resumes on Monday, January 4.
- ✿ Remember starting January 4, Dave and Amy will be bringing in snacks – you’re off the hook now! And Julie, Gabe’s grandmother will be doing laundry. Thank you, Dave, Amy and Julie!!
- ✿ Please join us for our next **parent meeting on Thursday, January 14 at 6:00.** This is an **important** meeting – just 3 weeks before our big fundraiser!
- ✿ There will be **no school on Monday, January 18.** We will be celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Day.
- ✿ There are two basket parties coming up in January – the 23 and 30. One will be hosted by Katy (Harper’s mom) and the other one by Meagan (Kaden’s mom). Thank you, Ladies!
- ✿ Our big fundraiser of the year – **The Love of Learning Auction and Family Fun Night** will be on **Saturday, February 6** from 4pm to 7pm at the Linus Pauling Middle School. Please bring your families, friends, acquaintances and complete strangers! Many exciting offerings and treats!

Thank You

Classroom Projects

- Cut number roll paper: Jamie Meyer
- Prepared burlap sewing: Jenny Braxton
- Cut lion shapes for coloring: Jenny Braxton
- Sewed pillows for Friday Art: Esme Weil
- Sewed ice pack covers: Esme Weil
- Cut gourds for Friday Art: Nicholas Giftai
- Prepared 1st level sewing cards: Esme Weil
- Prepared 2nd & 3rd level sewing cards: Lua Siegel
- Cut burlap sewing squares: Meagan Johanson
- Cut animal shapes for drawing: Esme Weil
- Cut paper leaf shapes for painting: Jenny Braxton
- Cut paper leaf shapes for painting: Esme Weil

Maintenance/Repair/Tech

- Refinished picnic tables: Karin Bolender & Sean Cummings
- Stain redwood picnic tables: Skye Nielson

Donations

- Flowers for the classroom: Jovi Tavano & Peter MacClary
- Kenyan artifacts for display: Jenny Braxton
- Swedish decorations for display: The MacClary Family

Our sincere and humble thanks for the many things you do for us and give to us!! We are so fortunate.