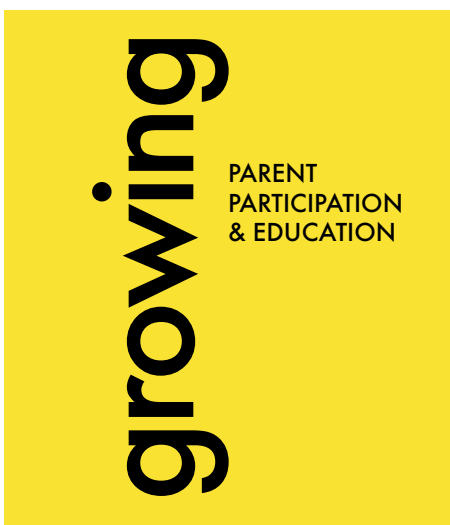




# California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools **PRESCHOOLER**



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## Letter from the President

Hello to my extended co-op family, I was on my weekly hike this morning with my husband and totally loving this fall weather. It's my absolute favorite time of the year! I was also thinking about our upcoming Thanksgiving break and feeling like a little child being so excited. Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday because it is centered around two of my favorite things... family & food. :)

I have so much to be thankful for and each day when I wake up, before my feet hit the ground, I take a moment to think about what my thoughtful intention is for the day. I try to center myself and really focus on all I have in my life that I am so grateful for. My sweet preschool always makes my list. Being part of our Cupertino Co-op Nursery School community has made my life so much richer. I have grown and changed so much from all of the experiences in the past 20 years. As I approach my retirement this coming June, I am cherishing each and every day with my parents and children.

**I am so thankful for all of you!** When I visit our co-op schools in Northern and Southern California, I am always filled with hope and gratitude that so many wonderful families like you are working so hard to make our co-op movement

so strong. You are the glue that holds your school together! Your Director and Teachers are so grateful for you.

Wishing all of you a wonderful Thanksgiving! Challenge yourself to find time to be thankful each and every day. It is my sincere hope that your school also comes to mind.

Please come up and introduce yourself to me at our upcoming conference in San Mateo in March. I'd like to thank you in person!

Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

All my love,  
Michelle

*Michelle Edgecumbe*  
Director/3s Teacher  
Cupertino Co-op Nursery School  
[www.cupertinocoop.org](http://www.cupertinocoop.org)  
President - California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools  
[www.ccppns.org](http://www.ccppns.org)

You may **REGISTER NOW** for our 71st Annual Convention in San Mateo on March 6th & 7th, 2020!  
Go to [ccppns.org/convention-2020](http://ccppns.org/convention-2020).



# FALL 2019

The Preschooler is a publication of the California Council of Parents Participation Nursery Schools (CCPPNS). Opinions expressed in articles are not necessarily those of CCPPNS or the editorial staff. Articles and photographs may be submitted for consideration. Please include as much information as possible when submitting photos. Submissions to [smcrep@carlmountparents.org](mailto:smcrep@carlmountparents.org). All submissions become the property of CCPPNS. Permission to reprint may be obtained. The Preschooler is published twice a year. An electronic version of The Preschooler is available on our website at [www.ccppns.org](http://www.ccppns.org).

# California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools

## OFFICERS

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State Administrator:  
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Joyce Woodruff

Communications Director:  
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Convention Consultant:  
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Secretary: Rebecca Nowlen

Finance: Jennie Ivazian

Advisor: Chantal Maher

## SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Vice President: Jocelyn Robertson

Secretary: Sandy Rojas

Finance: Eileen Lucas

Advisor: Joyce Woodruff

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Preschooler Newsletter:  
Megan Hoppes & Shannon Guzzetta

Awards:  
Konne Ainsworth

Website:  
Anghelika Maddalena

Historian:  
Open

Leadership/Training:  
Konne Ainsworth

PCPI:  
Megan Hoppes

Pins & Publications:  
Open

Quilt:  
Eileen Lucas



## Joint Area Board Meeting Recap from Selma (October 2019)

*In Attendance: Rebecca Nowlen, Nicole Gomez, Maya Hagege-Sinderbrand, Eileen Lucas, Carol Tatsumi, Erica Lewis, Sandra Rojas, Annamarie Manzo, Jocelyn Robertson, Crystal Apilado, Michelle Edgecumbe, Jennie Ivazian, Marin Kasper, Tara Burnes, Chantal Maher, Anghelika Maddalena, Konne Ainsworth, Annie Deckert, Megan Hoppes, Shelby Long, Sandy Steiner*

- The CCPPNS **Google Drive** has many resources for our schools, and is continually updated & organized.
- Starting soon: **“Wednesday Win”** communication to share some little victories at our school — to inspire and boost social media presence.
- **Billing for CCPPNS membership** (for schools & regional councils) will be through Jovial. Mail a check or pay online (*there is an additional fee for credit card payments*). Remember: each school pays annual membership dues to both CCPPNS and to their Regional Council.
- If your school needs advice, has situational questions or needs any support, please contact your CCPPNS Area Advisor:

**Advisor North: Chantal Maher**  
[earthcaringchantal@gmail.com](mailto:earthcaringchantal@gmail.com)

**Advisor South: Joyce Woodruff**  
[turkeychick99@gmail.com](mailto:turkeychick99@gmail.com)

The Advisor may direct you to another CCPPNS Board member or to Insurance/Risk Advisor.

## Interested in serving the CCPPNS board?

### Read Board Role Descriptions:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0BwO4ro2BvoYJczc0LV9xdHB1WWM/view?usp=sharing>

### Use this form to nominate or sign up:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSf5OjYpoxsG6MvFj4tVjc9o0NxB9Vx90KfjwBdJoQM5CRMiwv/viewform>

## Mindfulness Exercise

Lie down and take three breaths.

**Head** - breathe in and notice the problem;

**Heart** – breathe in and remember the goodness and the right intent behind whatever is getting to you;

**Strength** — breathe in, reminding yourself that you CAN tackle this problem.

## Teacher Reflection Exercise

Think about your favorite teacher. What was it about that person that made them the best?

Nominate a Teacher for a CCPPNS Award for 2020.  
(See next page for details).

**Focus Tip:** Effective leadership values and recognizes its community resources and utilizes many individuals strengths to lift up the whole group.

## Why Parents are Integral to Our Programs... Do NOT Underestimate Them

When we meet at the CCPPNS board meeting which is a yearly weekend intensive event in October, we often discuss the culture of our schools and I feel frustrated when I hear,

- “The parents have no time to contribute”,
- “The parents want a more academic curriculum”, and
- “The parents want to buy out.”

I hope to reframe that to consider benefits to parents as well as schools.

I love it that the parents at my schools share their many talents. Most of us directors are ECE educators with little administrative and business acumen. We NEED the up-to-date resources that our parents provide in terms of running the school. The director provides oversight but marketing, website quality, communication skills and high tech skills, to name a few, are ever changing and our parents have so much to offer.

A good director can break down and evaluate the issues the school is facing and use the valuable parent resources we all have. If you need to fundraise, look at your population and see who has the skills to support and be innovative enough to look at new resources. For example, our new treasurer is tapping into grandparents donating when they have to take money (RMDs) from retirement accounts and can donate money to nonprofits... a win-win.

When we reviewed and updated our handbook years ago, I edited it carefully. I mentioned to the board that I would love another set of eyes on it, someone stepped up as a professional editor (who knew?) and completely red marked my ‘finished’ copy. She made so many great edits for clarity of thought and it had a more professional format.

When we briefly chatted about updating the graphics on our t-shirts at a

brainstorm session, a new board member asked her sister, a designer, to create a fun, relevant and artistic graphic and it is wonderful and in keeping with our message. I am waiting for mine to arrive.

These are examples of how to value parents as leaders in our schools and trust them to grow and learn how a nonprofit works and how to support it. **We describe the need and reach out for support.** It benefits the schools and benefits the parent.

The benefit is clear to us, but it is also a benefit for the family. Their children see parents engaged in schools, supporting education and building attitudes about lifelong learning. In addition, parents learn new skills and also use their talents to support a nonprofit. So many times I have heard parents say, “I don’t have those skills but want to learn them.”

I love to support them by writing letters of recommendations for parents who are ready to reenter the work force with broader resumes and more confidence. I am especially proud of the letters I have written for parents going back to school after a successful experience of being a leader at a parent participating preschool.

I personally am MOST proud when parents come back as fully qualified teachers in our school!

### Konne

Konne Ainsworth  
Director, Explorer Preschool  
VP North, CCPPNS



to inspire...

**EVERY**  
accomplishment  
**STARTS WITH THE**  
decision to  
**TRY!**

If you are  
not willing to  
learn, no one can  
help you.

If you are  
**DETERMINED** to  
learn, no one can  
stop you.

"WHAT CAN I LEARN  
FROM THIS? WHAT  
WILL I DO NEXT TIME  
I'M IN THIS SITUATION?"

- CAROL DWECK -

They may forget  
what you said  
but they will  
not forget  
how you made  
them feel.

-Carl Buechner

# California Council of Parent Participation Nursery Schools Reminders & Tips

## ARE YOU HIRING?

Share your hiring needs with the CCPNS google group so we can help you recruit, add your post to the [CCPPNS.org](http://CCPPNS.org) website and learn from your job description.

## LEARN ABOUT THE CCPNS GRANTS & LOAN PROGRAM:

Review the packet for information about qualifications and application process.

### Grant/Loan Application Packet

If you have questions about the Grant and Loan Program, contact your Area Finance Chair:

Finance South: Eileen Lucas  
[eileenplucas@gmail.com](mailto:eileenplucas@gmail.com)

Finance North: Jennie Ivazian  
[amteacher@cupertinocoop.org](mailto:amteacher@cupertinocoop.org)

## CCPPNS MEETING DATES:

- \* 12/7/19 **Southern**  
Area Board Meeting  
Contact Jocelyn Robertson
- \* 2/8/20 **Northern**  
Area Board Meeting  
Contact Konne Ainsworth
- \* 2/15/20 **Southern**  
Area Board Meeting  
Contact Jocelyn Robertson
- \* 3/6-8/20 **CONVENTION**  
& Joint Area Board Meeting  
in San Mateo
- \* 5/2/20 **Southern**  
Area Board Meeting  
Contact Jocelyn Robertson
- \* 5/9/20 **Northern**  
Area Board Meeting  
Contact Konne Ainsworth



The 71st Annual CCPNS Convention will be hosted by the San Mateo Council on

**Friday, March 6th and Saturday March 7th, 2020**

with the CCPNS Joint Area Board Meeting on **Sunday, March 8th** (when daylight savings time begins).

The 2020 Convention will take place at **the San Mateo Marriott Hotel** at 1770 South Amphlett Boulevard San Mateo, CA 94402

King room rates are \$139/night  
Queen room rates are \$159/night

**Book Your Room Reservation Now!**

<https://ccppns.org/convention-2020>

The San Mateo Council is very excited to announce Keynote Speakers **“Teacher Tom” Hobson** and **Michelle Borba, author of UnSelfie** and we are lining up speakers from the **Stanford Challenge Success series**, experts in early childhood education, play-based learning, director and teacher break-out sessions, and more!

The speaker application form (can also be used for referrals) is on our website.

**The progressive bus tour on Friday, March 6th** will include Family Connections in Redwood City, Sequoia Parents Nursery School in San Carlos, and Parents Nursery School in Palo Alto.

The **Vendor** application form is also available [on our website](#). So far we have: Barefoot Books, Beauty Counter, KidPower, Stella & Dot, Usborne Books, and other possibilities.

To honor a teacher, director or other individuals who have given outstanding service to our coop community, please see **Award Nomination** details [on our website](#).

The **\*Teacher/Director Award\*** and **\*Honorary Lifetime Achievement Award\*** can be considered for teachers and directors who are currently employed by a member school, or recently retired, or retiring.

The **\*Community Service Award\*** and the **\*Award of Merit\*** can be considered for individuals or organizations within the community who have gone above and beyond normal services to help parent participation nursery schools, regional or state councils, or individual preschools who contribute to the community through special services or activities.

**The Award Reception will be held on Saturday, March 7th, 2020.** Doors open at 4:30pm. Appetizers and drinks will be served. Tickets to the event are available on convention registration form.

Nominations will be accepted through February 1, 2020, and the sooner, the better. Letters of endorsement for awards will be accepted postmarked by February 10, 2020. Letters should not be sent individually, and should be copied by the sponsor for their records. More information is on our website.

# 2020

# VISION

Cultivating Community & Connection  
71st Annual CCPPNS Convention

Friday March 6 and Saturday March 7, 2020

The Marriot Hotel in San Mateo

### Keynote Speakers:

Friday: **Teacher Tom** | Saturday: **Michele Borba**

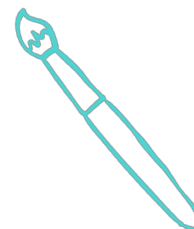
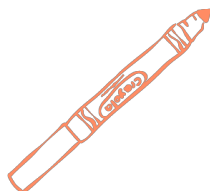
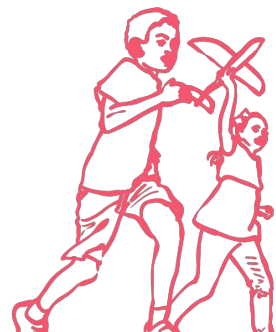
### For Parents:

Take with you parenting tools that will change your life. Connect with other parents and businesses that will support your parenting journey. Gain reassurance from other like-minded parents in their desire to parent mindfully and be motivated to persevere, even on the inevitable rough day!

### For Teachers:

At this convention, learn best practices to create a dynamic family friendly, non profit preschool. Discover the best ways children learn by connecting with Bay Area teaching experts.

[bit.ly/2020\\_parents](https://bit.ly/2020_parents)



# SAVE THE DATE



National Association for the  
Education of Young Children  
Annual Conference  
November 20-23, 2019  
Nashville, Tennessee

[www.naeyc.org/events/annual](http://www.naeyc.org/events/annual)



California Kindergarten  
Association Conference  
January 10-12, 2020  
Santa Clara, California

[californiakindergartenassociation.org](http://californiakindergartenassociation.org)



Parent Cooperative Preschools  
INTERNATIONAL

PCPI Annual Meeting  
April 16-19, 2020  
Portland, Oregon

[www.preschools.coop](http://www.preschools.coop)

Register now for the  
CCPPNS 71st Annual  
Convention in March 2020.  
Go to [bit.ly/2020\\_parents](https://bit.ly/2020_parents)

## 2019 Insurance Report

by Ann Shanklin and Bob Hazdor

- Waivers are beneficial. Make your cases more favorable in court if sued. Ann is working on a template of waivers that parents can sign for an entire school year's worth of events, rather than signing off on each event separately. Waivers and "additional insured" are both recommended when doing a special stand-alone trips like a theme park or beach trip, etc.
- Contact your RCP for a copy of the "Fundraiser Endorsement" doc with a list of activities that either need a special event waiver or are not allowed.
- Any outside contractors (non-members teaching taekwon do, etc.) need to be named as additional insured. Call Bob if you are hiring outside contractors.
- When renting out your facility for birthday parties, etc. make sure that you keep the same legal staff ratio (5-1) with a teacher or director, with CPR certification, onsite.

- Blog posts and communication to keep you up to date on changing laws and other requirements for 501(c)3 organizations.
- Training & Education including an extensive webinar series. 30-90 minutes sessions are ideal for in-service training on risk management skills, or for polishing and orienting senior management and board members to individual aspects of managing risks in nonprofit organizations. The interactive format permits questions from participants and responses from experts.

*Note that members of the Nonprofits Insurance Alliance can register for free! The code for registration can be found in our monthly newsletter or in the Member Portal. If you are not a member of the Nonprofits Insurance Alliance, you can still register for a non-member session cost of just \$45 per login. (Note: registration is required per computer, not per participant.)*

### Note these upcoming webinars:

November 13, 2019: Everything You Need to Know About NIAC and Group Purchasing Portal Info

November 19, 2019: Best Practices Documenting Employment Matters

In addition to the live webinars, NIAC has an extensive on-demand library of webinars for topics including Finance, Employment Issues, Risk Management, Nonprofit Management, and more...

## NIAC Benefits & Resources

There are lots of resources available to members of the Nonprofit Insurance Alliance (schools insured by Bob Hazdor belongs to NIA). To access, go to [www.insurancefornonprofits.org](http://www.insurancefornonprofits.org).

To request a login, send an email to [losscontrol@insurancefornonprofits.org](mailto:losscontrol@insurancefornonprofits.org) with your school name and address including city, state, zip, and your name, title, phone number, and email.

Some of the benefits & resources include:

- Publications including Blue Avocado, Management Booklets, Posters, etc.
- Services include the Group Purchasing Portal, Background Checks and Drug Screening, BOARDnetWORK, Consulting Services for Employment Matters and Loss Control, and more!



*A Head for Insurance. A Heart for Nonprofits.*

CCPPNS member schools must publish their nondiscrimination statement on their website. The statement must: be available year-round on your school's website, specify that your school does not discriminate, appear on your website homepage (without having to sign in or click around), be easy to find (ie: not hidden with tiny or hard to see font). If a school does not have a website they must publish in print or on the radio.

Sample statement: "The X school admits students of any race, color, national and ethnic origin to all the rights, privileges, programs, and activities generally accorded or made available to students at the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national and ethnic origin in administration of its educational policies, admissions policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs."



## Winter Process Art Ideas

### Coffee Filter Snowflakes



### Painted Puzzle Snowflakes



### Fingerprint Snowman Snowglobes



## Snowflake Art Projects

At the recent council networking night hosted by Redwood Parents Nursery School, I spied a fantastic winter art project hanging in their window. Instantly I thought how awesome these would be on display at my own school's annual Winter Celebration, a weekend event in which parents and community volunteers transform our preschool into a twinkling wonderland and we enjoy crafts, music, dancing and food together.

I love snowflake process art projects because if every kid in every co-op in California made one, it would be unique. Here are a few projects to consider. I hope you'll post the results on your facebook page and tag CCPPNS so we can all see the results!

*Wishing you happiness and good health in the winter months!*

### Dot Art Snowflake



### Class Hands Snowflake





This is a great article from: <https://www.bookwidgets.com/blog/2019/10/15-fun-team-building-activities-and-trust-games-for-the-classroom>

The well-being of students has a direct impact on their results. So, happy students learn better. As a teacher, you play a crucial role in their well-being and development.

You can create a good classroom environment by getting students to work together and to respect each other. Team-building activities are perfect for teaching your students those skills. In this blog post, I gathered 10 fun team building activities in your classroom, so your students get closer to each other. After this, I give 5 more activities that help building trust between them.

## Team-building activities for your classroom

All these examples of team building activities are easy to do in your classroom or in the hallway. If you want to take a breath of fresh air, you can also go outside, but it's not necessary. There are activities here for both elementary students and for high school students.

### 1. Over the electric fence

Imagine 2 chairs connected with a wire at about 1ft high. Imagine this is an electric fence. If you touch it, you're zapped. Even worse... everyone is zapped, because all the students must stay connected as well, and just like with an electric fence, if one person touches it, the electric shock glides through all the persons until the last one. Good thing it's not really loaded with electricity. The goal is to get over the fence while holding hands. It's a real challenge, as not everyone can just jump over it. It takes real teamwork to succeed.



### 2. The human knot



Let your students stand in a circle, giving hands. Now, students have to tangle themselves by walking in between students in front of them, going over or under locked hands. They can also go between other students' legs. They have to make a knot

keeping their hands locked to the other students. Two other students need to work together and give instructions to the human knot. They have to find a way to untangle it.

### 3. Escape the classroom

Students work together in groups to play this escape the classroom game. They have to look for clues and codes on their computer and in the classroom. For inspiration, check online about [how you can create a digital escape room and combine it with elements in your classroom](#). Scavenger hunts, breakout games, or escape the classroom games encourage students to work together: planning a strategy, divvying up tasks and communicating progress.



### 4. Bob the builder

This game is all about working together to build something great. It lets students work together, develop great things, and makes them think critically and learn from their mistakes and successes. Teachers give the teams an assignment. Examples could include challenging your teams to build the largest tower in Legos, the largest bridge with toothpicks and marshmallows, the biggest castle out of cardboard. Get creative with your challenges, using various resources!



### 5. Storytime!

Gather your students in a circle and give each student a picture of an animal, object, place... You could give each student a certain emoji, such as a snail, fire station, skis, dancer, baby, etc.



Start a story by creating an introduction of your own. The next student goes further on the previous storyline and adds an extra narrative with the picture they're holding. This process continues until you reach the last student. Together, you created a very complex and creative story. Every student took part in the story. This is ideal for promoting communication, as well as a creative collaboration.

### 6. Shrinking classroom

Students organize themselves in a way they can fit in a space that's rapidly shrinking. Form two groups to compete. They both stand in a defined place. The teacher reduces the standing area with, for example, a rope or small traffic cones. The students have to find a way to all fit in the limited area. As a teacher, you keep pushing their limits by reducing the area. The group that can get in the smallest "classroom" wins.



### 7. Get on the chair

For this team building game, students need to be flexible and balanced. Provide a sturdy chair for every student. All chairs should be lined up on one single line. Every student stands on a chair. The teacher asks them to stand in a certain order. For example: "I want you to organize yourselves from old to young." The students now have to change places without touching the ground.



In this exercise, students get to know each other better in an interactive way. The teacher can give other orders like: "from tall to small" or "from A to Z." Every time, the students have to change their positions without pushing someone off the chairs. Working together is crucial. To make it more challenging, set a time limit!

### 8. Classroom party

Around holidays, you can get students to cook and decorate. Ask them to organize a classroom party. They are responsible for decorations, food, and for the games. Form 3 groups. They have to work in teams to create the best classroom party ever: One team designs the holiday themed food and buffet, one team does the craftwork for decorations, and one team prepares the classroom games that will be played that day. They become true event-planners.



### 9. Blanket switch

Form 3 teams. Each team stands on a blanket, leaving about a quarter of the blanket space. Now, the three teams have to turn over the blanket without leaving it. This means they have to work together to end up standing on the other side of the blanket.



### 10. Movie time!

Create a class movie. Plenty to do for all the students in your classroom. It's the perfect team building exercise that teaches students to work together and be creative.



- Write a synopsis. What's the classroom story about? Let all your students write a synopsis and vote for the best one.
- Divide the character roles
- Get the clothing and costumes together
- Prepare the scenes
- Film the scenes
- Put together and edit the scenes
- Organize a movie night.

Visit [bookwidgets.com](https://www.bookwidgets.com) for more activities!



## School as a Place of Love

There is a Kevin Henkes book, *Chrysanthemum*, where the title character comes home from school and tells her parents, “*School is no place for me*”. My eyes fill with tears every time I read it. It seems to me that there are so many ways for school to feel to a child like a place where they don’t belong. Children of every age struggle with peer acceptance and fitting in. Sometimes other kids seem mean or cruel. Sometimes a kid knows that they are the one who is sticking out, awkward, like a cowlick that just won’t lie down. But for me, one of the more terrible reasons for a child to feel that pain, the feeling that school is no place for them, comes from teachers who may not love them.

I think probably most of the teachers in my extensive educational life had no love for me. They had a job to do, and lots of times, that job was to convey State standards, or the material on the syllabus. Seems reasonable enough. But, when I think back on the utter disinterest from so many of those education professionals, for whom I had no particular hard feelings, mostly I feel sort of cold, like there never was a relationship, we may as well have been strangers on the train. I guess I always thought there was nothing wrong with that, and even, that it seemed reasonable that these people, adults in my childhood, should refrain from investing in getting to know me. I mean, that’s a lot of kids to know. I imagine they were busy.

Those who know me as a teacher know that that is not the kind of teacher I am. The educational philosophy I learned insists that **a child’s relationship with their teacher is of critical importance**. The way I was taught to think, learning happens when children and teachers are co-creators of learning, in an environment which recognizes the essential humanity of each of the participants. Each individual child must be known, must be listened to, must be learned, must be loved by their teacher. Each teacher must open their heart up to all their students, to each and every individual. And it is a lot of students, and I am very busy! And this is my most important work, to learn and to love each of these kids. I do it all day, and I go home and read about how I can understand them better, in all their delightful variety. It overflows my life with joy, and I bet that all of those other, probably super tired, and in need of fair pay, and a bathroom break, and a proper vacation, teachers of my childhood have experienced the elation that fills you when you let the kids permeate your soul. Maybe I am just too new a teacher, or have too pleasant of a teaching environment, to know why those teachers of my past were so cold.

I do think the effect of teachers who fail to acknowledge the beautiful and unique humanity of each student has profound and almost irreparable consequences. I think kids can pretty much hear our thoughts about them. They can hear our sighs, see our eye rolls, know that we are talking about them. They internalize our struggle to love them in their fullness. They begin to feel unlovable, or else, they reject our estimation and choose instead what Herbert Kohl calls “**creative maladjustment**”, purposeful, at least unconsciously purposeful, not-learning. They will not listen to us. They refuse what we ask, in attempt to save face, for capitulating to the will of someone who does not care for them would be humiliating. Bless those teachers of teachers, for the benefit of those of us who think of ourselves as co-learners. I have learned more from those kids, who refused my bland pleasantries, than I ever could from kids who come in ready to please me, an adult with authority over their lives.

The idea of a child not feeling welcome at school feels so serious to me because of the high stakes of that notion taking hold. Some of the smartest, most intellectual adults I have known think of themselves as not very smart, or worse, because of the way that their school experiences shaped their perception of who they are. Incredible people were convinced by authority figures in their lives, by accident or not, that they are less capable than they really are, that they are less valuable than they really are, and less valuable in relation to other people, by virtue of some of those other people having received praise from teachers. But it’s not praise that gives shape to a positive self-image. **It’s love**. Those two things get conflated but are certainly not the same. Praise gets handed out in schools all the time for things like the skill of sitting still and being quiet, or spitting back the exact answer that the teacher had designated as correct. Lots of teachers no doubt appreciate those skills, but it’s not the same as loving the children who sometimes display them.

Several times this week, in completely different circumstances, outside of our school, I have heard the word, “bully”. I myself don’t ever use that word, when referring to a person. It falls under my commitment to recognize the essential humanness of a person. Judgemental, as opposed to descriptive, language is inherently de-humanizing. It makes the person one dimensional, easier to dismiss, easier to assign to the trash heap. That’s the point of it. It is painful to think about what kinds of things might cause a child to spend all their energy doing terrible things to other children. Probably, for a child to spend so much energy that way, they are experiencing some really serious stresses, internal or external, or both.

I want to be one of the people who looks for how we can get that child the support they need, not somebody who stops thinking of them as a child.

And, to be clear, the start of that support might be to ask, has this child eaten? Because it is pretty hard to keep it together if you have not eaten, as any parent of a young child knows. But beyond that, somebody has to love that kid. Somebody has to get close enough to be available to hear the child’s communication, whatever it is. It will seldom be delivered in clear print and good grammar. It might be a series of unspoken messages, body language that has to be interpreted, floated to the child for confirmation, adjustment. It might sound like vitriol, turning to fear. It might be whispered, begging you not to judge, but assuming you will. Kids know when they have done something you think is wrong. It pains them, even when they show this by smiling as they look in your eyes, or running away. They don’t need to be told. They need to be loved.

To steady my own children, I try to inoculate them through empathetic conversation. I want them to know and understand that people don’t just act mean because they are bad people, or because they are jerks or something. They act that way because they are hurt, or scared, or ashamed. I want my own children to respond to a child who is acting in hurtful ways with empathy. My kids, when we talk about this, call me out every time. They point out how I said that somebody who cut me off in traffic was driving like a jerk (I mean, it could have been worse). And they are right. All I can say for myself is that I am still making a distinction between an action someone takes, in a stressful moment, and who that person is. We are not our worst choices. We are not a jumbled collection of our mistakes. We are people, each of us, from the moment we are born and before, learning from everyone around us.

I always say, we are all teaching and learning all the time, even when we don’t mean to be. Get present to yourself as a teacher and a learner, and feel the awe. Each one of us has the potential to be a safe person for someone else, someone who loves them just as they are, with all of their complicated, messy, human qualities. To be a member of a co-op is to accept the gift and responsibility of extending your love to these other people’s children. You are one of those children, and so am I. The point of our school to me is for the children to feel that they are loved. Without that, nothing else works.

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