EXPLORING DEMOCRACY IN A PRESCHOOL SETTING

by

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(Under the Direction of Stacey Neuharth-Pritchett)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore democratic educational practice as it functioned in one high-quality, democratic preschool community during the 2009-2010 school year. Using a single, instrumental case study design (Stake, 2005) allowed me to illuminate how this intentionally democratic preschool community (including children, faculty, and parents) experiences, constructs, and practices democracy in its unique cultural context, including some of the possibilities and challenges that arose. Data generation included the collection of field notes on classroom observations and school events, photographs and video recordings of classroom experiences and interactions, transcriptions of parent and faculty interviews, and school documents such as portfolios, documentations, and school pamphlets. My data analysis process included developing thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973) and memos, creating internal and external codes, and producing a full narrative report. As I analyzed my data, I identified ten emerging and interrelated themes that recurred within the community and served as integral and foundational elements of the school's high-quality, democratic environment. These themes included: 1) maintaining a cultural foundation of respect, trust, and care among

all community members; 2) using responsive and intentional teaching practices and

making learning processes visible through diverse forms of discourse and documentation;

3) sharing the decision-making, power, and control among all community members; 4)

putting a strong emphasis upon building social relationships and learning collaboratively;

5) using narrative as a critical tool for making meaningful connections and building

memory and identity; 6) slowing down the learning process, both for children and adults;

7) upholding a strong image of both children and adults as powerful, capable, and

socially-connected problem-solvers and fellow citizens worthy of equal voice and rights

in the community; 8) providing opportunities for all members of the community to

develop a sense of social responsibility and concern for the common good based upon the

interdependence of self and others; 9) valuing pleasure, happiness, and levity as integral

parts of the school experience; and 10) upholding a commitment to freedom (physical,

emotional, social, intellectual) and foundations of social equality and justice.

INDEX WORDS: Democracy, Social Constructivism, Social Responsibility, Social
Justice, Social Relationships, Early Childhood Education,
Preschool Environments, Popular and Consumer Culture,
Pedagogical Documentation, Observation, Inquiry-Based Practice,
Reggio-Inspired Approaches, Image of Child, Collaborative
Learning, Culture of Respect, Freedom, Parent Collaborations,
Non-Hierarchical Learning Community

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Director of the renowned Reggio Emilia Preschools of Italy Sergio Spaggiari (2004, p. 2) once wrote:

> [I]t is absolutely necessary to have an enormous passion inside for this work...You have to be moved by the desire to find out and to know. To work with passion means to keep the head and the heart in contact. Malaguzzi often conjured up the image of a giraffe. The giraffe, he said, is a bit unfortunate in this respect. He's the most unhappy animal of the earth. With his long, long neck, his head is far removed from his heart...Think how often this happens in school and education. Think how often rationality and cold reasoning have precedence over emotion and feelings, and how difficult it is to achieve a union between the two. Think how often this distance between the head and the heart creates oversight, boredom, monotony and repetition in school.

I would like to first and foremost say "thank you" to the entire *passionate* faculty of "Springhill's" preschool for welcoming me into your school and allowing me to see the possibilities that arise within a learning community that has successfully married the heart and the head. After having experienced too many programs that have distant hearts and brains, thank you for re-inspiring me to remain passionate in my own work in early childhood education. Thank you for being so open to this project and allowing me to enter all aspects of the classroom life, including unfettered access (with video camera in hand) throughout the day. In particular, thank you to the teachers and children in the

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INTRODUCTION

"It should be your care, therefore, and mine, to elevate the minds of our

children and exalt their courage; to accelerate and animate their industry

and activity; to excite in them an habitual contempt of meanness,

abhorrence of injustice and inhumanity, and an ambition to excel in every

capacity, faculty, and virtue. If we suffer their minds to grovel and creep

in infancy, they will grovel all their lives." John Adams, *Dissertation on

the Canon and Feudal Law*, 1756

Overview of Study and Rationale

"Democracy cannot flourish where the chief influences in selecting

subject matter of instruction are utilitarian ends narrowly conceived for the

masses, and, for the higher education of the few, the traditions of a

specialized cultivated class. The notion that the "essentials" of elementary

education are the three R's mechanically treated, is based upon ignorance

of the essentials needed for realization of democratic ideals.

Unconsciously it assumes that these ideals are unrealizable…" Dewey,

Democracy and Education, 1916

Democratic principles are not new constructs. Yet at the dawn of the 21st century,

their actualization in U.S. schools remains elusive, both pedagogically and structurally.

As Glickman (1998) notes:

America has never really been a fully functioning democracy, and there are now

signs of further public retreat from the very concept of democracy. The reason

for this is that we have not understood that for democracy to work, it must be

viewed as a way of learning as much as a way of governing. This disconnection of

democracy from how we educate our young has led to a lack among our citizenry

of the competence, skills, and understanding necessary to live, learn, and work in

and for a democratic society. (p. 3)

How do early childhood settings support or hinder the realization of this "concept of

democracy"? What are the possibilities and challenges in creating a democratic culture

in preschool settings? These are the questions that guided this exploratory case study.

There are varied meanings of the ambiguous and value-laden word *democracy*. I

will begin with a few general definitions of democracy, and then proceed with a more

specific definition of democracy as it relates to educational practice. According to

Patrick (2002), a *fully developed democracy* provides:

constitutional guarantees for civil liberties and rights, which, if justice would

prevail, are exercised and enjoyed equally by all individuals in the polity….In

particular, there is constitutional and legal protection of the individual's rights to

think, speak, decide, and act freely to influence the policies and actions of

government….It provides majority rule with protection of minority rights. (p. 5)

Exploring further a general definition of democracy, Roklheiser and Glickman (1995)

cite three characteristics of a democratic political system:

1. *Equality*. Every member of society has the same power and worth in regard to

influence, decision making, justice, and due process.

2. *Liberty*. No one is enslaved by others. All are free to form their own ideas and opinions and to act independently. There is no repression or discrimination.

3. *Fraternity*. All members of society acknowledge a responsibility to participate with one another in a social contract. (p. 3)

Finally, Apple and Beane (2007) stress that democracy is not just a governing process. Their perspective is consistent with that of Roklheiser and Glickman, yet extends it by noting that for democracy to be sustained, it must become a way of living and the following values and principles must be present [the bulleting in the following quotation is that used by Apple and Beane]:

- concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities.

- concern for the welfare of others and "the common good."

- faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems.

- the open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible.

- critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies.

- an understanding that democracy is not so much an "ideal" to be pursued as an "idealized" set of values that we must live and that must guide our life as a people.

- the organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life. (p. 7)

Drawing from these and other sources (e.g., Coughlin, 2004; Hopkins, 1999; Malaguzzi, 1998; Moss, 2007), I have developed the following definition of democracy in educational practice and have subdivided that definition into three categories: pedagogy, curriculum content, and school structure. By *democratic pedagogy*, I mean educational approaches that respect and support the rights, well-being, and happiness of all children as citizen-learners within a community, and engage young minds in a co-constructive and participatory learning process. Furthermore, as part of democratic pedagogical practice, all children are included in important decision-making that affects their school experience both as individuals and, most importantly, as a group. By implication, this type of educational experience is antithetical to any agenda of top-down social control. By *democratic curriculum* content, I mean content that is negotiated with a strong priority given to children's emerging interests, engages children's critical thinking skills, and develops children's capacity for cooperative problem-solving. Democratically-legitimate curriculum is developed in a way that reflects the full diversity of perspectives held by community members, and embraces not only commonalities but also difference, dissonance, and dissent. Social justice issues are also included as part of democratic curriculum content. By *democratic school structure*, I mean an approach to school administration that includes the participation of all community members (e.g., parents, children, administrators, board members) in significant decision-making regarding school operations and procedures. Democratic school structure also requires that access to high quality, citizenship-enhancing educational experiences be extended to all children, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, gender or disability. This definition of democratic educational practice has been condensed and subdivided as

shown in Appendix A, which will be referred to in my review of literature in chapter 2. I have also used this tripartite definition as a guiding framework throughout my research process.

Clearly, there are no real-world private or public institutions that qualify as perfect democracies. However, framing educational issues around these democratic principles and values is an essential starting point for reexamining our early childhood institutions and the environments we create for our youngest citizens. Although many educational scholars and theorists have discussed democracy and its implications for early childhood education, there is little recent research that specifically examines the topic in U.S. preschools. My exploratory case study examined both the possibilities and challenges of creating a democratic culture in a preschool setting.

As discussed in the following section, many children and families have already been inculcated with anti-democratic messages by the time they enter a preschool educational program. Therefore, it is critical that the preschool community serves both as an antidote to these anti-democratic messages and as a microcosm of a well-functioning, participatory democracy where all community members live, experience and practice democracy daily.

Statement of Problem

Education is essential in sustaining a democratic culture. Yet over the last several decades, several overlapping trends have combined to undermine the acknowledgement of children as citizens living in a democracy. In fact, these trends have helped to remove the topic of democracy as a significant part of educational discourse, resulting in a marginalization of children in the political culture of early childhood education. Some of

these trends include: a narrowing concept of learning with movement towards standardization of our education system; a "pop" behaviorism that has become pervasive in all facets of our culture; a growing number of decisions made for corporate profit over the common good; and a continued expansion of our consumer culture with increased marketing to parents and young children. With these mutually reinforcing trends in our society, a democracy-supporting counterweight is needed. In the following sections, I will discuss these trends, give several examples, and highlight some of the problems these trends create for promoting and sustaining democratic education in preschools and schools in general.

Narrowing concept of "learning" with movement towards the standardization of our educational systems. During the last few years, media headlines have been filled with messages of failing schools (i.e., failing test scores), lack of teacher accountability, reductions of outdoor or free play (rationalized for the sake of more academic instruction time to enhance test scores), and reduction in field trips resulting from a budget focused on test scores. There is virtually no discussion on how schools are preparing children to be happy, healthy, productive adults who actively participate in their democracy. As a result of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, research suggests that teachers are feeling increased pressure to use didactic instruction, scripted curricula and, above and beyond anything else, teach to the test (Meier et al., 2004).[1] The

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[1] Further evidence of this increasing pressure on teachers and their student's standardized test scores can be seen in a recent cheating scandal that broke in Atlanta Public Schools. An investigation found that 178 teachers and principals in 44 different schools were involved in tampering with children's test scores on standardized tests (Severson, 2011). Similarly, cheating was discovered in several other states (e.g., Texas) where childrens' performance on standardized tests were directly tied to teachers' performance reviews, school funding, and salaries. Campbell's (1976) research on evaluation methods suggests

media has contributed to this pressure and narrow focus, with school test scores and school grades making front page headlines. Even realtors use the data to try and sell homes. Test scores play a pivotal role in parent decisions on where to live and in which school to enroll their children.

However, from a democratic perspective on educational equity, two points must be emphasized. First, research indicates (Kozol, 1991; Toutkoushian & Curtis, 2005) that school rankings, test scores, and grades are inextricably linked to socioeconomic factors of that school district. In other words, it is likely that the same teacher may produce significantly different results teaching the exact same way, depending on the site of her teaching. Second, not all parents and children have the resources to gain access to the neighborhoods with higher performing schools. Taken together, these points suggest a problem with our current discourse about education with its narrow focus on quantifiable test results as the primary measure of "successful" teaching and learning, which often tells us more about the school's neighborhood than it does about what is happening in the classrooms. By contrast, a discourse framed around democratic values would focus on strategies that ensure all children access to high-quality learning environments, support their current and future well-being, and foster their growth as productive citizens and lifelong learners.

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a reason for this unfortunate trend, "The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor" (p. 58). This unfortunate cultural trend highlights the need to explore alternative school structures, including more democratic ones.

These same pressures toward standardization are being felt in early childhood programs. For example, with President George W. Bush's implementation of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the teaching of discrete literacy and numeracy skills, including attempts to require all 3- and 4-year-olds to take a standardized test, took priority over Head Start's original holistic aims (Fuller, 2007) despite opposition from the National Academy of Sciences and the scholarly early childhood community. Although some of these policies are changing and the national testing program for Head Start has been discontinued, it is a powerful example of the narrowing conception of education and the push-down effect that public school policies have on early childhood programs, often in direct conflict with current research on best practices (Montie, Xiang, & Schweinhart, 2006).

As a former preschool teacher and director, I have felt the push-down effect of a high-stakes testing environment and a narrowing focus on learning. I can recall a number of instances of parents' expressed concern about their toddler's (1- and 2-year-olds) academic learning. After inquiring further, I discovered that parents almost always meant, "Are you teaching letters and numbers to my child (through skill-and-drill)?" It was very difficult to convince parents that their children are in fact learning while playing and that language and math concepts are learned, in many more effective ways, when children are not simply parroting or rote copying symbols that at their young age are not as directly connected to meaning as the symbols would be for slightly older children (Montie, Xiang, & Schweinhart, 2006).

With the barrage of information about failing schools and the pressures felt related to children's "readiness" for formal schooling, it is quite understandable that

parents are apprehensive about the academic intensity of preschool and its role in preparation for formal schooling. Perhaps our society's dependence on competitive types of assessment tools [that for our child to be successful they must be ahead of other children] also contributes to this parental fear and pressure to teach their toddlers to recite letters and numbers without regard to the child's broader comprehension of the concepts.[2]

With the current emphasis on this type of standardization and competition, the likelihood is that creating a collaborative ethos among students (an essential component of a well-functioning democracy) is significantly more difficult. Further, the primary focus on narrow, discrete skill instruction denies children support in developing their skills in critical thinking, negotiating, and complex problem-solving; embracing dissonance and diversity; and building relationships. As a result, this broad span of skills and capabilities necessary for effective democratic citizenship are at risk of receiving insufficient educational attention.

Playing on parents' fear and the desire for their children to be successful, this narrowing concept of learning has been supported and propagated by toy companies

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[2] Two examples of our society's use of competitive assessment tools include the heavy use of and value placed on norm-referenced types of standardized tests and the increasing competitive nature of getting children accepted into preschool and kindergarten programs. Various preschool and kindergarten programs increasingly require children to interview and compete for spaces in their school. In fact, several preschool teachers came to me while I was the director of a child care center wanting to have their preschoolers do practice interviews as part of their daily curriculum to help the children get accepted into "top kindergarten programs." At the same time, an increasing number of parents started coming to me for a "letter of reference" to attest to their child's abilities and to describe how their child stands out against the other children competing for that particular Kindergarten space. This cultural trend is also evident in recent parenting books such as "Kindergarten Wars: The Battle to Get into America's Best Private Schools" (Eisenstock, 2006) and "Testing for Kindergarten: Simple Strategies to Help Your Child Ace the Tests for Public School Placement, Private School Admissions, Gifted Program Qualification (Quinn, 2010).

(Linn, 2004; Paul, 2008; Thomas, 2007). For example, several children in my class of one-year-olds were fascinated with the buses driving by our playground and loved any books that involved buses. In fact, "bus" was one of the first words spoken by many of the children. To support the children's interests, I decided to purchase some toy buses and after visiting several stores was shocked at the selections. I was unable to find a single bus that was not electronic and/or connected to some academic learning concept. For example, one bus had alphabet buttons on the exterior that when pushed would electronically say the letter. Another bus also served as a math shape sorter with animals of different shapes (triangle, square, circle) that were to be placed in the correspondingly shaped seat on the bus. What happens to children's creativity and critical thinking (both necessary for creating democratic citizens) when starting at infancy, their toys are so narrowly focused on discrete skills? What does this academic fixation say about our respect for children's democratic right to self-guided exploration and learning?

Along the same lines, I recently received an email alert from Amazon.com about some new learning toys for infants and toddlers. When I opened the webpage, it had several toys featured including a "Fisher-Price Laugh and Learn Learning Letters Mailbox." Prominently displayed was a photo of an infant playing with the toy and underneath the photo was a formidable list of product features: "Teaches letters, numbers, opposites, colors, greetings and more! Includes three letters and a package for slotting. Hear the friendly mailbox characters. Slide the address roller to learn all about numbers. Lift the mail flag to learn about opposites through music and phrases." The other toys similarly promised to teach babies these concepts. The "Fisher-Price Moo Sounds Milk & Cookies" had the tagline "Introduce your baby to counting and numbers," and the

"Fisher-Price: Musical Tea Set" product features said, "Teaches baby about numbers, shapes, opposites, manners, greetings and more." Again, these kinds of toys do not encourage relationship-building, creativity, authentic connections between letters and meaningful language. What happens in a society when even infants are being pushed to learn isolated concepts that lack connections with the real world or authentic relationships?

In *Standardized Childhood*, Fuller (2007) discusses the growing public interest in universal prekindergarten and specifically its effects on Oklahoma's implementation of their statewide program. In his book, he explains that much of the political and popular support for Oklahoma's program was based on advocates' assertions that providing universal prekindergarten would increase overall test scores and school readiness. Fuller discusses the problems with this narrow focus. Absent from the political discussion was any consideration of how the creation of universal, high-quality preschool education might contribute to sustaining and cultivating a democratic society: On a pedagogical level, preschool classrooms could be designed intentionally as children's earliest experiences in the public sphere (a safe and nurturing space where they have the freedom to explore questions and ideas, negotiate, collaborate, embrace diversity and dissonance, and participate in the overall functioning of the program); and on a structural level, universal prekindergarten could help promote equality and justice for all children (given that our current preschool system has large disparities in both access and quality of care).

According to a report from the Alliance for Childhood, titled *Crisis in the Kindergarten*, which compiled the findings from nine studies, the ever-growing use of

prescriptive curricula geared towards standardized tests is leading to the disappearance of play. Miller and Almon (2009) explain:

> The latest research indicates that, on a typical day, children in all-day kindergartens spend four to six times as much time in literacy and math instruction and taking or preparing for tests (about two to three hours per day) as in free play or "choice time" (30 minutes or less)…In some kindergartens there is no playtime at all. The same didactic, test-driven approach is entering preschools. But these methods, which are not well grounded in research, are not yielding long-term gains. Meanwhile, behavioral problems and preschool expulsion, especially for boys, are soaring. (p. 11)

When these researchers asked teachers, "What are the obstacles to play and playful learning in Kindergarten?," their most common response was that the "prescribed curriculum doesn't incorporate them" (p. 31). To further elaborate, in an article titled *The Fear of Play*, Almon (March/April, 2009) explains:

> Real play — play that is initiated and directed by children and that bubbles up from within the child rather than being imposed by adults — has largely disappeared from the landscape of childhood in the United States. There are many reasons for this, such as the long hours spent in front of screens each day or in activities organized by adults. In addition, preschools and kindergartens that used to foster meaningful play and exploration often spend long hours on adult-led instruction instead. (p. 42)

Later in her article, she posits:

> The current mindset in the U.S. leads us to create a life that is as safe and risk-free as possible. We want life to be ultra-organized, and we want to be in charge at all times. We're taught from early on that life should be rational and measurable. No wonder people love to see young children sitting still and working on worksheets or at computer screens. It's so tidy compared to play, which is messy, not only physically but also emotionally…Play is full of symbols and metaphors. It has some elements that seem familiar and arise from our everyday life, but in the next moment it is full of magical thinking. It is a way of perceiving the world that is reminiscent of fairy tales and myths. It is the antithesis of didactic teaching and scripted lessons, which are highly predictable, although their outcomes tend to be much weaker than promised. (p.42)

In sum, this disappearance of play, narrowed conception of "learning," and increased standardization in early childhood settings are all cultural trends that potentially threaten children's right to self-determination, holistic learning, creativity, critical thinking, relationship-building, and social collaboration—all crucial building blocks of an authentically democratic citizenry.[3]

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[3] Another example of this standardization in preschools can be seen in Georgia Pre-K approved programs. In order to receive funding, child care centers are now required to pick (buy) from a list of approved (prepackaged) curricula. The *Bright from the Start: Georgia Department of Early Care and Learning* (2011, "Curricula Models") website provides links to each company's "one page flyers featuring their curricula" (advertisements). The first two I looked at had the following tag lines: "We've Planned Your Pre-K day. All day. Every day…Let's begin with the Letter people" (Abrams Learning Trends) and "Every activity from the time children arrive in the morning until they leave in the afternoon included" (Alphaskills).

Excessive influence of pop behaviorism. "Pop behaviorism" (Kohn, 1993) is the second, interconnected trend that comes into conflict with the concept of democracy. In a society that values quick and easy techniques, pop behaviorism has become a U.S. phenomenon shaping schools, work places, and even parenting. The core technique of behaviorism is to use positive reinforcement, particularly rewards, praise, and other extrinsic motivators to get a desired behavioral outcome. As an educational policy, the most common desired outcome of this technique is social control, which directly undermines the democratic rights of children as self-determining citizens. There is an abundance of research that challenges the widely held myth that rewards and punishments are effective beyond controlling immediate, short-term compliance (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999; Kohn, 1993, 2005). Not only are reward systems largely ineffective, they also have detrimental and unintended consequences. For example, studies suggest that extrinsic rewards in fact punish, rupture relationships, ignore reasons for behaviors, discourage risk-taking and diminish intrinsic motivations (Kohn, 1993). Yet, this carrot-and-stick approach to life continues to be indoctrinated into our way of thinking.

I recently attended a wedding shower with a group of well-intentioned, well-educated mothers who were discussing a toy called "Elf on a Shelf." One of the mothers mentioned she had recently purchased the toy for her child and described to us how it works. She explained how the toy elf is placed in different places around the house each night prior to Christmas and how the parent explains to the child that the elf will be watching them during the day. Each night he will return to the North Pole to report to Santa Claus the child's behavior (essentially whether they've been bad or good). Several

parents chimed in that they had also bought this "Elf on a Shelf," including one teacher who used it in her classroom. They unanimously touted its effects. The effects apparently were that of instilling sufficient fear in their children to behave so Santa wouldn't find out about their bad behavior and refuse to deliver their toys on Christmas morning. Interestingly, the parents all agreed that their children loved the toy.

"Elf on a Shelf" serves as a powerful example of how pervasive behaviorism is in our ideology, rhetoric, and culture. In this gathering of mothers there was no discussion of the possible downsides of this so-called "toy." Not one person voiced concern about whether the use of this elf may take some of the joy out of Christmas, or perhaps shift the children's perceptions of the holiday as a time for giving and enjoying time with family and friends, to a time focused on strategizing how to behave well enough in their own self-interest to receive their rewards (e.g., a stocking filled with material goods). Is this why and how we want children to behave, responding to fear someone is watching or so they can get some material good for themselves? What happens when children think the elf or parent isn't watching? Have they lost their reason or motivation for "improved behavior"? Is this the framework in which we want children to view family holidays? The focus of the conversation among these mothers was on how well the Elf worked as a quick fix to get children to be compliant to their parental requests. When compliance and social control is valued over respect, dialogue, and participation, are we fostering antidemocratic means to an end? How does this type of behavior modification serve to promote self-regulating, cooperative, and productive citizens? Also, if children learn to behave out of self-interest or fear without an understanding of why certain rules are in existence, merely following authority without raising questions, will they grow into

citizens concerned with the common good? Will they feel empowered to be active, engaged, and responsive citizens who are able to critically examine policy initiatives and power relations?

These same types of behavioral techniques are frequently used in early childhood settings as strategies to attain children's compliance. Again, as a director and teacher, I have seen more and more teachers using behavior modification charts with their children. Teachers send home a red or green light each day to the parents, indicating whether their child was good or bad. While typically employed as a behavioral management strategy for older children, again the intention is for the child to be properly rewarded for good behavior (e.g., given candy or stickers) or punished (e.g., loss of television privileges) for bad behavior. Research indicates that these types of behavior modification diminish children's intrinsic motivation for learning, create more self-centered children, and usually do not produce the desired outcome (Boggiano, Barrett, Weiher, McClelland & Lusk, 1987; Kohn 1993; 1996; 2005). If research shows that these techniques are largely ineffective in producing the desired outcomes, why are they so pervasive in our society? And, what are the possibilities for and barriers to creating a preschool environment that uses more democratic methods as an alternative (e.g., respect, negotiation, and problem-solving)?

Although behavioral theory has lost academic favor in the social sciences, research by Boggiano, et al. (1987) suggests how wedded adults in the U.S. are to their belief in the effectiveness of rewards. Their study found that even after college students and adults received "theory and research indicating that tangible reward decreases subsequent interest in enjoyable academic activities, rewards are [still] perceived by

adults as effective techniques to maximize long- and short-term subsequent interest for

academic tasks of both high and low initial interest level" (p. 866). Clearly, behaviorism

has a powerful hold on our beliefs and values. But when a system of rewards and/or

punishments predominates, it seems the inevitable result will include a stifling of

children's intrinsic desire to connect in pro-social ways, fewer opportunities for children

to learn the social value of certain rules and/or behaviors, and less time and real-life

practice needed for children to learn how to handle distress and conflict in healthy and

constructive ways (e.g., through perspective-taking, negotiating, and collaborative

problem-solving)---all essential qualities of a well-functioning democratic citizenry.

     Consider, too, that we are in a historical period when socioeconomic conditions

are feeding into a general, culture-wide fixation on "rewards." The emphasis on free

market ideology in the last twenty-five years produced unprecedented cultural

legitimatization for the single-minded pursuit of "rewards" in socioeconomic life. Prior to

the Reagan era, New Deal social protections and entitlement policies competed with the

cultural value of wealth accumulation in the U.S. Now, the cultural emphasis upon

rewards-motivated behavior in the marketplace is predominant, arguably creating strong

support for rewards-oriented approaches to parenting (Fraser, 2005). Perhaps with the

current economic crisis, we have an important opportunity to revisit these assumptions

and explore alternative paradigms that serve our commonwealth more equitably. In fact,

many educational and democratic theorists (Korten, 2008; Parker, 2003; Seedfelt &

Barbour, 1994) argue that supporting the commonwealth's interests is actually in

people's self interest. Yet self-interest and concern for others are commonly set up as

either/or dichotomies. As expressed by Italian economist Stefano Zamagni (2005):

> …the key to the ethic of virtues is in its capacity to resolve the opposition
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> between self interest and interest for others, between egoism and altruism, by
>
> moving beyond this distinction. It is the distinction, child of the individualistic
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> tradition of thought, that prevents us from grasping that which constitutes our own
>
> wellbeing. The virtuous life is the best not only for others—like the various
>
> economic theories of altruism would have it—but also for ourselves. This is the
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> real significance of the notion of common good, as it can never be reduced to an
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> aggregate of individual well-beings. Instead, the common good, which is
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> interpreted by the cooperative enterprise, is the good of being in common. That is
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> the good of being inserted into a structure of common action, gifted with certain
>
> peculiarities…(p. 11)

In this sense, democracy could be considered a common good, not a good that is offered

to others out of benevolence or charity. Yet, the cooperative basis of a democracy may

lose its strength when cultural systems (i.e., educational and familial) are set up in ways

that: 1) condition children to expect extrinsic rewards in exchange for behavioral

compliance and/or the performance of tasks; and 2) require children to compete with one

another for individual privileges, which creates an unnecessary conflict between

children's self-interest and their interest in the good of others.[4]

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[4] To explain further, in a behavior-based system, where children are taught that the reason they should perform tasks or behaviors is primarily to receive extrinsic rewards (e.g., treats, money, grades, conditional love) and to avoid punishments (time-out, taking away t.v.), they are more likely to develop a selfish "what's in it for me?" type of outlook in which to base their decisions. This form of social control threatens democratic values in that it undermines children's right to be a self-determining citizen; prevents children from developing their natural capacities to connect and help others (including the joy it brings to both the giver and receiver); limits their opportunity to take on other people's

Growing influence of corporate interests and profits. Another emerging antidemocratic trend is the influence of corporate profit-making on the lives of children and their schools. In recent years there has been a proliferation of for-profit corporate child care centers. When corporations own the schools, power is shifted away from families and local communities and put into the hands of the shareholders and corporate boards. No matter how well-intentioned the corporate management may be, this removes the decision-making power from the people that are most affected, undermining the possibility of democratic practice within the school. Unfortunately, the values of for-profit, corporate companies are often in conflict with the ideals of democratic educators. Rather than reinvesting money into schools, the number one obligation of corporations is to increase profits. In addition to these apparent problems of inequitable power structures and profit-taking at the expense of school quality, are corporate values—which are often undemocratic—beginning to impact education in more subtle ways?

The following example illustrates one way in which corporate involvement in schools has compromised children's overall health and well-being. According to a report in *The Future of Children* (Story, Kaphingst, & French, 2006, Spring), childhood and adolescent obesity rates have more than tripled in the United States. Several research studies have shown the negative impact that corporate influence has on children's nutritional health in schools (e.g., children's intake of fruits and vegetables decreases and their intake of daily fat increases when schools have vending machines and a la carte snacks available). In fact, a Pennsylvania research study (Foster, et al., 2008) indicated a

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perspectives; prevents children from developing an ethical framework in which to make life-long decisions; and limits children's right to problem solve and negotiate conflict themselves.

reduction in the onset of obesity (7% compared to 15% control group) in schools that

removed vending machines from the school and implemented a nutrition education

program. Unfortunately, most public schools have vending machines on site and feel

dependent upon the added income they receive from their sales. Companies are

increasingly advertising on school properties which further explains this trend:

> Many contracts increase the share of profits schools receive when sales volume
>
> increases, further encouraging schools to promote consumption. The practices
>
> contradict the nutrition and health messages students receive in the classroom and
>
> contribute to poor dietary habits. They also give soda companies unfettered
>
> access to youth and the chance to develop lifetime brand loyalty. (Story,
>
> Kaphingst, & French, p. 117)

Corporations have no incentive to change this practice if it affects their bottom

line: profit for the company. If schools were re-examined through a democratic lens

(e.g., concern for the welfare and common good of all members of the community as an

overarching value on which to base important school decisions), perhaps the impact of

corporate power on children's overall health and well-being would be more closely

scrutinized and new more democratic possibilities could be explored.

In another example of increasing corporate influence over the lives of children,

pharmaceutical companies have become a growing presence in our schools. Beyond

children's declining physical health, a growing number of reports contain evidence of

children's declining social and emotional health (Child Welfare League of America

[CWLA], 2009; Elkind, 2007; Huang, 2004; U.S. Public Health Service, 2000).

According to the *CWLA,* (2009), "recent estimates show approximately 1 in 5 children

with a diagnosable mental disorder and 1 in 10 with a severe emotional or behavioral

disorder causing significant impaired functioning at home, at school, or in the

community." In connection with this trend, there has been a proliferation in both the

diagnosing and prescribing of drugs for children, to the obvious benefit of large

pharmaceutical companies. For example, Zito and colleagues (2008) found that more

than 8% of children in the United States under the age of nine were taking psychotropic

drugs, and that this number is increasing, especially among preschool-aged children.

This comes at a time when influential doctors and researchers are being investigated for

their questionable links to pharmaceutical companies, including Dr. Goodwin, a

psychiatrist and former host of *The Infinite Mind,* a popular public radio program.

According to the *New York Times* (Harris, 2008, November 21), during one of Dr.

Goodwin's broadcasts:

> He warned that children with bipolar disorder who were left untreated could
>
> suffer brain damage, a controversial view…That same day, GlaxoSmithKline paid
>
> Dr. Goodwin $2,500 to give a promotional lecture for its mood stabilizer drug,
>
> Lamictal. In all, GlaxoSmithKline paid him more than $329,000 that year for
>
> promoting Lamictal, records given to Congressional investigators show. (para. 3)

On another show, Goodwin reportedly said:

> "As you will hear today, there is no credible scientific evidence linking
>
> antidepressants to violence or to suicide." That same week he earned around
>
> $20,000 from GlaxoSmithKline, which for years suppressed studies showing that
>
> its antidepressant, Paxil, increased suicidal behaviors. (para. 24)

In a personal experience as the director of a preschool, I witnessed first-hand the powerful hold that drug companies have on consumers, as well as their appeal to some parents' desire for quick and easy solutions to their "problems." The mother of a three-year-old girl named Cathy, who was enrolled at my school, complained that her daughter had trouble "sitting still, listening, and behaving appropriately." After meeting with her and observing Cathy in the classroom, it seemed, from my perspective, that much of Cathy's behavior could be attributed to her chaotic home environment, as well as the developmentally inappropriate tasks she was asked to complete. Cathy's mother decided to take her to a psychiatrist. After one visit, the psychiatrist recommended some parenting techniques for her to try (with the school following the same techniques) to alter Cathy's behavior. The psychiatrist told Cathy's mom that, if the techniques didn't work, she would prescribe Ritalin to Cathy. However, her mother opted out of the environmental changes as the first strategy to help adjust Cathy's behavior, stating that she did not have the time or patience to implement the strategies and was just going to give her the medication. That is precisely what she did; without any further discussion the psychiatrist prescribed Cathy psychotropic drugs. With multiple attempts from the teacher and me to try environmental changes before using the medicine, the mother still refused. The effect in the classroom was a child who did indeed sit in her chair for longer periods of time, but whose personality seemed to have disappeared and was replaced with a flat affect. In an article titled, *Are We Over Medicating Our Children*?, Harrington (2008) noted the increased use of psychotropic medications and their adverse effects on children. He pointed out that "the evidence-based data for this increase are sparsely supported in the literature" and "having toddlers and small children placed on

[psychotropic drugs] when their neurodevelopmental architecture is quite vulnerable should make general pediatric physicians pause and wonder what they are treating." He goes on to explain:

> theoretically, we can manipulate the serotonin and dopamine receptors with a pill and perhaps modify outburst and anxious behaviors, but I fear that we have relegated intensive persistent behavioral strategies to the background for parents who may not have the time or the skills to manage these difficult children. (p.212)

Arguably, when psychotropic medications are heavily marketed to families and used as the primary solution to control children's behaviors, they undermine children's rights to participate in the requisite hard work needed to build their internal capacities for self-regulation and develop healthy, authentic relationships with others. In a society that prefers quick fixes, has strong corporate influences (whose ultimate goal is profit), and lacks needed funding for public research that is untainted by corporate profit, it would seem that an exploration of educational preschool systems that promote democratic values and make children's well-being the foundation of their decision-making processes, is worthy of further study.

A final example, of the negative influence corporate profit-making can have on children's well-being, was exposed in Amy Goodman's article, *Jailing Kids for Cash* (2009, February 17). She wrote:

> As many as 5,000 children in Pennsylvania have been found guilty, and up to 2,000 of them jailed, by two corrupt judges who received kickbacks from the builders and owners of private prison facilities that benefited. The two judges pleaded guilty in a stunning case of greed and corruption that is still unfolding.

Judges Mark A. Ciavarella Jr. and Michael T. Conahan received $2.6 million in kickbacks while imprisoning children who often had no access to a lawyer. The case offers an extraordinary glimpse into the shameful private prison industry that is flourishing in the United States. (p. 1)

Certainly these may be extreme cases, but there are many other examples, both subtle and overt, of the growing and direct involvement of corporations in decisions regarding the well-being, freedom and rights of children and their development into democratic citizens. A preschool system whose foundation is based on democratic values and principles could potentially serve as an antidote to the growing corporate influence over young children and their educational environments.

Consumer culture runs rampant. The unsettling influences and pressures of our "consumer culture" on children are also becoming more evident. Children are being molded into consumers starting at infancy, and marketers have developed ingenious strategies to manipulate parents and children to buy or feel that they must have certain toys (e.g., "the whine factor"). Childhood is now viewed as a trillion dollar industry (Paul, 2008; Thomas, 2007). As described in Parenting Inc. (Paul, 2008), there is a company that has produced an infant DVD that "teaches your baby how to read." This is not a unique product. Infant and toddler videos are widespread and growing in popularity. According to one survey (Zero to Three, 2004) 90% of children under 24 months watch television or videos daily for an average of 1 to 1.5 hours. Not surprisingly, Paul (2008) goes on to show that none of these companies has done any research on the actual effects of infants and toddlers watching DVDs. Needless to say,

these DVDs and toys, to a large degree, encourage children to be passive consumers rather than active agents of their own learning.

In fact, there are several research studies on the effect of media use on children from birth to five years of age (Anderson & Pempeck, 2005; Thompson, & Christakis, 2005; Vandewater, Bickham, Lee, Cummings, Wartella, & Rideout, 2005; Wartella, Vandewater, & Rideout, 2005) that suggest the amount of media use for young children is correlated with fewer parent-child interactions, less time reading and reduced ability to read, an increase in irregular sleep patterns, an increase in obesity, and a reduction in time and quality spent on focused play.

Another research study, led by Juliet Schor, examined how involvement in consumer culture affects children's general well-being. As discussed in *Born to Buy: The Commercialized Child and the New Consumer Culture*, her findings serve as another powerful example of how this trend can negatively impact children. Shor (2004) explains,

> High consumer involvement is a significant cause of depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and psychosomatic complaints. Psychologically healthy children will be made worse off if they become more enmeshed in the culture of getting and spending. Children with emotional problems will be helped if they disengage from the worlds that corporations are constructing for them. The effects work in both directions and are symmetric. That is, less involvement in consumer culture leads to healthier kids, and more involvement leads kids'psychological well-being to deteriorate. (p. 167)

Compounding these negative effects for children, Shor's research discovered that "higher levels of consumer involvement result in worse relationships with parents…[and] relating poorly to parents leads to more depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem and more psychosomatic complaints" (p. 170).

Clearly, this high level of consumer involvement may hinder children's opportunity to become happy, healthy, productive democratic citizens. Unfortunately, marketers' effectiveness in their "cradle-to-grave" campaign for brand loyalty continues to grow, challenging a democratic way of life that requires active involvement in the civic life of the community over a preoccupation with private consumption. Children's immersion in commercial culture has serious implications. As Linn (2004) explains, marketing:

> aims to affect core values such as lifestyle choices: how we define happiness and how we measure our self-worth. Meanwhile, the very traits that today's marketing encourages—materialism, impulsivity, entitlement, and unexamined brand loyalty—are antithetical to those qualities necessary in a healthy democratic citizenry. (p. 8)

How do both the overt and subtle influences of a consumer culture impact young children in early childhood settings? What are the possibilities and challenges of creating a democratic preschool environment by supporting children both as active agents of their learning processes and as citizens in their community, in a way that may be able to redress some of these negative consumer values? These questions certainly warrant further study.

Time for New Possibilities

In addition to, and, in part as a result of these cultural trends, the United States has large numbers of children living in poverty and/or dealing with health issues, an economy in a deep recession, an education system that is losing its competitive edge with other nations, and growing numbers of environmental calamities. Yet this troubling period can serve as a crossroads, an opportunity to formulate new plans for a better society, and a chance to revisit old ideas in our present context and examine what worked and what didn't.

In the last several decades, mainstream discourse on early childhood education issues (as well as the early childhood literature) has not been framed around democratic principles and values; in fact, creating democratic spaces for children to practice and build their capacities as citizens in a well-functioning democracy is largely absent from the discussion. It is time to reexamine the mission of education and to refocus on its original democratic purposes, as well as to enhance our ability to participate in the solution of ongoing global issues.

We are also at a point in history when preschool education is receiving increasing interest from policymakers, media, and the general population. This interest has sparked a debate about what types of early childhood education are best for our children (e.g., what type of structure—private, nonprofit or public? what type of curriculum? what are the purposes for child care—school readiness, nurturing place for children when parents are gone?). Although there are many opinions on what types of child care and early childhood education are best, a number of public surveys show that the majority of voters believe preschool is a public good (Cooper & Dukakis, 2004; Fuller, 2007). With these

compounding issues in the forefront, it is a critical time to examine both the structural and pedagogical culture of our preschools to refocus our early childhood education discourse and resources on the democratic principles on which the United States was founded. Yet, few research studies address democracy and U.S. preschool education.

Filling the Gap in Research

After researching the issue, I found a gap in the empirical research focusing on democracy and early childhood education. I searched the Galileo@UGA education and child development databases (e.g., Child Development & Adolescent Studies, Education Research Complete-EBSCO, Sociological Abstracts-ProQuest, ERIC, PsychINFO), using key words such as: democra* (democracy, democratic values), social justice, citizenship, preschool*, child care, and early childhood education. There were several studies involving primary and secondary education and democracy but, none specifically completed in U.S. preschool settings. There were also a small number of studies related to democracy and early childhood education in foreign countries. For example, a section of Veloso's (2003) dissertation examined Brazilian children's citizenship and its relation to child care practices and several articles discussed implications of the *Step by Step Program* (Kaufmann, Hansen, & Klaus, 2002)*,* an international program that helps countries that are transitioning into democratic societies, with educational reforms that help prepare young children to be part of the new participatory citizenry. (See chapter 2 for a detailed review of empirical research and theoretical literature related to democracy and preschool education.)

Although there is an abundance of research that supports arguably better alternatives for school policy and functions (as mentioned above—healthy foods,

imaginative play, etc.) there have been difficulties in actualizing policy improvements. I would propose that it is in part because we have lost some of our prior focus on creating democratic institutions that will create happy, healthy, and productive citizens.[5] If we are to shift our focus and begin to improve our system, we need to examine exemplary democratic preschool programs. To that end, I selected a case study design for my initial exploration into both the possibilities and challenges of creating a democratic preschool

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[5] In each decade from 1907 to 1970, a White House Conference on Children and Youth was held, designed to address relevant issues of that decade for the purposes of improving the lives of children. Tracing the topics for these conferences suggests the changing focus and value put on children's issues in current educational policy discourse. For example, in 1909 and 1919 the conferences focused on children's health and welfare standards to ensure that all children had a fair and equitable start to life; the conference in 1929 was on children's protection and the children's charter was developed; in 1939 the topic was on *children in a democracy* and focused on "the fundamental democratic principles, conditions, and services essential for children's well-being in a democracy" (Child Welfare League of America, n.d., p. 2); in the 1950's the conference focused on how to "develop in children the mental, emotional and spiritual qualities essential to individual happiness and *responsible citizenship*" and the conditions deemed necessary to this development (Dean, as cited in CWLA, p. 7); in the 1960's focus was on promoting "opportunities for children…to realize their full potential for a creative life in freedom and dignity" (p. 9); in the 1970s the focus was on ways to "enhance and cherish the individuality and identity of each…child through the recognition and encouragement of his or her own development, regardless of environmental conditions or circumstances of birth" (p. 10). Unfortunately, that was the last official White House conference to be held. Funding was provided for a Conference on Children and Youth to be held in 1981. However, instead of a national conference, President Reagan dispersed the funding to the states instead. "In 1990, as part of the Head Start reauthorization, legislative language allowed for a Conference in 1993 but funding was not provided. President Clinton and President Bush have held different child-focused White House Conferences (e.g., school violence; brain research as it relates to early childhood development; and missing and exploited children) but they sponsored no formal White House Conferences on Children and Youth, and certainly none that focused on developing children as citizens in our democracy (CWLA, n.d.).

environment because it allowed me to shed light on this issue in a contextualized, holistic, and in-depth way.

Theoretical Framework

In constructing this case study, there were several theoretical frameworks that shaped my thinking and influenced the multi-layered approach I used. Goodman (1992) writes that, "a synthesis from several distinctive frameworks was more helpful…than any one tradition" (p. 34) in informing her research design. Similarly, I do not fully situate myself in one theoretical domain.

To begin with, my theoretical framework for this study has been partly influenced by feminist theory. In particular, Donna Haraway's (1991) essay, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and The Privileges of Partial Perspective" addresses some of the contradictions and/or paradoxes that I struggled with in trying to situate my own position/locality in different theoretical frameworks. She discusses the conflict that many feminists have felt between the dichotomous poles of "radical constructivism versus feminist critical empiricism" (p. 580). More specifically, Haraway explains,

> Our problem, is how to have simultaneously an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, and a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a real world, one that can be partially shared and that is friendly to earthwide projects of finite freedom, adequate material abundance, modest meaning in suffering, and limited happiness. (p. 579)

Haraway's description of this conflict resonates with my own struggle to simultaneously

contextualize and actualize my critical perspective on existing social conditions. For

example, I believe that *truth, knowledge*, and *identity* are socially constructed by social,

historical, and cultural factors, and in particular, are shaped by power structures. On the

other hand, I do feel that there are certain fundamental, indisputable human rights that

should be generally recognized as "true." Haraway's work provides me an alternative to

these conflicting paradigms, an alternative that does not reduce the complexities of

objectivity into dichotomous poles. She argues for

> epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not
>
> universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims.
>
> These are claims on peoples' lives. I am arguing for the view from a body,
>
> always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view
>
> from above, from nowhere, from simplicity. (p. 589)

Haraway argues for a new type of objectivity that moves away from the dominant

narratives of what objectivity is—namely neutral, separating mind and body with a

reductionist and immobile vision of reality. She proposes a feminist objectivity that is

about "limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of

subject and object" (p. 583). This feminist perspective allows me a way to think about

knowledge claims and scientific objectivity that resists placing the argument in

reductionist or relativistic terms and reflects my current thinking about the dialectic

between historically contingent and politically compelling truth claims.

Critical theory has also influenced my thinking and approach to this case study.

 Critical inquiry allows me to "call current ideology into question, and initiate action, in

the cause of social justice" (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). A critical theoretical framework allows me to ask socially transformative questions to examine the basic values, beliefs, and assumptions that may exist, and to illuminate the cultural and structural inequities and oppressions as they may exist in this preschool setting, particularly when those structures operate outside the immediate awareness of community participants.

However, I diverge slightly from certain critical theorists who suggest all-or-none types of power structures. For example, in "Pedagogy of the Oppressed," critical theorist Freire (1970/2007) discusses his notions of oppressed/oppressor, power/no-power and freedom/subjugation as strict binaries. In contrast, I believe there are multiple layers of freedom and power. For example, in many schools teachers (and/or administrators) have an inordinate amount of power. But to me, that does not equate with the students having zero power. Children may have to assert their power in transgressive ways, but I do not think their power ceases to exist. Instead, Foucault's description of power seems to align more closely with my own understanding. Foucault (1978) writes that "power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations" (p. 94). Foucault writes further, "Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective…there is no power that is exercised without a series of aims and objectives. But, this does not mean that it results from the choice or decision of an individual subject" (pp. 94-95). To my understanding, Foucault is suggesting that there are many levels, degrees, and types of power which are constantly shifting, merging, separating, and changing, creating an array of hegemonic forces that come to define the systems and institutions in which we participate.

As a former preschool educator and administrator, I am also aware that the ideological content of my research method is embedded, as it inevitably must be, in my social location as a researcher as discussed in the following section.

Subjectivity Statement

There have been several experiences both as a teacher and administrator that have shaped my thinking and interest in examining how democracy is supported or hindered in school settings. Experiences working as both a teacher in a low-income elementary school and as a Reggio Emilia-inspired preschool teacher and administrator shed light on my subjectivities and growing questions about democratic classrooms.

Several years ago, I worked in two public elementary schools as an Early Intervention Program teacher in Georgia. In the city in which I worked, there were four elementary schools, two with predominantly white, middle-upper class children (literally on the *north side* of the train tracks) and two with predominantly African American, lower socioeconomic children (on the *south side* of the tracks). I taught at the two schools that had predominantly African American, low SES children. Coming from a public school in an affluent area in another state, I was shocked at the condition of the two schools in which I worked, with no air conditioning, the copy machine barely working, and the building in disrepair. I was further disturbed when I attended a meeting at one of the schools on the *north side* of the tracks, which was a beautifully renovated space, with air conditioning, fresh paint, and many more rich and diverse materials for the children to use. I knew that there were still inequalities in the United States, but I did not realize how blatant they could be, especially in a public institution supposedly dedicated to equality of educational opportunity. I started to wonder: is it possible to

promote democratic values in schools that are so radically unequal? How are these two very different school cultures supporting children's development in becoming active citizens in a democratic society?

All of the children with whom I worked at these two schools on the south side were labeled "special needs" or were labeled at least one year below grade level in reading. After getting to know the children, I realized that, while the children were creative and intelligent, they struggled with the dominant language and often just didn't have the vocabulary to understand what they were reading. I was given a pre-packaged curriculum for reading instruction which explicitly laid out instructions for teachers and students and effectively removed any of the teachers' intellectual freedom to create their own plans based on the children's needs or interests. The reading books that were included in this pre-packaged curriculum had very little relevance to these children's lives and provided very little motivation for the children to read. It frustrated me that these children were labeled as requiring "special education" when in fact they seemed perfectly capable, but were just lacking the right resources or the correct environment to make them successful. Further, there seemed to be an attitude in the adult school culture that these children did not want to learn. However, I observed something very different when I started a before-school book club to enhance the reading opportunities provided to these children. Attendance at the book club was strictly voluntary, and in the beginning I was worried that none of the children would come. For the book club, I selected books *with* the children, books that had more relevance to their lives, read them and followed up with some sort of hands-on activity or discussion with the children. To my surprise and relief, each week more and more children started to come to the book club, until virtually

everyone participated. This made me begin to consider: what happens when we standardize curriculum, a curriculum that reproduces the dominant discourse of those in power? What can happen when instead we take a more *democratic approach to teaching*, tapping into children's natural curiosities, interests, and desires to learn? What can happen when we start with experiences that are meaningful to children? I believe that education is the linchpin of democracy. There should be no definition of democracy that does not have equal education (access and quality) included. I started to wonder, how can we hope to create a democratic classroom in a country that struggles with actualizing its democratic ideals?

Even after leaving that school, I continued to contemplate these questions. For the next 5 ½ years I was an administrator at a child care center, where I started studying the Reggio Emilia approach to education.[6] Since that time, the Reggio approach to preschool education has heavily shaped my thinking about democratic classrooms. The schools of Reggio were developed to be first and foremost places for ethical and political practice where democratic principles could be realized. In Reggio Emilia, Italy, the community opted for a preschool as a place for *social change* and *transformation*; a place that is not about just accumulating facts but a place for knowing how to think; a place

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[6] The preschools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, were created in the 1950's and 1960's to challenge traditional types of education, where adults were the ultimate authority and children were expected to be obedient. Through the fascist experiences of World War II, the people of Reggio Emilia came to realize that the people who conformed and obeyed were dangerous, and that in building a new society it was imperative to safeguard and communicate that lesson and nurture and maintain a vision of children who can think and act for themselves. As a deliberate response to the atrocities of fascism, the people of Reggio wanted to create schools founded not on the authority of the adult but on the perspective of the child.

where adults and children become active agents of their own learning; a place where freedom of expression and thought are encouraged; and a place where democracy is practiced and sustained through dialogue and exchange. As described by Moss (2006), Reggio educators teach "subjective, divergent and independent interpretations of the world in contrast with linear and accumulative process" (p. 109), meaning—from my point of view—that intellectual freedom is indispensable to democratic citizenship.

Yet from my experience both working as a child care administrator, and observing early childhood practice in U.S. preschool programs, it seemed that traditional school curricula and pedagogy were often at odds with preparing students to be active members in a democratic society. In addition, there seemed to be a major disconnect between the early childhood theories and research related to democratic pedagogy that I learned about in my college's teacher education program, and much of what is actually taking place in U.S. preschool classrooms. Particularly after visiting and observing firsthand the preschools of Reggio Emilia, I became even more aware of the glaring disparities between the possibilities of "what is" and "what could actually be" happening in child care centers in the United States. So I continued to wonder what the possibilities and constraints were for creating a school culture that reflects and promotes democratic principles in the United States, and ultimately set out to better understand this issue as a researcher. This case study serves as an important starting point of my journey to a better understanding of the possibilities and challenges that arise in democratic preschool communities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this case study sheds light on some of the possibilities and challenges that preschool communities have in becoming democratic spaces. My hope is that this research can serve as a provocation to expand the early childhood education discourse in ways that will lead ultimately to the creation of more supportive, caring, equitable, and democratic preschools for children, teachers and families. Ideally, by highlighting concrete examples of democratic practice in a rich narrative form, committed teachers and administrators can begin to consider preschool education from a democratic perspective and use this research to critique, reflect and adjust their own practices.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this chapter is to situate the present study in the available literature and research related to democracy in early childhood education. In the first section of this chapter, I highlight some of the major historical figures and events that have shaped current thinking and practice, as reflected in the literature. Second, I situate my case study in the current early childhood educational context. The third section reviews the literature on barriers in creating democratic preschool environments. The final section of this chapter outlines the structural, pedagogical, and curricular qualities of schools that function as democratic spaces, highlighting some of the theoretical literature and empirical research in these areas.

Democratic Principles in Early Childhood Education: Historical Precedents

In the following section, I briefly review the literature on significant historical figures and events that have shaped (both negatively and positively) our current early childhood education system, and in particular its relation to democratic values and practices.

Origins in Ancient Greece – Plato. Democratic principles and their relation to early childhood education have historical precedents as far back as Ancient Greece and particularly in the writings of Plato (427 B.C.-347 B.C.). At that time, Athenians respected children, valued their play, and taught them primarily through dialogue, stories and poetry (Wolfe, 2002). These values appear prominently in Plato's writings. It is

important to note, however, that this democratic education was only afforded to Athenian citizens, which left out the majority of children, including among others, the children of slaves (see below for further discussion).

As discussed in the literature (Plato, trans.1983 & Wolfe, 2002), many of Plato's beliefs formed a foundation for democratic education. For instance, Plato believed (Plato, trans.1983 & Wolfe, 2002) children's lessons should never be taught through compulsion but rather through play; the goal for education should be to create good citizens for a good state [see below for meaning of "good citizen"]; women as well as men should be educated and women should actively participate in the governance of society; education must start early to be effective; balanced education should not focus solely on intellectual and philosophical pursuits, but it should include physical activities, mathematics, as well as the aesthetic and expressive arts; education is the primary tool for improving society and building citizenship for a prospering republic; and education should not be a private enterprise. All of these principles are congruent with this study's *working* definition of democratic educational practices (see the chart in Appendix A, P1, P2, S1 & S2). Perhaps more than any other contribution to democracy in early childhood education is Plato's fundamental belief that the primary purpose of education is to create productive citizens for the commonwealth.

In *The Republic* (trans. 1983), Plato highlighted the educational system he envisioned and put forth his theory that truth lies outside of the subject and that everyone has the capacity to learn through education. He explained that education "does not consist in putting knowledge into the soul, but in turning the eyes of the soul toward the right objects, and the young must be taught in play, for no free man learns anything

worthwhile under compulsion" (Plato, p. 167). This quote underscores Plato's belief that children learn through play, dialogue, and meaningful experiences rather than under compulsory adult instruction. Clearly, these are necessary practices for a democratic preschool environment (see Appendix A, P1).

Instead of seeing teaching as instruction from without, Plato saw "true education as the process of drawing out what is latent in the learner" (Wolfe, 2002, p. 11). In other words, children aren't born as blank slates, but are born with natural learning predispositions. As discussed below (in the section titled, *Strong Image of Children*, p. 86) and supported by empirical research (e.g., Brophy, 1995), the belief that all children are born with powerful capabilities and resources for learning is an important quality in creating a democratic school environment.

Based on this philosophy, Plato believed that observing children was critical in seeing what they "are naturally fitted for" (Plato, trans. 1983, p. 107) and in building upon those capabilities. Again, this philosophy portends current best practices in early childhood education, as well as the important democratic concept that observations are necessary for ongoing and evolving curriculum and program development. Only through careful observation can children's interests and capabilities effectively inform curriculum design, thus avoiding an authoritarian, deficit model of curriculum.

Although Plato's philosophy of education resonates with many democratic practices and principles, some of his ideas conflict with contemporary perspectives on democratic education (Cowen, 2000; Parker, 1994; Purshouse, 2006). Plato completely excluded non-Athenian citizens (primarily slaves) from education (nearly two-thirds of the population) and envisioned differentiated roles for each citizen based on their "natural

capacities and dispositions" (Wolfe, p.12), creating an educational class system.[7] It should be emphasized that while Plato grew up during the height of Athenian democracy, in adulthood he experienced both war and the demise of democracy, perhaps coloring his final viewpoint on the democratic project. As Cowen (2000) explains:

> Plato was so disappointed with the Athenian experience of 'democracy' that (in his Republic) he abandoned hope for the possibilities and potential of changing most people. He proposed a scheme for the differential distribution of education and, one notes, lifelong political and economic roles which in his view would produce a just society. (p. 135)

This contradicts current perspectives on democracy in early childhood education where equal access and opportunity to education are considered a child's right as a U.S. citizen.

There are two ways in which a differentiated or meritocratic system is problematic and incongruent with democratic principles. First, such a system rewards certain abilities or behaviors, often those most valued by dominant groups in society, over nontraditional skills and abilities that may also contribute to society. Second, merit and tracking systems do not necessarily consider the social and historical contexts that strongly influence children's performances, but rather assume a certain "natural ability." In terms of democratic education, these systems do not allow children who may come from families that are nontraditional or from conditions with limited economic resources equal opportunity to reach their true potential.

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[7] Plato also believed that the state's role in education should include taking away children from their parents, with an assumption that some parents would not be good guardians of future citizens.

In spite of Plato's affirmation of children's potential for learning, his ultimate lack of faith in individuals' abilities to make rational judgments in the way they conduct their lives shaped much of his philosophy (Purshouse, 2006). Plato believed that "each individual should promote the stability of the state as the ultimate criterion for personal morality" and "did not believe much in individual liberty" (Purshouse, p. 140). Therefore, his concept of a *good citizen* meant both an obedient individual who submits to the rules of his/her guardians, and an individual who develops the skills with which he was "naturally fitted" (Plato, trans.1983, p. 208) to best support the needs of the state. In Plato's ideal republic, "Knowing one's place' in society, and indeed willingly accepting it, are praised as hallmarks of the *good citizen*" (Purshouse, p. 140). Some critics such as Karl Popper argue that Plato's "good citizen" puts the interests of the state over the interests of the individual, potentially leading to totalitarianism or fascism (Purshouse, p. 141).

Early European influences and ideas of the Enlightenment. Following Plato, the literature does not appear to reflect major new developments in early childhood education, especially in relation to democracy, through the long Roman period or the Middle Ages (Krogh & Slentz, 2001). The next influential figure for democratic practices in early childhood education appears during the 17th century with John Amos Comenius.

John Amos Comenius **(1592-1671).** At a time when European schooling focused on memorization, narrow book-learning and harsh discipline, Moravian-Czech scholar John Amos Comenius advocated for a different kind of education for children. Comenius's life was filled with religious and political persecution which shaped much of

his later thinking and work towards social reform. His ideas were developed with the hopes of finding a universal method of education to bring peace, allay humankind's suffering, and unite all people and religions together through their shared appreciation of God. Referring to the European schools as "slaughterhouses of minds," Comenius believed a "revolution in teaching methods was essential to allow learning to become rapid, pleasant and thorough" (Wolfe, 2002, p. 20). Comenius's beliefs highlight the critical relationship between democracy and early childhood education.

After careful observations, Comenius developed many powerful and forward-looking beliefs about children and teaching practices that were congruent with principles necessary in creating a democratic school culture. For example, he believed that children are intrinsically motivated to learn, writing that "a bird learns to fly, a fish to swim, and a beast to run without compulsion" (Comenius, as cited in Wolfe, 2002, p. 17). Similar to Plato, he believed that "children will learn if taught only what they desire to know" (Comenius, as cited in Association of Childhood Education [A.C.E.], 1937, p. 3). Comenius's ideas, clearly radical for his time, also reflected current ideas about democratic practices in early childhood education as discussed in my working definition (see Appendix A, sections C2, P1, P3, P5). First, a democratic curriculum gives priority to children's emerging interests. Second, democratic educational approaches respect and support the well-being and happiness of all children and allow them to participate in decision-making processes related to curriculum content. Finally, compulsory education based on extrinsic motivators is antithetical to a democratic approach.

Another important democratic quality found in Comenius's work is his *strong image of the child.* He believed that children were born with certain capabilities and

potential. Comenius wrote, "Nature has implanted the seeds of learning, virtue, piety. To bring these seeds to maturity is the object of education" (Comenius, as cited in A.C.E., 1937, p. 3). The competing view that children are empty vessels to be filled with instructional content was not part of his thinking.

At a time when Latin was the primary language used in schools, Comenius believed children should be taught in their native language and have more access to their European culture. He wrote that language was necessary for communication and that grammar was only a tool to facilitate this communication. Therefore, learning should not include just grammar, but should focus on real objects and events (Wolfe, 2002). In a democratic, preschool culture, providing children opportunities to communicate, and actively participate in problem-solving and real-life community issues is critical.

Comenius created the first illustrated reading book on record, *Orbus Pictus* [meaning "Visible World in Pictures"], and wrote the *School of Infancy* (1630) and *The Great Didactic* (1638), in which he laid out the principles and methods of his approach. In spite of living through many wars and being exiled to many countries during his lifetime, Comenius steadfastly believed that the liberation of human society would come through education (Wolfe, 2002).

Comenius believed that all social classes and sexes should have access to quality education, clearly a tenet of democracy (see Appendix A, S1). This radical idea must have contrasted harshly with mainstream European society, and it remains a critical hurdle for the United States today, as we struggle to provide quality early childhood education to all children.

Enlightenment thinkers. Many of our current U.S. principles reflect ideas which developed during the Enlightenment and which continue to shape current U.S. early childhood education. The construction of childhood as separate and distinct from adulthood (Cannella, 1997), the concept of Western individualism (Cannella, 1997; Featherstone, 2003; MacNaughton, 2003), and the primacy of reason and rationality as the purveyors of objective truth (Canella, 1997; Descartes, 1937/1993; MacNaughton, 2003) all stem from the Enlightenment period. According to MacNaughton (2003):

> Enlightenment thinkers believed that reason is the key to human progress and reason was at the heart of new Enlightenment ways to understand the world that we now know as science. In reason lay the promise of finding true happiness, freedom, and equality…(p.16)

As the influential Enlightenment thinker Immanuel Kant explains further in *What is the Enlightenment?* (1784/1995):

> Enlightenment is man's release from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is man's inability to make use of his understanding without direction from another. Self-incurred is the tutelage when its cause lies not in lack of reason but in lack of resolution and courage to use it without direction from another. Spere aude! [which means "Dare to know!"] Have courage to use your own reason! That is the motto of enlightenment. (p. 1)

More than an end unto itself, Enlightenment thinkers valued "reason as the means to create a better world" and "scientific ways to explain, predict and thus control the world through universal truths about how it works" (MacNaughton, 2003, p. 72), thereby contributing to social progress.

In the context of the history of early childhood education, MacNaughton (2004, p. 16) explains, "The intellectual ferment of the Enlightenment included a search for the conditions under which reason could be pursued, with the result that the child became a point of focus and interest." Two influential Enlightenment thinkers who specifically addressed the topic of early childhood education were John Locke (1632-1704) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). John Locke had a significant impact on child-rearing practices during the enlightenment. He wrote a philosophical treatise on education titled, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). According to the literature (Beatty, 1995), Locke believed that young children should not be educated outside of the home during a period when many children of wealthy parents were apprenticed out to other families. He believed parents should 1) teach by example; 2) allow children time to play; 3) help develop children's internal guilt as a form of discipline (as opposed to submission to authoritarian rule of the Church as a form of discipline that was more customary at that time); 4) reason with their children when possible; 5) trust their own "reason" to guide their parenting decisions; and 6) refrain from using physical punishment. As Beatty (1995) explains further:

> Though Locke's vision of childhood was more cerebral, austere, guilt-ridden, and adult-oriented than that of the romantics who were to follow, his ideas nevertheless did much to counter Calvinist views of infant depravity and contributed to the growth of freer, more playful, and more experimental attitudes toward education and child rearing. (p. 7)

As discussed in *Thoughts on Education* (1803/1900), Kant also moved away from earlier depictions of children as sinful and unworthy recipients of education for liberty and social progress. He wrote:

> First, we must allow the child from his earliest childhood perfect liberty in every respect (except on those occasions when he might hurt himself—as, for instance, when he clutches at a knife), provided that in acting so he does not interfere with the liberty of others…Secondly, he must be shown that he can only attain his own ends by allowing others to attain theirs… Thirdly, we must prove to him that restraint is only laid upon him [so] that he may learn in time to use his liberty aright, and that his mind is being cultivated so that one day he may be free; that is, independent of the help of others. (p. 28)

In other words, Kant's (1803/1900) goal of education is to help children develop their natural "tendencies" (p. 11) towards liberty and goodness, which will result in social progress.

Allowing children opportunities to make decisions, participate in debate, use their own reason, and act independently are historical precedents from the Enlightenment that continue to be valued in early childhood discourse today and are each necessary in building democratic citizens. Many Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke and Kant believed that both individualism and concern for the common good are necessary in maintaining social progress.

The ideas of the Enlightenment became popular in the United States during the 18th century. As Schafer (1997) notes, the American Revolution served as a "laboratory for the application and further refinement of the enlightenment ideas" (p. 5). He explains:

In the great Enlightenment laboratory, the United States, optimism about both democracy and education reigned, at least for a time. The young Jefferson voiced his legendary confidence in the ability of a free people to acquire the knowledge and expertise to govern themselves in a constitutional representative democracy. (p. 6)

Contemporary philosophers (e.g., Foucault, 1978, 1984; MacNaughton, 2003) have challenged some of the ideas of the Enlightenment. For example, the Enlightenment thinkers believed that the use of reason would ultimately bring happiness, freedom, and equality. But contemporary critics of the Enlightenment argue that "reason has brought us not a better world but one in which war, poverty, dislocation, and environmental degradation have grown" (MacNaughton, 2003, p. 73). Furthermore, "science has given us a particular form of truth that has often been used to benefit dominant groups in societies (see Bertens, 1995; Parker 1997)" (p. 73). In other words, while enlightenment thinkers strive for happiness, freedom, and equality as their core values, values that are congruent with democratic values, the contemporary critics point to the fallacy of proposing reason and rationality as exclusive means to democratic ends. As Parker (1994) notes, democracy should be seen as a living creed or "path" (p. 13) subject to the development of new understandings and varied cultural contexts--not merely as a static, universal goal to be attained.

While Kant's views on children were emancipatory in the sense of viewing children's potential for goodness, by contemporary standards he still seems to have a somewhat "deficit model" of young children. In *Thoughts on Education*, Kant (1803/1900) explains:

In the first period of childhood the child must learn submission and positive

obedience. In the next stage he should be allowed to think for himself, and to

enjoy a certain amount of freedom, although still obliged to follow certain rules.

In the first period there is a mechanical, in the second a moral constraint. (p. 26)

Perhaps Kant, as radical as he was for his time, was also limited by his historical and

social context in his understandings of young children's potential.

Romanticism and later European influences. Influenced by and reacting to

Enlightenment ideas, new philosophers brought the emergence of Romanticism during

the late 18th and early 19th centuries. As Cannella (1997, p. 24) puts it, "Accepting man

as an irrational animal, Romanticism emphasized individuality, especially through self-

expression, and accepted individual expression without the necessity of following a

'rational' form." Many of these European, Romantic educators have also shaped U.S.

early childhood practices and their relation to democracy.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (**1712-1827**). One of the earliest and most influential

thinkers and writers of this period was Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He promoted a "natural

education" (Rousseau, 1896/2003), where teachers help children make direct connections

with their environment rather than having to learn abstract ideas in isolation without

relevance to their previous experiences. He believed that in teaching children, it is

essential to give them purposeful activities that have significance to their life. A similar

philosophy of the necessity for a hands-on, relevant curriculum for children continued to

be emphasized by later progressive educators who had strong democratic aspirations.

According to Featherstone (2003):

Rousseau's qualified dissent from the psychology of John Locke and Descartes

introduces an important theme: It is the effort to rescue Western man from the

nihilistic consequences of one version of modernity, the dualities imposed by 17th

century science, which broke the world into rival realms of spirit and matter and

suggested that the basic underlying reality was matter. Rousseau borrows

Locke's psychology, but he tries to reintegrate mind and body, heart and mind, to

achieve a unified, unalienated consciousness. (p. 10)

Rousseau's more holistic view of the child moves closer to the democratic concept of

respecting and supporting children's rights to intellectual freedom, emotional expression,

and physical explorations, as referenced in my working definition of democratic

educational practices (see Appendix A, P1).

However, contrary to an education for citizenship, Rousseau believed that

children were born good, but needed to be protected from a corrupt society. According to

Wolfe (2002, p. 42): "Like Plato, Rousseau felt the child needed a good political state in

order to develop. But if the state was corrupt, then the child needed to be shielded from

the environment…until he or she developed independence, judgment and understanding."

Engagement with, not protection from the sociopolitical life of the community, is an

essential part of democratic educational practice.

Rousseau's beliefs that children are born good and that education should be about

supporting children's capabilities have had a strong impact on our cultural zeitgeist.

However, in my view, some of his writings bring forth a more subtle, deficit model of

children, as illustrated in the following passage from *Émile* (Rousseau, as cited in

Skinner, 2002):

Let [the child] believe that he is always in control, [but] it is always you [the teacher] who really controls. There is no subjugation so perfect as that which keeps the appearance of freedom, for in that way one captures volition itself. The poor baby, knowing nothing, able to do nothing, having learned nothing, is he not at your mercy? Can you not arrange everything in the world which surrounds him? Can you not influence him as you wish? His work, his play, his pleasures, his pains, are not all these in your hands and without his knowing? Doubtless he ought to do only what he wants; but he ought to want to do only what you want him to do; he ought not to take a step which you have not foreseen; he ought not to open his mouth without your knowing what he will say. (p. 40)

Rousseau starts this passage espousing a belief akin to Locke's belief that children are born as blank slates. Then he seems to advocate giving children a false sense of freedom, not because he trusts them to make good decisions in a supportive environment but rather to more easily control their behavior for his own purposes. Clearly, Rousseau's position diverges from Plato's much stronger image of the child. Rousseau's pedagogy does not seem to create democratic citizens so much as easily controlled and manipulated subjects. Moreover, Rousseau's view that girls merited a less meaningful educational experience directly contradicts structural democratic educational practices (see Appendix A, S1).

Johann Pestalozzi **(1746-1827).** Pestalozzi, an avid follower of Rousseau, took his ideas and philosophies and started trying to put them into actual practice. Green (1905) provides a comprehensive overview of Pestalozzi's life and philosophies in his book titled, *Pestalozzi's Ideas on Education*. Two seminal works written by Pestalozzi include *Leonard and Gertrude* (1977) and *The Education of Man: Aphorisms* (1951).

One major contribution that Pestalozzi brought to early childhood education is his more holistic concept of the child. As he puts it: "Only that which affects man as an indissoluble unit is educative…it must reach his hand and his heart as well as his head" (Pestalozzi, as cited in Wolfe, 2002, p. 62). Pestalozzi explains further, "I'm convinced that when a child's heart has been touched, the consequences will be great for his development and entire moral character" (Pestalozzi, as cited in A.C.E., 1937, p. 4). He also believed that children's interests would be the motivation for learning true knowledge and not rewards or punishments. Pestalozzi (as cited in Green, 1905) explains,

> [The] feeling of power is for every young child a greater reward and a greater joy than any of those rewards and decorations which men devise for his encouragement in learning. Yet in the schools no use is made of it; we find instead the most pitiable and unnatural substitutes employed. At best they only make the child tolerate that which their teachers wish to cram into them. (p. 83)

Another of Pestalozzi's contributions was his belief that children should have direct contact with objects and manipulatives to learn best and then gradually move to more abstract ideas or concepts (Green, 1905; Wolfe, 2002). In terms of democratic practice, an emphasis upon hands-on experience supports the child's right to freely explore and engage his or her physical environment (see Appendix A, P1).

According to Wolfe (2002), Pestalozzi's "overriding aim of education was to restore human dignity and a sense of individual worth to people, particularly children in poverty" (p. 68). In light of the disparities in the quality and access to quality of early

childhood education in present times, Pestalozzi's social justice orientation fits well into democratic educational practice (see Appendix A, S1).

Friedrich Wilhelm August Froebel (1782-1852). Drawing inspiration from his observations of Pestalozzi's school at Yverdon, Friedrich Froebel founded the first "kindergarten" [meaning children's garden]. He selected the word "kindergarten" because it represents a place that supports the nurturing of children's capacities, akin to nurturing plants in a garden. Froebel wanted to differentiate his approach from the traditional role of a "school," which aimed merely to deposit knowledge into children (as opposed to supporting their natural capacity to think and learn for themselves). Froebel wrote several influential essays and books on his philosophies and methods of education including *The Education of Man* (1826) and *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (trans. 1909).

Froebel wanted to build on Pestalozzi's ideas, but to focus more on the concepts of unity and interdependence within a more structured, intentional environment. In *Pedagogics of the Kindergarten* (trans. 1909), Froebel describes this "method of development and nurture [as] a method which descends from the universal to the particular, from the whole to the part, from unity to diversity" (p. 41). Consequently, he developed specific teaching methods with "gifts" and "occupations" for the children to help develop their awareness that all forms of life/objects are interconnected—that there is diversity within unity and unity within diversity. In my working definition of democratic practice, the curriculum aims to reflect a diversity of perspectives, and Froebel, at least partially, advocated that goal (see Appendix A, C1).

In contrast to the Enlightenment philosophers, Froebel along with other Romantic thinkers has a more holistic view of learning. Froebel notes that children's feelings and emotions cannot be separated from their ability to think and reason. Rather they are all interconnected and necessary for children's optimal development. Froebel (trans. 1909) explains:

> The starting point of human development, and thus of the child's development, is the heart and emotions; but the training to action and to thought, the corporeal and spiritual, goes on constantly and inseparably by the side of it; and thought must form itself into action, and action resolve and clear itself in thought; but both have their roots in the emotional nature. (p. 42)

Although influenced by Rousseau in many ways, Froebel didn't agree that children should be isolated from a corrupt society (Wolfe, 2002), but rather should experience the outside world. Froebel's divergence from Rousseau may stem from his extensive observations of children and ultimately his stronger faith in their capabilities.

Froebelian Kindergartens were established in the U.S. in the second half of the nineteenth century. Many of Froebel's methods and ideas serve as precedents to the values and practices in a democratic preschool environment. Some examples of his ideas and practices that are congruent with democratic education are (Froebel, trans. 1909; Wolfe, 2002): parent participation is a necessary part of children's education and the community of the school; students should participate in the governance of the school; children should not be asked to do anything the adults themselves would not do; adults should respect children's individuality; teachers should support projects that develop children's understanding of unity and interconnectedness (e.g., common garden and

circletime); adults should follow the spontaneous interests of children in curriculum development; and play is a critical part of the curriculum. In many of these innovations, Froebel's principles on early education reflect the working definition of democratic educational practice (see Appendix A, C1, C2, C3, P1, P2, P4, P5, S2).

   Robert Owen **(1771-1858).** In 1816 Robert Owen, the owner of a cotton mill in New Lanark, Scotland, opened The Institution for the Formation of Character, which provided child care and education for the children of his employees. Owen was the first employer to create workplace child care and education for his employees (Paciorek & Munro, 1996; Wolfe, 2002). He also allowed children in the community whose parents were unable to afford to pay for their education, to come to the school for free. He emphasized 1) educating the whole child, 2) using NO punishments or rewards, 3) including music and dance as an integral part of the program, and 4) educating girls as well as boys (Packard, 1866; Wolfe, 2002).

   In his autobiography, Owen (1858) writes:

   the constitution of every infant is capable of being formed or matured into a very inferior or a very superior being according to the qualities of external circumstances allowed to influence that constitution from birth. To a great extent the character is made or unmade or marred before children enter the usual schoolroom. (as cited in Wolfe, 2002, p. 145)

This quote illustrates his strong belief in starting education at a young age and his belief in the critical influence of environmental factors on children's character formation.

   As a social reformer, Robert Owen had a deeply-held conviction that education, wealth, and political power should be shared equitably among *all* members of a

community. In 1826 his revolutionary ideas came to the United States, where he

acquired a large expanse of land in Indiana and attempted to create a utopian society. As

part of this new society, Owen opened the first industrial child-care facility. His high-

quality program, open to children of all ages and socioeconomic backgrounds, serves as

an important precedent for structural educational democracy (see Appendix A, S1, S2).

Maria Montessori (1870-1952). Maria Montessori, an Italian doctor and

educator, developed the Montessori Method of education, which became widely practiced

in Italy, Europe and eventually the U.S. She initially developed these educational

methods and materials while working in a psychiatric clinic in Rome with children who

were labeled "mentally deficient" and "insane" (Montessori, 1912/2007). After careful

observations and studies, Montessori (1912/2007) came to believe that "mental

deficiency presented chiefly a pedagogical, rather than mainly a medical, problem" (p.

31). Consequently, in an experimental, demonstration school for children with special

needs, Montessori tried out her ideas, providing children with a sensory-rich

environment, lots of hands-on, experiential learning, and freedom to make choices in the

selection and use of learning materials (Peters, 2008). Not only did children successfully

learn to read and write but "within two years, the children were able to pass Italy's

standardized public school tests. More importantly, Montessori's innovative practices

had elicited positive learning behaviors from children previously left behind by society"

(American Montessori Society [AMA], "The History of the Montessori Movement"

section, para. 1). With the success of this program and her continued careful observations

of children, she came to believe that her methods would work with "normal" children as

well. In 1907 she set up a child-care program, Casa dei Bambini [meaning Children's

House], a preschool for children who lived in the tenements in an impoverished area of San Lorenza, Italy (Montessori, 1912/2007; Peters, 2008).

Many current democratic practices in early childhood education today have precedents in Montessori's philosophies and teaching methods. For example, she believed that poor children have the same right to care and education as rich children. She also believed children should receive free lunches if they came to school hungry, and at Casa dei Bambini she provided free medical care for children who couldn't afford this service (Wolfe, 2002).

Casa dei Bambini was a communally-owned program with intentional involvement of families in the program. Portending the "involvement of all stakeholders" component of this study's working definition of democratic practice (see Appendix A, S2), Montessori wrote "The idea of collective ownership of the school is new and very beautiful and profoundly educational" (1912/2007, p. 63). She also believed that children have rights to participate in their education and wrote, "What cowardliness to recognize the adult's rights and not those of the child! Shall we give justice only to those who can defend and protect themselves and in all else remain barbarians?" (Montessori, 1915, p. 19). This shared power and collective involvement in early childhood education of many stakeholders (parents, teachers, and children) is a democratic practice that is achieved in very few schools today.

Another lasting precedent Montessori brought to democratic early childhood education was her work towards peace education. In fact, she received three nominations for the Nobel Peace Prize for her efforts. She wrote, "Avoiding war is the work of politics, establishing peace is the work of education" (Montessori, as cited in Duckworth,

2008, p. 1). This stood as one of her fundamental beliefs. As noted in *Introduction to Peace Education* (Montessori Connections, 1998-2004):

> Montessori was convinced that peace, as a state of being, not just absence of hostility and war, is based on the peaceful development and unfoldment of children's innate potential. Individuals who have fulfilled their potential are self-actualized contributors to life, who have found their purpose in life, have self respect and consequent respect and appreciation of others contributions. They are peaceable. They appreciate and collaborate not only with their fellow humans but with all living creatures and the planet on which we live. (para. 4)

Montessori's peace education is an excellent precedent for making social justice and peace-making a part of the curriculum content in a democratically functioning school environment (see Appendix A, C4).

Although she strongly advocated for respecting children and giving children freedom, some of her rigid methods counter democratic ideals. For example, most of her materials have only one correct way to be used, which limits children's development of creativity, critical thinking, and divergent thinking skills. In addition, Montessori teachers, referred to as directresses, were essentially given a scripted approach to their lessons and interactions with children. Order and control were central aspects of the approach while imaginative play was de-emphasized (Montessori, 1914/1965).

U.S. Early Childhood Education beginnings. Three important types of early childhood education emerged in the U.S. during the late 1800s and early 1900s: kindergartens, day nurseries, and nursery schools (Goffin, 1994). Goffin provides a concise overview of the development of day cares, nurseries, and kindergartens in

Curriculum Models and Early Childhood Education: Appraising the Relationship. Beatty (1995) provides a more comprehensive review of these historical developments in her work titled, *Preschool Education in America: The Culture of Young Children from the Colonial Era to the Present*.

Day nurseries arose in the 1800s for working, low-income mothers and served primarily as custodial care. They were typically full-day programs, primarily set up in charity organizations to support immigrant families. In 1863 the first federally sponsored day nursery for mothers working in the Civil War was opened.

Nursery schools, often associated with universities, started to form primarily in the 1920s for the children of middle and upper class parents and emphasized the growing study of child development and psychology. These nursery schools, experimental in nature, were most often part-time programs "designed primarily to provide child-rearing advice and social-emotional enrichment to a child's home life" (Goffin, 1994, p. 17).

The *kindergarten* movement started to spread in the 1860s after Elizabeth Peabody and other educators translated the Froebelian methods from Germany and brought them to the United States. Kindergartens were seen primarily as helping to prepare children for formal schooling. As written in an 1870 U.S. Commissioner of Education Biennial Report:

> But to no country is it (the kindergarten) adapted so entirely as to America, where there is no hindrance of aristocratic institution, nor mountain of ancient custom, to interfere with a method which regards every human being as a subject of education, intellectual and moral as well as physical from the moment of birth, and as heir of universal nature in co-sovereignty with all other men, endowed by

their Creator with equal rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. (as

cited in A.C.E., 1937, p. 7)

The disparate emergence of so many different types of early childhood care and

education programs is perhaps part of the reason there is still no singular purpose,

overarching mission, or universal system of early childhood education. However, as

Beatty (1995) posits:

Rather than allowing this lack of consensus to hold up provision of public

preschool education, as arguably it may have done, we should view these

disagreements as healthy, central to our traditions of individualism and

democracy. How different families want their young children educated relates

directly to critical issues of privacy, freedom, community, and the role of the

state. Having a system that permits parents to choose the kind of preschool

education their children receive is crucial, even though it risks being a nonsystem,

as now. (p. 204)

On one hand, the diverse selection of early childhood programs allows families to

choose the types of settings that best fit their individual needs--an essential part of a

democracy. On the other hand, this type of "nonsystem" can be problematic in relation to

democratic values for several reasons. First, providing different options of child care

does not necessarily allow for true freedom of choice for families, particularly for the

minority and/or disadvantaged groups in society. For example, if a family in Atlanta,

Georgia, with limited financial resources is looking for child care, there may be several

neighborhood schools in which they could enroll their child, yet, perhaps none of them

are affordable, or on their bus route, or supportive of their non-native language, or

supportive of their religious beliefs. Arguably, this situation does not allow for a true

choice and freedom for families and children to select the optimal preschool learning

environment.

Secondly, as Beatty (1995, p. 204) suggests, "the history of preschool educators'

concerns about quality and standards and recent research on the provision of preschool

education suggest that choice models can be very problematic and must be closely

monitored." In other words, allowing parents freedom to choose from different types of

preschools is not sufficient in creating a democratic system when too many shortcomings

in quality pervade the marketplace for early childhood education. In low quality settings,

the protection of children's democratic rights as citizens (see Appendix A, P1) can hardly

be assured.

Finally, early childhood care's historical legacy of a choice-based, decentralized

system lacks any governing commitment to creating early childhood settings as

democratic spaces. Denying children's right to practice active citizenship may be

problematic in sustaining a democratic society.

Progressive era legacies. More than at any other time, the early decades of the

twentieth century (referred to as the Progressive Era) brought together educators whose

major aims centered on connecting educational practices with democratic goals,

experimenting with new models of early childhood education, and ultimately, working

towards improving societal conditions for all children and families (Dewey, 1916/2007;

1938/1997; Hill, 1926/1987; Kohn, 2008; Nager & Shapiro, 2000; Smith, 2000). In

Revisiting a Progressive Pedagogy, Nager and Shapiro (2000) explain:

Although there were many strands to the Progressive movement, one commonly

held and fundamental belief was the deeply political nature of education, through

which people could create a better world and a truly democratic society (for a

fuller discussion see, for example, Beatty, 1995; Cremin, 1961, 1988; Graham,

1967). (p. 12)

There are many important democratic values that were shaped by the ideas of

progressive educators. In the article titled, *Education Progressive* (2008), Alfie Kohn

provides a useful outline of these core ideas: *Community* -- learning takes place in a

caring community where "interdependence is as important as independence" (p. 1);

Attending to the whole child -- intellectual growth is not "limited to verbal and

mathematical proficiencies" (p. 1); *Collaboration* -- teachers use a model of "working

with" children rather than "doing to" which includes "less focus on behaviors than on

underlying motives, values, and reasons" (p. 1); *Social justice* -- teachers provide

opportunities that support children's "commitment to diversity and to improving the lives

of others" (p. 2); *Intrinsic motivation* -- progressive educators promote children's "long-

term dispositions to learning rather than just improving short-term skills" (p. 2); *Deep*

Understanding -- teachers provide a purpose and context for skills and facts through

projects, problems and questions; *Active learning* -- children help develop curriculum,

formulate questions, seek answers, and evaluate how successful they've been; *Taking*

kids seriously -- "progressive educators take their cue from the children—and are

particularly attentive to differences among them…Each student is unique, so a single set

of policies, expectations, or assignments would be as counterproductive as it was

disrespectful" (p. 2). These precedents of the Progressive Era are all congruent with

contemporary democratic early childhood practices (see Appendix A, P1, P2, P3, C1, C2, C3, C4).

Many of these progressive education principles and practices were not new constructs, but originally were put forth by past educators (as discussed in the previous sections of this chapter). However, the progressive educators were the first to connect comprehensively the ongoing development of educational practices, values, and principles of schools with the overall foundational aim of creating a "better world and truly democratic society" (Nager & Shapiro, 2000).

Three important progressive educators who helped to bring democratic values into mainstream early childhood practice were John Dewey (1859-1952), Patty Smith Hill (1868-1946), and Lucy Sprague Mitchell (1878-1967).[8]

***John Dewey* (1859-1952).** As one of the fathers of progressive education, John Dewey wrote many books and essays outlining his beliefs on schooling and its role in society. Along with the progressive ideas mentioned in Kohn's (2008) outline, Dewey's thinking specifically related to democracy was quite revolutionary at that time and remains an important precedent for early childhood educators today. In Dewey's essay, *Creative Democracy—The Task Before Us* (1939, p. 229), he refers to democracy as "a way of life controlled by a working faith in the possibilities of human nature." As Hickman and Alexander (1998, p. 4) note, this requires "faith in the capacities of each individual, and a faith in education as a means of liberating those capacities." Expanding on this concept, Dewey (1939) argued that in a "creative democracy," both ends and

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[8] It should also be noted that Dewey, Mitchell, and Hill were collaborators in the progressive education movement. In fact, Mitchell and Hill were both strongly influenced by Dewey's progressive theories and tried to actualize his ideas in their early childhood settings.

means must be democratic in character. In other words, a director who is authoritarian in her means to a greater democratic preschool environment would be a contradiction in terms.

In *Democracy and Education* (1916/2007)*,* Dewey describes his ideal form of democracy:

> A democracy is more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience. The extension in space of the number of individuals who participate in an interest so that each has to refer his own action to that of others, and to consider the action of others to give point and direction to his own, is equivalent to the breaking down of those barriers of class, race, and national territory which kept men from perceiving the full import of their activity. (p. 66)

He believed schools, as well as other social groups, should be spaces for democracy to be practiced.

Dewey cautioned that "any education given by a group tends to socialize its members, but the quality and value of socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group" (Dewey, 1916/2007, p. 63). He said that the following two questions should be used to measure the worth of any given form of social life, "How numerous and varied are the interests which are consciously shared? How full and free is the interplay with other forms of association?" (p. 63). To further elaborate,

> any group, therefore, must refer its own actions to the actions of other groups, and the existence of these groups as well as the interplay among them are encouraged by the mores and institutions consciously shared by the *broader* public—the

bigger public, the *commonwealth* that contains these little publics. In this way, common interests and multiple reference points are joined and nurtured. (Parker, 1996, p. 5)

As applied to early childhood education, this emphasizes the importance of creating preschool communities that allow for various viewpoints and the building of relationships within the larger school culture and greater community.

Patty Smith Hill (**1868-1946**). Although not as well-known as some of the other progressive educators, *Patty Smith Hill* also played a pivotal role in the formation of early childhood programs for young children. Unlike Dewey, Hill did not publish any major works on her beliefs and theories (Wolfe, 2002). However, she did write many speeches, introductions to curriculum guides, journal articles, and essays that were published in various forms and continue to have relevance to current progressive, early childhood education. For example, Hill's article titled *The Function of Kindergarten*, originally published in 1926, was reprinted in the *Young Children* journal in 1987 and still seems relevant today. In chapter nine of *Dauntless Women in Childhood Education*, Snyder (1972) provides a useful biography of Hill's life in relation to her educational work.

After teaching at a school in Louisville, Kentucky, Hill became a professor at Teacher's College, Columbia, where she advocated for "democratic and creative methods" (Wolfe, p. 273) of teaching. She brought several important contributions to democracy in early childhood education. First, she believed children are capable of being self-governing and incorporated that concept into her program, allowing children much freedom of movement, expression, and initiative. This was quite radical for the time, and her opponents argued that it would lead to chaotic environments. Second, she pushed her

student educators not to just rigidly follow a curriculum or "method," but rather to observe children closely and then develop and refine curricula based on these observations and critiques of work. This was at a time when it was not unknown for many educators to blindly follow Froebelian or Montessori methods, rather than work from an understanding of the theories or purposes behind those methods. Finally, in the 1920s, with the proliferation of many types of nurseries for young children, the lack of unity in curriculum and standards, and the bulk of training occurring in Europe, Hill set out to create a professional organization in the U.S. that would support the nursery school movement. Consequently, she formed a committee and helped establish the National Association of Nursery Education (later renamed today's National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC]). Creating a network of early childhood educators has been crucial in sharing new ideas and practices and advocating for the rights of children. Patty Smith Hill's legacy continues to influence democratic early childhood education.

Lucy Sprague Mitchell (**1878-1967**). In accordance with the other Progressive educators, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell* worked tirelessly to improve education and society as a whole. Antler's (1987) biography titled, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: The Making of a Modern Woman*, provides a thorough overview of her life's work. For a more concise review on Mitchell, see Greenburg's (1987) article titled, *Lucy Sprague Mitchell: A Major Missing Link Between Early Childhood Education in the 1980s and Progressive Education in the 1890s-1930s*.

Mitchell believed a new type of education system was needed to help create a more rational and humane society. In order to achieve this, she felt schools needed a

radical change in structure, as well as a reconsideration of how children learn. As

described by Nager and Shapiro (2000, p. 22):

> The basic idea, however, was simple: the school should create an environment of
> "children learning actively, interacting with each other, taking initiative, finding
> pleasure in accomplishment and creative expression, with teachers who were
> enthusiastic and who established a generally democratic style of school life"
> (Biber, 1972, p. 52).

Consequently, in 1916 Mitchell established the Bureau of Educational

Experiments, later renamed the Bank Street College of Education, to serve as a place 1)

to study how children learn and how their environment affects learning and 2) to educate

teachers and others on how to create these environments. As Nager and Shapiro (2000, p.

13) explain:

> For Mitchell, like Dewey, scientific study of the child was intimately linked to the
> idea of education as a vehicle for social justice...In this way, the Bureau placed
> the study of child development within the school setting at the core of the
> educational enterprise. The term experimental referred not to traditional
> laboratory research but to trying out and reflecting on educational ideas and
> practices. (p. 13)

As Frank Pignatelli (2000, p. 221) notes,

> out of this unashamedly optimistic, ardent, democratically driven experimentalism
> came a deep and abiding belief in the creative capacity of the individual as a
> social being to devise intelligent solutions to real problems and to posit

meaningful future plans—plans designed to ensure continuous educative growth.

(p. 221)

As part of the progressive movement, Mitchell's philosophies and approaches to schooling for a more democratic society serve as important precedents for contemporary aims of creating a democratic preschool environment.

Legacy of the War on Poverty – National Head Start Program. In 1957, during the height of the Cold War, the United States experienced shock when the Soviets launched Sputnik, the first satellite to orbit the earth. This led to insecurity about U.S. technological abilities, creating new pressures on schools to focus heavily on cognitive development and discrediting some of the holistic and democratic aims of progressive education.

Soon thereafter, the ideas of Swiss epistemologist, Jean Piaget (1896-1980) gained significant recognition in the U.S., particularly his "theories on the stages of children's learning, which treated intelligence as dynamic" (Kirp, 2007, p. 60). In addition, the work of Bloom and Hunt started to bring about recognition that intelligence wasn't immutable. Their research brought forth the possibility that the environment and past experiences could affect intelligence (Fuller, 2007). This was antithetical to previous beliefs that children were born with or without certain capacities and spurred the movement that focused on cognitive skills.

Within this cultural context, one of the most comprehensive, democratic projects shaping the course of U.S. early childhood education took place, the creation of the national Head Start Program. In 1964, President Lyndon Johnson launched The *War on Poverty* in an effort to eliminate poverty from U.S. cities and streets. As president,

Johnson explained, "We seek not just freedom but opportunity, not just legal equity but human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and as a result" (Johnson, as cited in Kirp, 2007, p. 59). The U.S. Congress supported his efforts by creating the *Office of Economic Opportunity,* giving that office the power and funds to fight poverty in whatever way they deemed necessary. This brought about the creation of many new programs, such as the Domestic Peace Corps and Job Corps. It also brought about the beginning of major federal funding for early childhood programs through the inception of the Head Start program. Head Start had six major components (Zigler & Styfco, 1996): 1) early childhood education; 2) health screening and referral; 3) mental health services; 4) nutrition education and hot meals; 5) social services for children and their families; and 6) parent involvement.

In the 1970s, Edward Zigler became the director of the Office for Child Development and introduced additional components to Head Start: performance standards, a home-based program, the Child Development Associate credential, and services to handicapped children (10% of the children enrolled in Head Start had to have a disability, which is still a requirement). Although many of the programs created by the Office of Economic Opportunity were disbanded in the more conservative 1980s and 1990s, Head Start remains a stalwart program (Zigler & Muenchow, 1992).

Starting in the 1960s and 1970s, several longitudinal studies examining the effectiveness of Head Start and other early childhood education programs for low-income children were implemented and have been influential over the last several decades in early childhood discourse on optimal learning environments for children's development

(see "Current Early Childhood Educational Context" section, for more details on these research studies).

In relation to democratic education, Head Start serves as an important example of both the challenges as well as the possibilities for creating both structural and pedagogical democratic spaces. Over the last 40 years, as well as today, the Head Start program continues to evolve. For example, in the mid-1990s, the highly publicized findings of brain research by neuroscientists seemed to validate what many early childhood educators had come to understand through close observations of children. This research refuted some prior beliefs in the science community and concluded the following (The Southern Early Childhood Association [SECA], 1997): both genes and the experiences that babies have affect brain development; a child's brain by the age of three is twice as active as that of an adult's; brain development is "non-linear"; and there are prime times for acquiring certain kinds of knowledge and skills. This research added legitimacy to educators' efforts in advocating for high-quality programs and helped bring about the creation of the *Early Head Start* program, a new branch of the Head Start program which provides funding for programs for children from birth to age three.

There are innumerable ways in which Head Start serves as a precedent for democratic preschool education, as demonstrated by the following four examples: First, Head Start was created to provide *equal opportunity* for all children's educational success regardless of race or socioeconomic status, stretching democratic struggles beyond just civil liberties (see Appendix A, P1, S1). Second, providing care and optimal learning environments for children with disabilities is a mandated part of the Head Start program (see Appendix A, S1). Third, ongoing teacher training and parent participation is

essential to the functioning of each Head Start school (see Appendix A, S2). Fourth, Head Start recognizes parents as their child's first and most important teacher and provides them the opportunity to participate in school and policy decisions through a shared governance structure (see Appendix A, S2). Finally, community outreach serves as an important component of their program (see Appendix A, P2, S2).

Along with all the possibilities that Head Start offers to democratic education, it also serves as a cautionary tale. Zigler and Muenchow's (1992) book, *The Inside Story of America's Most Successful Educational Experiment,* highlights how historical particularities, cultural context and societal events can impact programs. For example, programs can become vulnerable to political swings of the pendulum, moving them away from their initial mission. This seemed to be the case in the 1970s, when the Head Start Planning Committee's original goals for the program (e.g., improving children's mental health, boosting children's emotional and social development) seemed to become overshadowed and judged by a narrow benchmark of success—increasing children's intellectual capacities, or more specifically their IQ scores. As mentioned above, the program was created during a time in which social science research was documenting the malleability of children's cognitive abilities. In light of this research and banking on the success of the program, politicians and the media focused on children's IQ scores as the primary measure of Head Start's success. In 1969, a controversial report came out indicating only short-term IQ score gains for children in the Head Start program, resulting in problems for Head Start, as advocates struggled to regain positive public opinion and continued funding for the program. As Edward Zigler recalls, the IQ controversy "started to push the pendulum from over-optimism concerning the effects of

compensatory education to a nihilistic view that such programs were a waste of money"

(as cited in Kirp, 2007, p. 63). The impact President George W. Bush's administration

had on Head Start with its focus on discrete skills and assessments serves as another

example of how political, social, and cultural events continue to shape the program (for

further discussion, see the "Narrowing Concept of Learning" section in chapter 1).

What can be learned from the study of past early childhood educators?

…we must in all seriousness despise instruction without vitality,

knowledge which enervates activity, and history as an expensive

surplus of knowledge and a luxury, because we lack what is still

most essential to us and because what is superfluous is hostile to

what is essential. To be sure, we need history. But we need it in a

manner different from the way in which the spoilt idler in the

garden of knowledge uses it, no matter how elegantly he may look

down on our coarse and graceless needs and distresses. That is, we

need it for life and for action, not for a comfortable turning away

from life and from action or for merely glossing over the

egotistical life and the cowardly bad act. We wish to serve history

only insofar as it serves living. (Nietzsche, *On the Use and Abuse*

of History for Life, p. 7)

As Nietzsche suggests, any worthwhile encounter with history must lead to a

committed appropriation of that history for the purposes of deepened living. In my view,

reading about the prominent figures in our field has the potential to create a new source

of energy for participating in the ongoing work of bringing democratic practices to early childhood education.

The strongest impression I have taken from the literature on historical early childhood education is that too much of our democratic heritage has been stripped away from the mainstays of early childhood educational practice, leaving behind techniques and methods that lack their original foundation in democratic purposes.

There seems to be a tendency for certain historical figures to become celebrated and their methods reified. Perhaps as a result, in the dominant early childhood education discourse, the original purposes and theories behind their practices have become de-politicized and, in different ways, silenced.

For instance, "learning through play," a practice advocated by progressive educators, has evolved into an accepted "best practice" for children; arguably, this has been a positive outcome for the field. However, there is a loss of the broader political vision associated with these somewhat tenuously accepted practices. Looking at the history, many progressive educators viewed play, among other reasons, as an essential tool for helping children practice the skills needed in becoming active citizens in a democracy. Contemporary advocates of play emphasize the benefit of play in terms of "school readiness," socialization, and literacy skills. All three are important benefits, but such a discussion tends to shift the discourse away from an explicit democratic purpose. How can there be a deeper understanding of methods and practices if they are disconnected from the purpose or theories behind them?

Another example would be the way in which Enlightenment thought has been transformed in modern day political discourse around education. As we have seen, social

progress was a universal aim of Enlightenment thinkers. Yet, aspects emphasizing the

common good have often become superseded by a more individualistic, competitive

ethos. As discussed in the literature (Apple & Beane, 2007) and presented in chapter one,

both the concern and protection for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities

and concern for the welfare of others and "the common good" are important values

necessary in creating a democratic school environment. Much of the concept of

individual rights stemmed from the enlightenment period. However, in recent decades a

new narrative has developed around "individualism" that seems to trump concern for the

common good (Goodman, 1992). As Parker (1994) explains, the citizenship curriculum

that was once focused on foundational values such as individual freedom and dignity are

now "too often appropriated by the individualistic obsession with rights ('negative

liberties'), self interest, and the concept of universal human nature or sameness" (p. 6).

A careful examination of the beliefs of past childhood education philosophers and

practitioners can lead to a greater appreciation for the role of democracy within early

childhood education.

Current Early Childhood Educational Context

Overview of current context. With increasing numbers of women going to

work, with the vast growth in all types of child-care programs (e.g., state, federal, for-

profit, non-profit, cooperative), and with the interest in universal prekindergarten at an all

time high, we seem to be at a defining moment for the path that early childhood

education will take.

Although the U.S. is one of the wealthiest countries in the world, more than 20%

of children under the age of six live in poverty and approximately 10% do not have health

insurance (Lynch, 2007). Compared to other wealthy countries, the U.S. fails on child

poverty. According to "a sample of 26 relatively rich nations, the United States has the

second highest child poverty rate (UNICEF 2005)…[The] variations in policy account for

most of the variation in child poverty among rich countries" (Lynch, p. 7). The adverse

effects of children growing up in poverty are substantial. As adults, they are "more likely

to engage in crime, have substance abuse problems, abuse and neglect their own

children," (Lynch, p. 8) perform poorly on academic tasks, have poor health, contribute

less to the growth and development of the economy, and overall, become less productive

citizens.

As citizens in a "democratic" society, all children deserve a safe and nurturing

environment during the first years of their life. As of 2005, the U.S. had over 11 million

children under the age of five enrolled in some type of regular child-care arrangement

(Johnson, 2005). Yet, gross disparities can be seen across social-class and ethnic groups

in their access to quality early childhood care and education (Fuller, 2007; Meyers &

Gornick, 2003). Several influential, long-term studies have supported the benefits of

providing low-income children with high quality early care and education. These studies

highlight the long-term benefits for individual children as well as society as a whole. The

following sections summarize some of the findings in each study.

The Abecedarian Project. The Abecedarian Project (Campbell, Ramey &

Pungello, et al., 2002; Kirp, 2007) shows both the short- and long-term benefits of

providing high-quality child care for high-risk, low-income children. This research

project began in the 1970s at the University of North Carolina. The group selected and

followed 111 children (from prenatal clinics and departments of children services). Half

of them were placed in the control group, and half of them were provided with high-quality child care five days a week from 7:30am to 5:30pm from infancy until they were five years old. The researchers followed the children into adulthood and found that the children who attended the Abecedarian program reaped a wide range of benefits compared to the control group. Overall, the children in the treatment group made higher scores on various cognitive tests (including IQ tests) lasting through adulthood, were three times as likely to attend college, earned a higher income, required less money to be invested in their school districts (because they were less likely to need special or remedial education), were more likely to have good jobs, and were half as likely to have become teen parents.

Perry Preschool Project. Another study (Schweinhart, 2003) showing the long-term benefits of providing high quality early care to children living in poverty is the Perry Preschool Project started in the 1960s by David Weikart in Ypsilanti, Michigan. Out of 123 children, Weikart randomly assigned 53 of them to the Perry Preschool and the other children to the control group. The Perry Preschool was a ½ day program (approximately 3 hours a day) that focused on developing children's cognitive skills, primarily through problem-solving and play (with an emphasis on planning and reviewing their activities). Their child-to-teacher ratios were low. The children typically attended the preschool for around two years. Home-visits were provided to offer parents support and advice. The teachers were highly trained, with most having a master's degree, and were paid public school salaries.

While the children were still in elementary and high school, the researchers found significant benefits for those who attended the Perry Program. These children:

were significantly less likely than the control group to skip school, to be assigned

to a special education class, or to repeat a grade. Their attitude toward school was

better, and their parents were more enthusiastic about the education that their

children were receiving. Their high school grade point average was higher. By

age nineteen, two-thirds of them had graduated from high school, compared with

just under half (45 percent) of those who hadn't attended Perry Preschool. (Kirp,

2007, p. 53)

The long-term benefits of attending the Perry Preschool Program were perhaps

even more dramatic. Following these children into adulthood, the researchers found that

the treatment group earned twice as many college degrees, were less likely to go to jail or

prison (28% versus 52% in the control group), were less likely to use drugs, were more

likely to own their own home and car, earned 25% more per year than the control group,

and were less likely to have been on welfare.

Muennig, Schweinhart, Montie, and Neidell's (2009) 37-year follow-up study

examined the effects of the Perry Preschool Program on adult health at age 40. Their

results showed:

The PPP led to improvements in educational attainment, health insurance,

income, and family environment improvements in these domains, in turn, lead to

improvements in an array of behavioral risk factors and health. However, despite

these reductions in behavioral risk factors, participants did not exhibit any overall

improvement in physical health outcomes by the age of 40 years.

Chicago Child-Parent Centers. A third research study (Reynolds, 1999;

Reynolds, Temple, & Ou, 2007; Temple, Robertson, & Mann, 2001) that had significant

findings took place in the Chicago Child-Parent Centers. These centers started in 1967 as part of the public school system with federal funding support and served children 3 to 5 years old. Some of the program's fundamentals included involving parents as both learners and collaborators (e.g., providing parent classes), emphasizing language and reading, providing continued support to families as their children transitioned to elementary school, and keeping class sizes small.

Starting in the 1980s, Arthur Reynolds compared the progress of 989 children who attended a Child-Parent Center with children who had similar backgrounds but who did not attend one of their programs. The results were once again quite dramatic. In adulthood, the children who attended these programs were more likely to have gone to college, more likely to have health insurance, less likely to be clinically depressed, and less likely to have gone to prison (21% less likely) (Reynolds, 2007). Sadly, despite these proven positive effects, the exemplar Chicago Child-Parent Centers have seen recent budget cuts, including a 20 percent cut in 2006 and a reduction of centers from 25 when they first opened to a mere 13 today (Kirp, 2007).

As the U.S. Declaration of Independence states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Children as our youngest citizens should certainly have these same opportunities, including the right to quality care during their formative years.

Internal and External Barriers in Creating a Democratic Preschool Environment

What are some of the external and internal barriers that have prevented access to high-quality, democratic preschools? Although most people would advocate a democratic

environment, there are several external and internal forces, as discussed in the early childhood education literature, that impede the development of this type of community.

Issues of inequality.

"The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life." Jane Addams

The inequality of public education has been evident for many years. Kozol (1991) highlighted many of these "savage inequalities" after visiting public schools across the U.S. According to Darling-Hammond (2004), the situation has not improved; spending on children in low-income areas is often 3 to 4 times less than in white or affluent areas. This is true even as families with low incomes tend to pay a higher percentage of their income (taxes) towards public education. Darling-Hammond explains:

> Unlike most countries that fund schools centrally and equally, the wealthiest U.S. public schools spend at least ten times more than the poorest schools—ranging from $30,000 per pupil at the wealthy schools to only $3,000 per pupil at the poorest. These disparities contribute to a wider achievement gap in this country than in virtually any industrialized country in the world. (p. 6)

With the passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act,* the gross disparities have only worsened. Federal government "punishes" schools they designate as "failing" by removing their funding, further deepening the divide in school quality.

Unfortunately, unequal access to quality care is not unique to elementary-aged children, but starts at infancy for many children in the United States. In *Keepin' On: The Everyday Struggles of Families Living in Poverty*, Ispa, Thornburg and Fine (2006) discuss the challenges that nine poor, African-American mothers had in accessing high-

quality child care for their children. Their research highlights some of the barriers these mothers faced, including lack of affordable transportation to high-quality centers, lack of information about available programs for which they may have been eligible, lack of quality care during "off hours" when they had to work, disqualification from receiving the state subsidy when their income level rose too high (e.g., one state limit was defined as a full-time income of $6.90 per hour), and their misperception that the care their children received was of sufficient quality.

Accessibility to high-quality care for infants, toddlers and preschoolers is not a problem for just low-income families. Several studies have shown that the situation for many middle-class families is even worse than for low-income families because they are not eligible for subsidies, and their only options end up being sub-par care (Fuller, 2007; Meyers & Gornik, 2003). Preschools cannot be democratic institutions if they are not open and accessible to all children.

As described in the previous studies (e.g., Perry Preschool Project, Abecedarian Project, Chicago Parent-Child Centers), it is evident that quality matters and has life-long implications. Several cost-benefit analyses (Dickens, Baschnagel, & Bartik, 2007; Dickens, Swahill, & Tebbs, 2006) show that as a nation, the U.S. economy will save billions of dollars in the long run if we invest our tax dollars in child care (e.g., less money for welfare, prisons, remedial education, etc.). This should raise the serious question as to why the U.S. is sacrificing children's equal access to quality care.

Can the marketplace produce democratic schooling? Democratic processes can be said to govern our schools only when equal access to quality care is provided for all children, and equal opportunities for participation in decisions are extended to all

children and families. Can the private marketplace in early care and education yield these democratic outcomes?

Advocates of marketplace systems may argue that the marketplace supplies as much quality care as parents demand, reflecting the overall desires of families with children. Furthermore, it could be argued that consumer choice in the marketplace is a form of democratic participation, and that parents have this right under marketplace conditions. How do these arguments hold up when compared to research that shows what actually happens in the market for early care and education?

In fact, child care as a market commodity can breed unfair competition and unequal access to quality care. In 1999, Thomas Grubman, a stock analyst, illegally negotiated a deal with the CEO of Citigroup in an attempt to get his twin daughters into an elite preschool in New York City. The plan involved Citigroup donating $1 million dollars to the preschool and persuading the board to accept Grubman's children in exchange for Grubman upgrading the AT & T stock rating (Starr, 2002). Obviously, this is an extreme case, but it shows the lengths to which some parents will go in order to guarantee their children access to high-quality programs. In a democracy, *all* children should have the right to quality care and education. Instead, our current system creates a competitive market where parents with the most money or with questionable ethics win. In the long run, leaving early care and education largely in the hands of the marketplace will be to the detriment of all children. Moreover, when parents are forced to compete for a minimal number of spaces in high-quality child care centers, their focus shifts from a concern for promoting a sense of community and an investment and concern for everyone's children to a "look out for my child only" mentality.

Not only does a marketplace system run counter to democratic ideals in the way it produces an inequitable distribution of quality care, but also in the way it relies on parents—as child-care consumers—to help regulate the quality of care their children receive. When corporate preschools compete for "customers," they have a strong incentive to exaggerate the quality of the care they provide. In fact, many researchers (e.g., Cryer & Burchinal, 1997; NACCRRA, 2010; Shpancer, Bowden & Ferrell, et al., 2002) suggest that parents as child-care consumers are misinformed about the quality of care their children are receiving, regardless of their income or education level. Several studies (Cryer & Burchinal, 1997; Shpancer, Bowden & Ferrell, et al., 2002) have highlighted the significant gap in parents' knowledge regarding the experiences their children have in child-care centers. The researchers found that parents consistently rated the quality of their child's program higher than that of trained observers. Interestingly, researchers found that although there was a discrepancy in perceptions, the parents' values did match the early childhood professional values on what they deem important factors for a high quality center (e.g., positive interactions, safe environment, etc.). In other words, the parents' perceptions of the schools were higher than the actual quality of the center, but their values were congruent with those of the early childhood education professionals. Most alarming, perhaps, was the researchers' finding that parents *significantly* overestimate the quality of care provided in areas that have considerable impact on their children's development, such as teacher-child interactions and discipline policies. The researchers found this to be the case with virtually all families, regardless of their education or income level.

This research has implications for providing more "consumer" protection, more parent education, and further teacher training to assure quality. But it also raises the question of whether leaving the construction of early care and education largely to the marketplace will allow for democratic early care and education.

This evidence (Cryer & Burchinal, 1997; Shpancer, Bowden & Ferrell, et al., 2002) of a gap between parent perceptions and what actually occurs at the child-care center suggests some problems with an over-reliance upon market-based solutions for providing equitable access to democratic processes within early care and education. How can parents be considered informed participants in a "democratic," market-based decision-making process when their knowledge of the "product" they are purchasing is limited? Furthermore, how can parents be considered as capable guardians for the democratic rights of their children when, again, their perceptions of school are subject to misconceptions with no real inducement for the business operators to change these perceptions?

For-profit providers of early care and education face a serious conflict of interest as democratic facilitators. Parent values (e.g., small teacher/child ratios, positive interactions with teachers) generally require a larger investment in quality staff and facilities, both of which are often in conflict with a corporation's bottom line. Clearly, it would not be in the business's best interest to better match their programs to the parents' values. This would require costly additions (e.g., reduction in child/teacher ratio; higher wages to attract higher quality teachers) which would sacrifice profit for the owners. Providing parents with additional information about what quality looks like would likely have costly repercussions. For instance, corporate child-care centers typically build

larger schools because they produce more profit and require less overhead. Yet, smaller

schools have been shown to be more effective in fostering relationships and promoting

democratic principles (Starnes, 2007; West Ed Policy Brief, 2001).

When early care and education is organized along for-profit lines, the gap is

perpetuated between what parents believe they are getting for their money, and what they

are actually getting. Unfortunately, this misconception erodes the basis for democratic

practices and creates a "false consciousness" about the quality of care their children

receive and the need for changes to the status quo. False consciousness "is the point at

which members of society buy into their own exploitation and subordination, and become

uncritical tools of production and consumption" (Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996,

p. 337).

Corporatization of child care. In recent years there has been a proliferation of

for-profit corporate child-care centers (e.g., there are now ca. 1,770 KinderCare Learning

Centers, and the Learning Care Group, Inc., has approximately 1,109 centers). When

corporations own the schools, the power is shifted away from families and local

communities and put into the hands of the shareholders and corporate boards. No matter

how well-intentioned the corporate management may be, this removes all decision-

making from the hands of the people that are most affected, undermining any hope of true

democratic practice within the school.

In addition, there have been several large corporate takeovers of child-care

companies. For instance, the Bain Group, a private equity firm, will be taking over Bright

Horizons, which had recently acquired Lipton Corporate Child Care Centers. Each time

a child-care corporation is bought out by a larger corporation, the distance increases between the decision-makers and the children and families affected by those decisions.

Unfortunately, the values of for-profit, corporate companies conflict with the ideals of democratic educators. Increasing shareholder's profits is the number one obligation of corporations. With a fragile market and some child-care corporations already accruing large debt (e.g., ABC Learning Center), who will ultimately suffer? It leaves the corporations little choice but to sacrifice quality by actions such as cutting wages and increasing staff-teacher ratios, both of which have been shown as strong indicators of quality (Howes, & Cryer, 1997; Patterson, 2004; Phillips, Mekos, Scarr, McCartney, & Abbott-Shim, 2000; Phillipsen, Burchinal).

As an alternative to the corporate-dominated marketplace, non-profit care and public regulation offer considerable advantages toward equal access to high quality and democratic participation. Several studies have indicated that nonprofit care has higher quality than for-profit centers (Mullis, Cornille, Taliano, 2003; Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997; Sumsion, 2006) and that states with more stringent regulations have higher quality centers (Phillipsen, Burchinal, Howes, & Cryer, 1997). It should also be noted that German and Australian governments regulate child-care workers' salaries like the United States does for public school salaries (Phillipsen et al., 1997, p. 302). Citizens in Reggio Emilia, Italy, invest over 10% of their city's budget into their municipal preschools (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998), and most industrialized nations provide some type of universal early care and education for their preschoolers.

Corporate culture and democratic practice. John Dewey (1916/2007) strongly believed schools, as well as other social groups, should be spaces for democracy to be

practiced. His ideal form of democratic schooling (as described above, in the quote on p.

52) seems to conflict with the values and operations of corporate and for-profit

businesses. Corporations tend to use a hierarchical, competitive, business model which

conflicts with a democratic structure in which all stakeholders (e.g., parents, children,

administrators, community, and other schools) are considered crucial decision-makers

with an active role in the governing process. Corporations value homogeneity and

compliance over diversity and creative conflict.

Dewey (1916/2007) reminds us that democracy is not just procedural, but a way

of life that requires collaboration among and within many diverse groups. Yet, if a

Bright Horizon is next door to a KinderCare Learning Center, by the nature of their

business they view each other as competitors, competing for consumers and gaining

profit. They have very little incentive to work together on projects that might inhibit their

economic growth.

In addition, a for-profit preschool will, by definition, not work to attract students

of low-income parents who cannot afford this care. This inevitably narrows the type of

students attracted, rather than the school working for an all-encompassing diverse student

body which is necessary for a truly "democratic" school.

These corporate barriers to democratic practices can be summed up in the words

of Alma Fleet, professor and head of the Institute of Early Childhood at Macquarie

University and contributing editor and author of the book, *Insights: Behind Early*

Childhood Pedagogical Documentation (2006):

Research shows high-quality child care is costly and depends on low staff-child

ratios, the employment of highly qualified staff and professional development for

workers…Many of the new players, restricted by their one-size-fits-all approach
to service delivery and their responsibility to return profits to shareholders, will be
reluctant to move beyond mandatory minimum staff ratios or respond adequately
to the cultural diversity of different neighborhoods. We have a takeover climate
in child care that is very, very worrying ethically…It bothers me that people see
child care as a way of making money because if there's money available, it should
be going to children's programs and services, not to shareholders.

Decline of social capital in the U.S.

"Citizenship is not a spectator sport." (Putnam, 2000, p. 341)

Unfortunately, civic participation and social capital[9] have been on the decline
for many years. Putnam (2000) chronicles the root causes of declining social capital in
the United States, which include: 1) "suburbanization, commuting, and sprawl" (p. 283);
2) "effect of electronic entertainment" (p. 283)—the privatizing of our leisure time; 3)
"generational change" (p. 283) replacing the long civic generation; and 4) "pressures of
time and money" (p. 283).

For democracy to prosper, Putnam (2000) identified three civic virtues,
acquired through social connectedness, that are critical for a strong democracy. These
virtues are active participation, trustworthiness, and reciprocity.

Active Participation. In a study of high school seniors titled *Youth, Voluntary
Associations and Political Socialization* (1981), Hanks found that "regardless of the
students' social class, academic background, and self-esteem, those who took part in

---

[9] Social capital "refers to features of social organization, such as trust…and networks,
that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam,
1993, p. 167).

voluntary associations in school were far more likely than nonparticipants to vote, take

part in political campaigns and discuss public issues two years after graduating" (as cited

in Putnam, 2000, p. 339). Instilling the civic virtue of active participation at an early age

to counteract our nation's decreasing social capital is critical. Preschools, as democratic

associations, could serve as an important starting place for children to begin actively

participating in community issues.

> *Trustworthiness.* Research suggests that when people have multiple

interactions, they are much less likely to cheat or shirk responsibility (p. 339). This

suggests that building relationships within the preschool and larger community should be

one of the primary goals of a democratic preschool.

> *Reciprocity*. The more citizens interact with each other, the more likely they are

to display concern for the "generalized other" (e.g., participate in a food drive, contribute

to charity, etc.). Putnam explains,

> to political theorists, reciprocity has another meaning as well—the willingness of
>
> opposing sides in a democratic debate to agree on the ground rules for seeking
>
> mutual accommodation after sufficient discussion, even (or especially) when they
>
> don't agree on what is to be done. Regular connections with my fellow citizens
>
> don't ensure that I will be able to put myself in their shoes, but social isolation
>
> virtually guarantees that I will not. (p. 340)

Creating a space for many diverse and varied interactions among children and teachers is

essential in democratic schooling. Both *conflict* and *debate* among preschoolers should

be viewed as important learning opportunities and not as a distraction to the scheduled

curriculum.

With an overall decline in social capital, it is critical to promote active participation, trust, and reciprocity in early care and education. All three civic virtues are necessary in sustaining a strong democracy. Yet, with the current trend in education which seems to emphasize standardization, a push for academics, a narrowing of the curriculum (Fuller, 2007; Meier & Wood), and a program largely led by time (Wien, 1996), creating a democratic environment where these civic virtues can be developed serves as a challenging barrier.

Individualism supersedes community. More than ever, U.S. society seems to be putting a premium on individualistic goals and values. For a democracy to work, there must be a balance between individualism and community. Goodman (1992) highlights four primary reasons that individualism has become so pervasive in our society.

1) Heritage. Goodman explains, "Individual liberty, separation from past traditions and social arrangements and personal freedom to 'prosper' without restrictions were promoted as the founding values of American democracy and rooted the ideology of individualism deep into our psychic soil" (p.13).

2) Patriarchy. The second reason, patriarchy, essentially fosters a set of "masculine" values such as competition, individual achievement, aggressiveness, and objectivity while implicitly rejecting the "feminine" values such as subjectivity, empathy, caring and bonding. Goodman notes,

> Since Western civilization has been dominated by a male consciousness for several thousand years (Elshtain, 1981; Janssen-Jurreit, 1980), it is not surprising that our conception of societal relations reflects a masculine ethos which in turn legitimates and fosters the same set of values as individualism. (p. 16)

3) *Popular Culture*. Goodman points out that art, religion, popularized philosophical themes, and other cultural practices have contributed to establishing individualism as "our societal creed" (p. 17). He explains: "Christianity during the colonial period of our nation's history encouraged the accumulation of wealth [and] worked in harness with economics toward the goal of individual success" (p. 17) and,

> as industrial capitalism emerged, a secularized amorality or "radical subjectivity" replaced Christianity as philosophical guidance for many individuals' personal actions. Under this personality ethic, individual ambition no longer had to be morally justified. Personal achievement was considered a manifestation of a healthy personality. (p. 17)

4) *Corporate Economy*. Goodman explains,

> As corporate capitalism has grown, it has absorbed many areas of social life to fit a relatively narrow pattern of marketplace relationships. Today, as in Dewey's time, much of our life is reflected in economic metaphors of working, buying, selling, and ownership. We become deluded into thinking that our individuality is part and parcel to what we own. While flaunting our ability to choose from an abundance of commercial goods, we channel our desires into a relatively narrow range of how life could be lived as we come to identify ourselves as primarily "consumers." (p. 19)

Sadly, when "personalities become aligned with the needs of our corporate economy, our 'individuality' is in part, reduced to choosing the brand of beer or cigarette that 'singles us out from the crowd'" (p. 19). Langer (2002) expands on this issue and suggests that during the 21st century "children's identity is negotiated in terms of consumer choice" (p.

70) where essentially our "individual desires" are little more than market manipulated and constructed wants or needs.

An important goal for democratic schooling is to try to counterbalance individualism with values that support the community good. This "dominance of individualism at the expense of community as a social value" (Goodman, 1992, p. 11) is a significant barrier to overcome in the development of an environment where democratic processes govern.

Democratic governance is hard work. Another barrier that impedes the development of an environment where democratic practices govern occurs when individuals lack the interest or ability that is necessary to work within these types of democratic institutions. This seems to be, in large part, due to their previously limited opportunities to develop participatory attitudes and abilities. Pateman (1970) suggests that democratic organizations can shape individuals' attitudes, the quality of their work, and their social identities. He explains, people learn "to participate by participating and that feelings of political efficacy are more likely to be developed in a participatory environment…The evidence indicates that experience of a participatory authority structure might also be effective in diminishing tendencies toward nondemocratic attitude" (Pateman, 1970, as cited in Goodman, 1992, p. 85).

Goodman points out, "Most individuals think of democracy as providing something to people; in fact, democratic living requires significant obligations from people" (1992, p. 82). In her study, she found that

> although getting involved in students' (as well as parents' and teachers') personal
> lives, confronting complex problems, actively engaging in substantive decision

making with others, and having the freedom to generate and act upon their own

ideas resulted in high levels of morale and a great deal of personal meaning

among the teachers at Harmony [an elementary school that intentionally strives to

be democratic], these same factors also took considerable time out of their lives

and demanded a level of emotional intensity not found in most traditional schools.

(p. 83)

Although shared decision-making can be a longer, more intense process, this

barrier does not outweigh the positive benefits gained by allowing all stakeholders to be

involved.

Methods and procedures dominate school culture. When methods and

procedures dominate, a democratic vision and purpose of schooling can become lost. In

the following quote, Ayers (2003) describes how this can serve as a barrier to democratic

schooling:

To build democratic schools is to work toward a democratic future, recognizing

that democracy is always a community in the making, always an aspiration we

approach fitfully. The soul of democracy is a social spirit of compassionate

solidarity, of engagement, of sympathy, empathy, and connectedness. It begins in

care and cooperation, and the recognition that our lives are suspended in

interdependent webs of relationship. That spirit can never be achieved by

reference to forms and procedures alone, but rather is fueled by a sense that

injustices can be opposed and justice aspired to, that questions can remain open to

dialogue and debate, that people can develop the ethical knowledge to stand up

and count for something, and that human beings can learn to live together in

common cause. All of this is a possibility, neither certain nor necessarily probable, but something to imagine and pursue. (p. 37)

When teachers and administrators follow scripted curricula and view teaching primarily as a set of procedures to be followed, creating a democratic early care and education environment can be significantly impeded.

Community turns into conformism. When developing a democratic early care and education environment, it is important to recognize that a democratic community can subtly turn into conformity. Wisneski's research (2005) highlights the challenges of creating a classroom community in elementary schools that often insist upon control and conformity. She suggests that even the ideals of community can become another discourse which could be used to control, categorize, and exclude others.

Goodman (1992) also cautions against creating schools which, although intended to support a democratic community, actually promote social conformism. He explains,

> requiring unquestioned obedience and passive acquiescence to adult authority at all times, equating patriotism with the value of community, creating cult figures such as Joseph Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, or a particular religious leader to be blindly revered, stressing rote memorization and 'correct' answers to even moral questions, and placing so much value on group solidarity that the individual who disagrees becomes 'silenced' through intimidation are some of the instructional practices found in these schools that result in an education for social conformism rather than for critical democracy. (p. 28)

There are many internal and external barriers to democracy discussed in the literature on democratic education. However, if schools are aware of these challenges and build a network of support among stakeholders, creating a democratic environment can be possible.

Structural, Pedagogical, and Curricular Qualities of a Democratic Preschool Environment

As mentioned in chapter 1, there were no comprehensive studies specifically examining democracy in U.S. preschool settings. There were, however, several studies examining democracy in primary and secondary education and some theoretical literature on democratic preschool education. From this education literature several qualities of a democratic classroom emerged. Therefore, in the following section I will review the research that specifically relates to these qualities, with an emphasis, when available, on related preschool educational research.

Eight qualities of a democratic classroom and school. The following eight qualities of a democratic classroom are interconnected and overlapping in many ways. These qualities include: fostering an atmosphere of collaboration rather than competitiveness; developing a strong image of children and teachers; making classrooms serious sites of inquiry; developing curriculum based on children's interests and real community issues and problems; addressing unequal power structures; focusing on schooling for social justice and social responsibility; taking a critical approach to teaching and learning; and reconceptualizing teacher education programs. I will discuss each of these qualities as reflected in the substantive literature below.

Collaborative ethos. Creating a school community based on collaboration is critical for democratic ideals to flourish (Kohn, 1992, 1996; Smyth, 2000). In a society that is highly and increasingly competitive, creating a space for collaboration can be challenging. Smyth warns that a competitive classroom will create a "lack of generosity of spirit toward the views of others" and that "if the purpose of education is conceived narrowly as being to satisfy the dictates of the economy—then social capital will be eroded" (p. 492) inside and outside of school.

Roseth, Johnson and Johnson (2008) completed a meta-analysis of 148 independent studies comparing the "relative" effectiveness of cooperative, competitive, and individualistic goal structures. Their results "indicate that higher achievement and more positive peer relationships were associated with cooperative rather than competitive or individualistic goal structures" (p. 223).

As discussed in Kohn (1992) several research studies suggest that cooperative learning also reduces hostility, improves social skills, increases self-esteem, promotes an acceptance of people with different abilities, encourages viewing others as potential collaborators (rather than as obstacles to one's own success), and promotes perspective taking. All of these attributes are necessary for developing participatory citizens in a healthy democracy.

In contrast, research suggests that competition impedes a collaborative ethos and can be destructive in fostering a democratic community. Kohn (1992) outlines some of these adverse consequences. First, competition produces *anxiety,* which can hinder achievement. Second, competition is an *extrinsic motivator* [defined as "artificial incentives outside the task itself" (p. 206)], and extrinsic motivators tend to diminish

interest in the task and reduce productivity. Third, "whether they win or lose, children typically attribute the results of a competitive encounter to luck or fixed ability; the result is a diminished sense of empowerment and responsibility for learning" (p. 206). Fourth, if students believe the main reason for learning something is to win, "the presumptive winner therefore has been given no reason to do anything more than is necessary to defeat everyone else. More important, all the likely losers have been given no rationale for bothering with the subject matter at all" (p. 206).

Competition is also becoming more prevalent beyond the students in the classroom. For example, the privatizing and grading of public education and "the exhortation[s] to teachers, students, and schools to compete against one another" (Smyth, p. 499) is increasing. This can only lead to diminishing learning possibilities as well as "social stratification, segmentation, and alienation" (p. 499). It would be virtually impossible to promote and practice democratic and collaborative practices, beyond token forms, in this type of competitive atmosphere.

According to Wong's research "teachers remain with a district when they feel strong bonds of connection to a professional learning community that has, at its heart, high-quality interpersonal relationships founded on trust and respect" (as cited in Portner, 2005, p. 45). Unlike traditional child-care centers, where planning is typically an isolated event that happens at most once a week, in a democratic early care and education environment, teachers are continually involved in collaborative planning with their co-teacher (as well as with children, parents, and administrators as much as possible). As Achinstein and Athanases (2006), Mullen (2005), and Portner (2005) suggest, creating

this type of democratic, participatory and collaborative framework, with multiple layers of support, reduces stress and increases the contentment and retention of teachers.

Strong image of children and teachers. Traditional approaches to education are often tied very closely to a weak image of the child—disavowing the child's ability to participate in democratic processes at school. In Western societies, the dominant images of children range from:

knowledge and culture reproducer, a tabula rasa or empty vessel needing to be filled with knowledge and to be 'made ready' to learn for school; as nature, following biologically determined and universal stages of development; as innocent, enjoying a golden age of life, uncorrupted by the world; or as supply factor in determining the labor force. (Dahlberg, 1999, p. 7)

Unfortunately, the common factor in each of these images and constructions of the young child is that they produce a weak, passive, isolated and incapable child.

To create a school culture that supports democracy, it is important to deliberately challenge this view of young children and see them as "having extraordinary strength and capabilities, a co-constructor of knowledge and identity in relationship with other children and adults. This construction produces a rich child, active, competent and eager to engage with the world" (Dahlberg, 1999, p. 7).

Empirical evidence shows teacher's beliefs, attitudes, and images of children directly impact their interactions with children and, in turn, impact both children's behaviors and achievements. For example, in *Research on Motivation in Education, Classroom Milieu*, Brophy (1995) summarizes the research on the role that teacher beliefs, attitudes, expectations and motivation play in helping to understand how teachers

respond and interact with their students. The author cites many research findings that show, "teacher expectations are likely to affect academic motivation" (p. 186). The research shows "students of teachers who expect them to find academic tasks meaningful and worthwhile will be more likely to do so than students of teachers who expect them to view such tasks as pointless drudgery" (p. 186).

Loris Malaguzzi, one of the founders of the Reggio Emilia approach, a leading philosophy for democratic early childhood education (see chapter 1, for further discussion of the Reggio Emilia approach), believed educators should have a strong image of all children and that each child is born with endless possibilities. He explains:

> A child who possesses many resources at birth, and with an extraordinary potential which has never ceased to amaze us; a child with the independent means to build up its own thought processes, ideas, questions and attempts at answers; with a high level of ability in conversing with adults, the ability to observe things and to reconstruct them in their entirety. This is a gifted child, for whom we need a gifted teacher. (Malaguzzi, 1998, p. 66)

To have democratic schools, a strong image of the teacher must also be secured. In *Reclaiming Social Capital through Critical Teaching*, Smyth (2000) reviewed literature regarding the different images of teachers. He discussed the current dominant view of teachers that has become prevalent over the last three decades, that of *teacher as technician*. He explains that *teachers as technicians* are expected to implement predetermined curricula based on a narrow economic-oriented agenda. Smyth argues that the complexity of teaching is impossible to be truly reduced to operational terms. Dewey in *Experience and Education* (1938) also discussed the importance of expanding our view

of teachers beyond technical terms. This low status of teachers effectively expands the gap between what actually occurs in classrooms with what is developed by educational reformers. However, if schools are going to be places for democratic practices, a strong image of the teacher is necessary. Smyth suggests this alternative image, the *teacher as intellectual and political actor*. *Teacher as intellectual* highlights the fact that teachers must have an expansive knowledge about their field and an overall breadth of knowledge. They must be able to make theories, test them, and adjust teaching practices accordingly. Because teaching involves humans, it is impossible to purely operationalize approaches. Therefore, teachers need to be able to consider the larger implications of school practices and make judgments about how to effectively construct curricula appropriate for their children. As *political actors*, teachers in their educational settings need to be "clear about the different ways in which they experience their work—how they encounter it, how they understand it, and how they feel about it," (Smyth, 2000, p. 496) in order to help "challenge and transform the structural and cultural features...we come to understand as oppressive and antidemocratic" (Ginsburg, 1988, as cited in Smyth, 2000, p. 496). If teachers truly begin to see themselves as *political actors*, significant strides could be made toward more democratic classrooms.

Unfortunately, the empirical research suggests that the image of the teacher has an impact on the quality of teachers being attracted to the field as well as the image that children are constructing. Gordon's (2005) research "demonstrates that the images of teachers and the teaching profession as developed and sustained within various American cultural and economic communities are as much a contribution to any shortage of teachers of color as are the structural impediments so frequently cited" (p. 31). After

interviewing 200 minority teachers, Gordon found that over half of the participants viewed the negative image and low status of the teacher in society as the major factor contributing to the lack of minority students entering the profession. This was above and beyond structural factors (e.g., economic reasons).

Sandefur and Moore's (2004) research examined the images of teachers in popular culture. Specifically, the researchers examined teacher images in picture storybooks through ethnographic content analysis. Their findings were as follows: 1) "the teacher in children's picture storybooks is overwhelmingly portrayed as a white, non-Hispanic woman" (p. 47); 2) "the teacher in picture storybooks who is sensitive, competent, and able to manage a classroom effectively is a minority" (p. 47); 3) "the teacher in children's picture storybooks is static, unchanging, and flat" (p. 48); 4) "the teacher in children's picture books is polarized [either saintly or very unpleasant]" (p. 48); and 5) "the teacher in children's picture books does not inspire in his or her students the pursuit of critical inquiry" (p. 49). None of the teachers was found to be a *transformative intellectual,* and only six out of the 62 reflected images of teachers as educated professionals. What do these images tell us about society's beliefs about teachers? How does it affect recruitment of teachers? How does it shape teachers' identities and interactions with their children?

For schools to be democratic spaces, it is important to have a strong image of both teachers and children.

Sites of "serious inquiry." As discussed in the literature (Cowhey, 2006; Smyth, 2000; Vasquez, 2004), an important part of democratic teaching involves creating spaces for children and teachers to partake in meaningful inquiry. Teachers develop questions to

help deconstruct what schooling is about, what counts as knowledge, whose agenda is being represented and what groups of students are being excluded. This creates an ongoing practice of examining everyday teaching practices and then reconstructing curricula and classroom structures to bring about positive change. Again, this moves teachers away from being compliant technical workers following scripted curricula and towards active creators of democratic practices.

For example, the importance of creating schools as serious sites of inquiry is demonstrated by a year-long, collaborative study by Paris et al. (2007) at an inclusive, laboratory preschool. The director and teachers at the school felt increasing pressure that their inclusion policies and practices were being challenged both within and outside the school, so they decided to engage in practitioner research to examine the following questions: "Do current administrative policies and practices match the current goals and values and mission of the school? How can administration best support teachers in inclusive classrooms? What does it take for teachers to successfully include children with special needs in the classrooms? What do families of all our children need and how can we support them?" (p. 2). According to the authors, "engaging in their own research guided by questions that grew out of their unique context, personal histories, and convictions, yielded both immediate data-driven changes in policies and practices as well as more far-reaching changes in their own perspectives" (p. 25). This research allowed the teachers, director, and families to examine a shared problem from multiple perspectives in their local context and empowered them to make well-informed changes in an intentional way. This type of inquiry and decision-making is critical for a democracy to prosper.

In a democratic organization, both children and teachers become researchers who actively investigate the world and relationships around them. Malaguzzi (1998) emphasizes this point:

> Teachers must be aware that practice cannot be separated from objectives or values and that professional growth comes partly through an individual's effort, but in a much richer way through discussion with colleagues, parents, [children] and experts. Indeed, education without research or innovation is education without interest. (p. 73)

Teachers and children participate in action research as a way to constantly critique and improve their practices and deepen their thinking processes. Several studies have shown the benefits of developing these action research projects within school communities (Garin, 2003; Paris, Eyman, Morris & Sutton, 2007).

Further research indicates that teacher research and critical inquiry can transform teaching practices (Jennings & Smith, 2002), shift prevailing power structures (Crawford & Cornett, 2000), increase awareness of the value and need to share responsibility with teammates for making curriculum decisions (Moran, 2007), make visible—to teachers, parents and the larger community—the relationship between teacher thinking, practice, and children's learning (MacDonald, 2007; Moran, 2007) and finally, become a necessary part of a well-functioning democratic community (Goodman, 1992).

It is essential that children also take on serious inquiry projects, particularly researching the communities in which they live, unmasking questions that are usually marginalized or pushed off the social and educational agenda of schooling, and developing possibilities for change. Allowing children to actively pursue inquiry related

to the community gives them some of their first experiences in being democratic citizens contributing to the bettering of society (Cannella, 2002; Fischman & McLaren, 2000; Goodman, 1992; Hunt & Metcalf, 1996).

Meaningful curriculum for children's interests and community issues. In order to have a truly democratic classroom, the involvement of all participants is needed. Therefore, the teacher does not create lesson plans in isolation. Rather, a democratic teacher would bring in the student lives, perspectives, cultures, and experiences and make them the center of curriculum in a way that involves students as co-constructors of the curriculum (Fischman & McLaren, 2000; Harber, 2002; hooks, 1994; Smyth, 2000; Vasquez, 2004). This includes issues that have historically been avoided or "off-limits" such as issues of racism, poverty, gender and class discrimination, and corporate misuse of power (Hunt & Metcalf, 1996). This idea of children as co-constructors of curriculum was also reflected in a Ugandan study discussed in Clive Harber's (2002) article *Education, Democracy and Poverty Reduction in Africa*. Harber discusses the primacy of education for democracy in Uganda's educational policy. In this project, "children are involved in the identification of problems and in the search for solutions to these problems and they are engaged in efforts aimed at helping their friends in the schools and the community to solve problems" (p. 274). This is an excellent example of how children can be empowered as active citizens.

In a case study investigating the use of a popular culture curriculum in a UK classroom of 6 and 7 year-olds, Marsh (1999) found that by incorporating themes (e.g., Batman and Batwoman) from popular culture into the curriculum, the teachers were able to motivate children whose interests are usually excluded from the classrooms

(particularly minority and low income children), increase children's sustained play, connect literacy activities to meaningful pursuits, bridge the gap between home and school interests, and allow children to actively participate in the construction of popular culture while challenging their understandings of embedded messages often perpetuated in popular culture (e.g., gender stereotypes and violence). Although this case study was too small to be over-generalized, the findings suggest noteworthy benefits and possibilities in resisting pre-packaged curricula and focusing on curricula based on children's interests.

Crawford's (2004) research highlights the negative impact of mandated packaged curricula on a primary teacher's beliefs and pedagogy. Through interviews and group discussions, Crawford follows one teacher's thinking and pedagogy: first, during her initial teaching experience at a school that focused on children's interests, developmentally appropriate practices, and teacher-created curriculum, and second, following her move to a highly-structured school with a mandated curriculum and a primary focus on passing standardized tests. Crawford notes that the primary teacher's

> understanding of the role of the teacher has changed markedly, as teaching has been transformed from a constructive process guided by the principles of developmentally appropriate practice, to a linear, systematized methodology, in which instructional choices are made according to a color-coded plan produced by the basal publisher and mediated through the endorsement of the school. (p. 209)

Crawford found that the use of a mandated curriculum had a "deskilling" effect on this educator (deskilling refers to the process where a teacher's identity shifts from a professional who develops curricula and makes autonomous decisions based on her

professional aptitudes and students' lives to a view that sees a teacher's job as merely a technical skill to be followed).

Crawford (2004) also found a shift in this teacher's image of her students. She began "seeing high expectations and strong intelligences exhibited in the context of daily life ('These are smart people who have lots of skills. And, the parents want good things for these kids.'),"" to seeing children as having "serious deficits and that teaching them requires highly directive, commercially-constructed reading curricula ('Now here, some children can't do anything. These kids need this.')" (p. 209). This study powerfully demonstrates the impact that various types of curriculum can have on the way teachers perceive their role and identity, as well as their image of children in their classroom and the experiences they provide them.

Another powerful example of a meaningful curriculum that supports democratic participation is discussed in Fischman and McLaren's (2000) article, *Expanding Democratic Choices: Schooling for Democracy: Toward a Critical Utopianism*. The authors share how the community of Porto Alegre, Brazil, created many structures to create more democratic schooling policies. "One of the most effective tools for resolving the frequent disconnection between the cultural and social frameworks of communities and schools is the use of educational thematic units, built around a central concern for the community" (p. 172). This allowed not only teachers and children to be involved in curriculum development, but also included the parents and the local community.

Shifting dominant power structures. Involving students, parents and community members in curriculum design along with teachers is just one way to shift the dominant power structures that are often prevalent in schools today. Smyth (2000) suggests that

one of the "major obstacle[s] to be overcome is the coercive character of schooling, and in particular the traditional way in which power is exercised by the teacher, which he [Kreisberg] regards as the major blockage to student empowerment" (Kreisberg, 1992, cited in Smyth, 2000, p. 500). Smyth suggests that the teacher's focus should shift from "power of position" to an "expertise of authority." To do this, education should be based on dialogue and empowerment, built on relationships between teachers and students where together they can work to address current issues without disempowering others, and based on teachers who truly value democracy in the students' daily lives. Unfortunately, most classrooms are embedded with teacher domination, where teachers talk *at* children more than talk *with* children. Smyth says that classroom power should be "two-way and dialectical, with resistance from students" (p. 500) and that learning is a negotiated process between the teacher and student. Therefore, teachers should constantly strive to share power with their students, allowing them to help shape the classroom rules, develop topics to be addressed, be involved in solving conflicts and any other ways that can help make a more democratic classroom by equitably distributing power.

Goodman's ethnographic study (1992) describes how a private elementary school in Indiana attempts to promote a more critical, democratic society in the U.S. He highlights the strong impact that can occur when administrators make a deliberate attempt to shift dominant power structures where children, parents, and teachers are allowed to participate in decision-making about all aspects of the functioning of the school, including school rules, curriculum, community projects, and children's individual work.

He also highlights some of the challenges that occur with this type of approach to schooling (e.g., it is "labor intensive" and requires "emotional intensity," p. 82).

Goodman illustrates how schools can serve as sites where children are able to be active participants in their learning and school life, rather than passive followers of other's agendas. This type of education seems to give them the tools to be productive citizens in a democracy in the future. A similar approach could be used in a preschool setting where teachers, children and administrators share power and responsibility in the functioning of the school.

Model for social justice and social responsibility versus focusing only on individual rights. In a year-long study with her preschool children, Vasquez (2004) shows that another way to support democratic classrooms is to base teaching on a model for social justice and social responsibility, rather than focusing on the traditional model based on individual rights. Teachers and students must *not* treat issues of equity and social justice as "other people's problems outside the classroom" (Smyth, 2000, p. 501). They must make a commitment to building relationships that promote respect and represent every child's cultural heritage as well as take an active resistance to oppressive and unjust acts that occur in our schools. Smyth explains that teachers can promote democracy and social justice by,

> engaging students with the big questions that fire the imagination and the forces that shape their lives...for example, in areas of high unemployment, teachers...might engage their students with questions such as: What work is here? Why are there no industries? How can we get higher unemployment benefits? Although questions such as these do not have ready answers, they are a starting

point for students to see beyond victim-blaming responses to what is occurring. (p. 502)

In *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education: Social Justice and Revolution*, Cannella (1997) argues that the current construction of the "child" is "psychologically and physically distinct from other human beings" (p.162). She explains:

This construct has separated us, denying our human connections. Living within this construct, those who are younger have been controlled, oppressed, labeled, and limited. Their voices have been silenced under the weight of 'adult' psychological, educational, and policy constructions of and for them. (p. 162).

Cannella recommends rejecting this notion of childhood as the basis for our decisions in the field and instead making "social justice and equity as human rights for those who are younger" (p. 163) the foundation for this new conceptualization of early childhood education. She suggests several ways to work towards this new model of early childhood education for social justice including, "a struggle to learn how to respect others, the recognition of multiple realities, the belief in the inhumanity of creating others as objects, the practice of radical democracy, and the willingness to take revolutionary action" (p. 169). Cannella deconstructs the current conceptualization of childhood education and suggests possibilities for the future. Her theoretical propositions for a social justice model of early childhood education opens up many possibilities for future research.

Cassidy, Chu and Dahlsgaard's (1997) research examines what factors children consider in reasoning about moral issues and specifically whether they consider issues of social justice and care. According to Cassidy et al., previous research suggests that preschoolers are unable to adopt social justice and care orientations. For example,

"Piaget (1932) proposed that preschool children perceive rules as permanent and unchanging. He claimed that rules are followed by these children merely because they are an edict of authority" (p. 420). Cassidy et al.'s results refute this argument and suggest that children are, in fact, very capable of recognizing and reasoning about moral dilemmas. Perhaps more importantly, the results indicate that preschool-age children are able to resolve moral conflicts with *both* justice and care orientations. The study was conducted with thirty-one preschoolers who were each read four stories containing moral dilemmas and then asked how to resolve the situations. The interview data was transcribed and analyzed for the results, which indicate (Cassidy et al.):

> [The preschoolers] appear to be capable of considering not only issues of relationship, responsibility and feelings, but also rights, justice and fairness. These data lend further support to the idea that preschool children analyze social contexts and make judgments based on their interpretations of varied, and sometimes competing, issues. (p. 429)

This study lends support to Cannella's (1997) proposal that the voices of younger human beings should no longer be silenced; rather children should participate in conflicts and issues that arise in school and are capable of viewing situations from multiple frames, including a social justice orientation.

Critical approach to teaching and learning. Critical teaching is necessary for both democracy and social justice. There is much literature that supports the need for teachers to involve students with issues and questions that emerge outside of the classroom (Bigelow, 1992; Chomsky, 1994; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2004; Smyth, 2000; Vasquez, 2004). Bigelow includes an example of how a teacher created a critical and

participatory democracy in his classroom "through a dialogical approach to teaching in which he [Bigelow] has his students critique the larger society by probing the social factors that make and limit their lives, who they are, and who they could be" (as cited in Smyth, p. 507). He goes on to say that "teachers and students should question their own role in maintaining the status quo and confront the dynamic of power and the role of resistance" (p. 507). Teachers should help students in "understanding the production of one's own knowledge and... the exploration of culturally validated knowledge; and understanding the patterns and relationships that support the lived world" (Kincheloe, Slattery, & Steinberg, as cited in Fischman & McLaren, 2000, p. 177). In other words, critical teaching extends beyond the typical state mandated curriculum to a more ideal democratic model.

Therefore, in a democratic school community, teachers and children actively examine issues in a variety of ways through the development of their critical literacy skills. According to Vasquez (2004), critical literacy means "looking at an issue or topic in different ways, analyzing it, and hopefully being able to suggest possibilities for change or improvement" (p. 30). Vasquez writes, "a critical literacy curriculum needs to be lived. It arises from the social and political conditions that unfold in communities in which we live" (2004, p. 1). In this framework teachers view life as political and develop curricula that support these critical perspectives, but also help children develop their own critical literacies in the classroom, school, and surrounding neighborhood communities.

According to Bartoleme (1999), teachers should work for political clarity, "the process by which individuals achieve a deepening awareness of the sociopolitical and economic realities that shape their lives and their capacity to recreate them" (p. 235). As

democratic teachers with a critical perspective, it is necessary to "effectively create, adopt, and modify teaching strategies that simultaneously respect and challenge learners from diverse cultural groups" (Bartolome, p. 235) so that they are able to see and participate in the possibilities for change.

With critical literacy at the heart of a democratic curriculum, learning becomes "a process of adjusting and reconstructing what we know rather than of accumulating information" (Vasquez, 2004, p.1) and centers on issues of social justice and social change, moving beyond traditional education.

Reconceptualizing teacher education. According to the literature, in order to promote democracy, teacher education must be reconceptualized. Giroux and McLaren (1996) propose a reconceptualization of teacher education programs which will view teachers as "transformative intellectuals" (p. 301) and schooling as spaces for an ongoing struggle for democracy. Giroux and McLaren aim to "resurrect" Dewey's notions of democratic schooling and to develop a theoretical perspective that extends it even further. The authors propose a rationale for the development of teacher education programs where concern for democracy, critical citizenship and social reform is the imperative. They argue that teacher education programs should provide teachers with:

> the critical terminology and conceptual apparatus that will allow them not only to critically analyze the democratic and political shortcomings of schools, but also to develop the knowledge and skills that will advance the possibilities for generating and cultivating a deep respect for a democratic and ethically-based community.
> (p. 311)

The intention should be to change the relationships between both teacher education programs and public schools, as well as the relationship between public schools and the larger society. Giroux and McLaren propose viewing public schools as public spheres: democratic sites for debate, dialogue, and active participation, building a sense of civic responsibility and empowerment countering the dominant corporate values. The authors also suggest redefining authority in emancipatory terms where "teachers are bearers of critical knowledge, rules, and values through which they consciously articulate and problematize their relationship to each other, to students, to subject matter, and to the wider community" (p. 313).

A final area that is essential for democratic classrooms and schools is the creation of more relationships between practicing teachers and academia. Smyth (2000) suggests that there is a disconnect between the two and that University faculty should "adopt" school practitioners and work with them to theorize what is going on in schools. He shares an example from the *Education for Social Justice Research Group,* which "involve[d] university faculty working with teachers and students in school settings against sexism, racism, and poverty. Their central construct is the notion of teaching for resistance" (p. 504) and then creating appropriate forms of social action. Creating stronger support for practicing teachers is an important aspect of creating democratic schools.

Kidd, Sanchez and Thorp's (2008) study examined which type of teacher education program experiences brought shifts in pre-service teachers' culturally responsive dispositions and teaching practices, leading to an increased understanding of the social justice issues that affect the children and families in their care and an expanded

understanding of the cultures different from their own. Their findings suggest five critical experiences that effect change in both teacher dispositions and their teaching practices. These experiences included pre-service teachers: 1) partaking in readings related to issues of race, culture, poverty and social justice; 2) participating in diverse internship experiences; 3) interacting with diverse families (e.g., completing home visits and gathering family stories); 4) critically reflecting on their own beliefs and practices; and 5) participating in discussion and dialogue with their classmates, professors, and professionals in the field. When only a small percentage of preschool teachers in the workforce have a bachelor's or higher degree and are not required to complete a certification program, how can such programs be made available? What roles do universities play in support of this type of program? This offers a particular challenge for advocates who want to bridge the gap between theory and practice in early childhood classrooms, develop teachers who are culturally responsive, and create schools that promote a democratic ethos.

Methods for creating a democratic preschool environment through stakeholder involvement. Additional literature and research has been devoted to presenting ways in which a more democratic early childhood environment can be created. Developing a strong democratic early care and education environment requires the involvement of all stakeholders (e.g., parents, staff, administrators, and children) and a departure from the traditional ways in which stakeholders often participate within the school. Democratic schooling is not based upon an artificial and rigid division of labor as much as a set of responsibilities that can most effectively be accomplished by collaborative efforts and trusting relationships among stakeholder groups. In the

following section of this paper, I will highlight the literature on these more progressive, democratic types of involvement.

   Develop a contextual curriculum with observation-based planning. Using a "one-size-fits-all" curriculum conflicts with democratic schooling. Consequently, in a democratic preschool community, teachers and administrators work together to develop curricula based on the specific needs and interests of the children in their care. As presented in the literature, the way in which the educators perceive and develop curricula in Reggio Emilia, Italy, can serve as a good example. As discussed in previously, the people of Reggio Emilia, Italy, intentionally developed preschools as political spaces for democracy to be practiced (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998). To reflect this purpose, they developed a dynamic curriculum in which inquiry and learning are viewed as a circular process that is always evolving. Oken-Wright and Gravett (2002) describe the process: First, teachers observe children's play and investigations and then document their experiences. Next, teachers study and interpret their documentation. Typically, this will not be done in isolation, but as a group process with children, teachers, administrators, and parents. Then, teachers will begin to make hypotheses about the children's intentions and decide either to put out provocations[10] or wait and observe for a longer period. Then the cycle repeats itself. It is a continuous process, each time bringing about new understandings.

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[10] A *provocation* can be a question, object or any sort of environmental or social presence that sparks the curiosity and emotional engagement of the children. Its purpose is to energize the intrinsic motivation of children to learn more about their world. Successful provocations lead to new and deeper expressions of children's thought and action.

Understanding the children's intentions, both explicit and embedded, through observations and dialogue is of primary importance to help support children's investigations and interests. Intentions may be *explicit* (e.g., children see a rainbow reflected in the window and begin to investigate where rainbows come from) or *embedded* (e.g., children are continuously playing "Superheros!" After documenting and interpreting their play, teachers hypothesize that the children's imbedded intent may be more about children's desire to gain power and feel a sense of control.)

In addition to the democratic nature of this type of curriculum, many researchers (e.g., Barclay-Smith, 2003; Harden & Verdeyen, 2007; Marsh, 1999; Trepanier-Street, 2000) suggest it positively affects children's learning. Observation-based planning in a meaningful context is an important starting point for a negotiated curriculum that promotes democratic learning.

Use a negotiated curriculum: Discourse, design and documentation. As described by Forman and Fyfe (1998), there are three components to a negotiated curriculum: discourse, design and documentation. *Discourse* refers to a fundamental desire to understand each other's words. "Discourse connotes a more reflective study of what is being said, a struggle to understand, where speakers constructively confront each other, experience conflict, and seek footing in a constant shift of perspectives" (p. 241). Discourse supports the belief that schools should be built on relationships and that learning can be sustained through discourse. Discourse also helps all stakeholders develop a *critical* perspective.

Design refers to any activity in which children make records of their plans or intended solution. Their design can be a drawing or can be constructed with other types

of media, and will be revisited for later experiences. Design "refers to the function of a record to communicate and not simply to the record itself. The educational value of design flows from the special attitude of the designer, an attitude of producer and communicator" (Forman & Fyfe, 1998, p. 241).

Documentation, according to Julianne Wurm (2005), "offers vital information to teachers about themselves and their students, and it brings families 'inside the story' of their children's lives at schools and can create a testimony of work done with children as it is collected over time" (p. 106). There are multiple purposes for using documentation. These include interpreting a child's actions**;** interpreting teachers' actions**;** creating a shared understanding**;** making children's strong capabilities visible; interpreting the significance children put on their experiences; striving to understand children's theories, interests, and intentions**;** challenging our assumptions and altering our expectations**;** and begetting questions and further inquiry.

The literature on pedagogical documentation discusses the challenges (Macdonald, 2007) as well as the many benefits that occur when used in early childhood programs (Fleet, Patterson, Robertson, 2006; Macdonald, 2007; Rinaldi, 2004).

Resisting the traditional approaches to curriculum development, using a negotiated curriculum promotes democratic principles.

Develop relationship-based rather than discipline-based practices for classroom management.

…in order to develop normally, a child requires progressively more complex joint

   activity with one or more adults who have an irrational emotional relationship with the

child. Somebody's got to be crazy about that kid. That's number one. First, last, and

always. (Urie Bronfenbrenner, as cited in Shonkoff et al., 2004)

In a society that often values quick and easy techniques, behaviorism has become

a U.S. phenomenon shaping schools, work places, and even parenting (Kohn, 1993). The

core technique of behaviorism is to use positive reinforcement, particularly rewards,

praise and other extrinsic motivators to get a desired behavioral outcome. As a policy,

the most common desired outcome is social control. This reflects a deficit model of

children and corporate model of discipline, thus conflicting with democratic practices. In

fact, children are born with a desire to connect positively to the important people around

them (Kohn, 1993, 1996, 2005) and their optimal development requires environments

with supportive, nurturing, and secure relationships (Shonkoff et al., 2004).

In a democratic learning environment, teachers and administrators help children

find ways to build positive relationships with their families, friends and teachers. In

dealing with conflict or distress, their primary responsibility is to validate and

acknowledge the legitimacy of children's feelings under all circumstances. Several

researchers have shown the critical importance in developing a school based on

responsive, nurturing care rather than discipline-based behavior management (Carlson,

2006; Siegel, 1999; Shonkoff, et al., 2004).

***Support the 100 languages of children (as opposed to narrow view of skills and
learning).*** A democratic preschool community does not limit children's learning to a

small range of skills and concepts, nor privilege certain learning modalities above others.

Instead, children have the freedom to explore, question, learn and express themselves in

numerous ways. The expression "100 languages of children," developed by Loris

Malaguzzi (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998) refers to the idea that children are

equipped with a virtually unlimited number of different expressive, communicative, and

cognitive modalities, and that any truly emancipatory learning context should provide a

space for these modalities to be explored. In a democratic school, children should have

the right to access these multi-symbolic modes of thought and expression, despite the fact

that alpha-numeric forms of literacy have privileged status in conventional education.

Examples of "the 100 languages" include dance, sculpture, drawing, music, social

collaboration, political action, dramatic play, construction and so forth. A related

metaphor is that different materials (e.g., clay, wire, paint, plaster wrap) and activities

(e.g., dance, music, dramatic play) each have their own distinctive "language," waiting to

be discovered by children. As an antidote to the traditional narrow view of skills and

learning and to support a democratic learning environment, Edwards, Gandini, and

Forman (1998) believe teachers and administrators should intentionally support the many

languages that children possess.

Embrace dissonance, difference, transgression, diversity, as well as similarities

and identity of the school culture. To teach democracy can mean many things. It can

mean teaching students a fuller more complicated history, making sure silenced voices

are included in the telling; it can mean building a democratic environment for learning; it

can mean questioning stereotypes and labels; and it can mean teaching children, even the

youngest among them to question what they are learning. (Nieto, 2004, p. 100)

A democratic school community is organized to foster *dialogue* and *exchange*

with an emphasis on a free exchange of ideas, acknowledging and giving voice to

difference. This includes not only children but parents and teachers as well. According to

Dahlberg, democratic educators work "to disrupt processes of normalization, standardization and neutralization and make way for and celebrate diversity, difference and pluralism" (1999, p. 12). Grieshaber (2008) provides an argument for a new type of teaching in the 21st century:

> [Greishaber] encourages the active interruption of stereotypical performances of early childhood practitioners and children by suggesting practitioners push the boundaries of their theoretical and practical knowledge by making way for contradictions and inconsistencies that accompany all forms of diversity and difference, taking risks, and disrupting the status quo. (p. 505)

Greishaber notes several examples, as discussed in the early childhood literature, of these types of transformative practices and how they can benefit children, teachers and parents in an increasingly diverse nation and world.

Embracing differences as well as similarities, continuously challenging the status quo, and interrupting stereotypes are important and transformative practices that are essential in creating and sustaining a democratic preschool environment.

Focus on a collaborative assessment of teachers and children.

"In the United States, the practice of assessment is most often thought of as synonymous with evaluation and, in an American context, evaluation is a process of judgment, measuring or placing one work in relation to other works." (Seidel, 2001, p. 304)

Unfortunately, traditional teacher evaluations are usually arbitrary, quantifiable assessments ranging from "unacceptable" to "acceptable" teaching behaviors based on one or two observations of discrete skills, completed once or twice a year by an administrator. This type of evaluation tool, based on the assumption that it will improve

teacher's practice, contradicts the belief that teacher knowledge is primarily constructed through *ongoing* reflection and action, particularly in a collaborative learning environment (Helterbran & Fennimore, 2004; Johnson, 2004;). In addition, as Johnson (2004) explains, "norms of collegiality do not simply happen. They do not spring spontaneously out of teachers' mutual respect and concern for each other. Rather, they are carefully engineered by structuring the workplace with frequent exposure to contact and frequent opportunities for interaction" (p. 97). Instead of using the traditional forms of isolated learning and assessment, administrators and teachers in a democratic preschool use documentation for reflecting on their own work and for creating individual and collaborative goals to improve their practice. Providing teachers with *ongoing,* constructive feedback based on authentic observations and dialogue throughout the year (and not just an isolated end of year evaluation) helps build trusting relationships and supports a democratic ethos.

In a democratic learning environment, a similar approach is used for a child's assessments. Again, documentation would be an integral part of the process. Carlina Rinaldi (2004) captures the importance of non-traditional documentation in the following quote:

> Documentation, as we have developed in Reggio, does not mean to collect documents after the conclusion of experiences with children but during the course of these experiences. Traditionally, the recording and reading of memories takes place at the end of an experience and may become part of a collection of archives. For us, documentation is part of the daily life in the schools. It is one of the ways in which we create and maintain the relationships and the experiences among our

colleagues and the children. We think of documentation as an act of caring, an

act of love and interaction. We believe that both the teacher and the children are

learners. (p. 1)

The sentiment expressed by Carlina Rinaldi serves as an example of how documentation

processes can foster a caring and ongoing democratic learning environment that strives to

build a network of relationships. Unlike typical assessments given in preschools, the

purpose of this type of documentation is not to serve as a "static" record shared only at

conference time, but rather to serve as a "dynamic" tool that reveals the child's emerging

identity and provokes deepened reflection on how to support the child's ongoing

experiences at school. The contents are drawn from meaningful experiences, not

checklist-driven tests or performances. Clearly, this type of documentation allows for

ongoing reflections of teacher and student work which foster deeper understanding and

make visible a richer image of both the child and teacher, necessary qualities for creating

a democratic community.

Support children's participation as active and critical citizens and resist

dominant ideology of children as consumers or products. Children have an innate

desire to understand their world and master ways of interacting in it. By acting on the

physical and social world, children start to make connections and build understandings

about how things work. Through their actions they construct knowledge. As Gandini,

Cadwell, Hill and Schwall (2004) observe, when children can act on their questions and

theories, they develop knowledge and, most essentially, the ability to think deeply and

make meaning. In a democratic early care environment, teachers emphasize *children as*

producers, not as passive consumers.

Larry Armstrong, in an article titled *Productivity Assured—or We'll Fix Them Free* (1991), reveals a proclamation by an LA school district that their graduates (the products) will come with warranties guaranteeing their employers that they'll possess the "basic skills" needed to enter the work force or they'll be returned for remediation at the school district's expense. In a response, Blacker (1993) posits that perhaps more disturbing than the actual article, was the near universal acceptance of this treatment of humans as products amounting to an investment in human capital for economic ends.

MacNaughton, Hughes, and Smith's (2008) edited collection of case studies, titled *Young Children as Active Citizens: Principles, Policies and Pedgagogies* provides excellent examples of the possibilities in supporting children as active citizens. MacNaughton et al. explore how young children can and should actively participate in civic life and the public sphere. Their book comprises of "research-based case studies of [European and Australian] policy-makers and educators listening to young children's views and responding to them in respectful and ethical ways. Each case study…show[s] how such activity, done successfully, can support and enhance a vigorous democratic society" (p. ix). This book has important implications for all stakeholders interested in creating democratic preschool communities in the U.S.

Focus on collaborative learning where knowledge is co-constructed, rather than individualized learning based on a narrow set of skills. In a democratic learning environment, children and parents participate in collaborative learning groups. One of the founders of the Reggio Emilia schools, Loris Malaguzzi (1998), believed that children's self-identity is constructed out of relationships formed with people and things in the environment. He believed that without the group the child would not be able to

find his/her identity. This "connected or social view of identity is also reflected in the Reggio educator's talk about favoring the *circulation of ideas* among children and adults in order to promote flexibility rather than rigidity in thinking: Ideas do not simply reside in the individual in isolation" (Nimmo, 1998, p. 304). This contrasts with the dominant European American school model that is based on a belief that children come with an identity that is separate from his/her environment and relationships with others and based on the belief that learning is essentially an individual process (Sweder et al., 1998). In a democratic learning environment, it is necessary to have many collaborative learning groups built on relationships with all stakeholders.

Build children's understanding of social justice, community, equality, and democracy through projects. Traditional school curricula and pedagogy are often at odds with preparing students to be active members in a democratic society. In contrast, when teachers and administrators intentionally strive to create spaces that allow for ethical and political practice, such as can occur in the creation of collaborative projects, then democratic principles can be realized. This type of teacher would aim to support "subjective, divergent and independent interpretations of the world in contrast with linear and accumulative processs[es]" (Moss, 2006, p.109). In this view, intellectual freedom is indispensable to democratic citizenship.

The literature provides an excellent example of a project that builds children's understanding of social justice, community, equality, and democracy. In an article titled *Why We Banned Legos* (Pelo & Peloajoquin, 2006), two teachers describe a Lego project they facilitated with an after-school group of 8-year-olds. The teachers noticed that the children would build elaborate "Legotowns," but would often exclude some children

from using the legos and would only give other children a small number of the less

appealing bricks. This particular classroom shared space with a church group and over

the weekend the "Legotown" was accidentally knocked down. Consequently, the teachers

decided to use the opportunity to discuss and explore several issues with the children,

including some of "the inequities of private ownership." From a social justice

perspective, the teachers wanted to challenge some of the children's already internalized

views about private property, and the competition for resources. They wanted to

introduce concepts such as democratic participation, resource-sharing, collaboration, and

social justice. The article highlighted the rich experience of this project and how the

children developed a new ethic for Legotown. This serves as a powerful example of how

preschoolers can learn about issues of social justice and equality issues through projects.

Build community alliances. Creating a democratic early care and education

environment can be a benefit, not only to the children and families it serves, but to the

entire community, as well. Several researchers (Dodd & Lilly, 2000; Freeman & King,

2001; Gigliotti, Morris, Smock, et al., 2005) have written about the positive effects

community projects have produced. For example, Freeman & King (2001) document the

positive outcomes produced during a community project where a group of four and five

year-olds visited a senior center once a week to read with their senior citizen "book-

buddies." Some of the benefits included: providing children meaningful practice using

their budding literacy skills, building authentic relationships among children and adults,

and helping children develop into active participants in community.

Gigliotti, Morris and Smock et al. (2005) discuss another example of how

involving the community can be beneficial; their research examined a summer program

that brought together preschool children and adults with dementia and showed how all stakeholders involved in the project (e.g., parents, children, staff, and patients with dementia) profited from the experience.

As suggested in the literature and described in the sections above, the creation of a democratic early childhood educational environment requires a network of relationships where all stakeholders actively participate and support the functioning of the school.

Conclusion

The field of early childhood education and its importance for sustaining and building a democratic society is clearly an area that needs greater research attention in the future. At a time when U.S. early childhood education is increasingly needed by the majority of families, yet continues to be unequal and disjointed, we must begin to carefully examine and re-imagine the purposes of schooling. Although creating a democratic early care and education environment has many challenges, the literature summarized above provides ideas, support and evidence for the numerous ways in which a democratic preschool can be conceived, established and maintained.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I describe in detail the design of my case study, research questions, context of the study, overview of participants, methods for data generation and analysis, and issues of confidentiality and validity. I conclude with a summary of the upcoming chapters.

Case Study Formulation and Design

I selected instrumental case study for my research design. The primary purpose of an *instrumental case study* is to gain understanding of and insight into a particular issue or topic by studying a particular case (Stake, 1995). I used case study design to explore the concept of democracy in one non-profit, U.S. preschool program. Democracy is a rather elusive term that has many different forms and meanings to different people and communities and has been largely left out of current U.S. discourse on early childhood education. A single, instrumental case study design (Stake, 2005) seemed to be the best choice for my dissertation because it allowed for in-depth exploration into democracy to see how it was socially enacted within one particular preschool community during one specific period of time. In other words, this type of case study design allowed me to explore and illuminate how one self-described democratic preschool community (including children, faculty, and parents) experiences, constructs, and practices democracy in their unique cultural context, highlighting both the possibilities and the

challenges that arise with such an undertaking. From a critical perspective, I also tried to uncover some of the implicit factors that may have shaped participant experiences.

Case study research design was also selected because, as an early childhood education-researcher, this design allowed me to explore a preschool community and the concept of democracy in a holistic and context-sensitive way and to see the varied influences, perspectives, and dynamics that operate in each instance (e.g., the time frame of my research). Stake, a leading case-study researcher in the U.S., describes case study design in an interpretive paradigm (Bassey, p. 27). Stake explains that "case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied" (2005, p. 443) and that a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry (p. 444)…To study a case [is to] study its particularity and complexity…coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" and contained within a bounded system (Stake, 1995, p. xi).

The primary unit of study for this case study was a preschool classroom (3 & 4 year olds) in a mid-sized city in the eastern part of the U.S. The primary social actors in this case study include: 1) co-teachers in the Gardenia classroom, 2) children from the Gardenia classroom, 3) the studio teacher, 4) the director of early childhood program, 5) the executive director of the school, and 6) five parents in the community. Secondary actors included in the case study were the co-teachers, children, and parents in the other four preschool classrooms.

In the hopes of capturing the lived experiences of the Springhill teachers and children, along with the unique socio-cultural, political, and historical context in which

they are situated, my research was also influenced by ethnographic traditions.[11] In this way, I attempted to,

> marinate…in the minutiae of an institution—to experience its customs and practices, its successes and its failings, as those who live it every day do. This immersion sharpens our intuitions and provides innumerable clues about how the institution fits together and how it adapts to its environment. (Putnam, 1993, p. 12)

Buchbinder, Longhofer, Barrett, Lawson, and Floersch (2006) suggest that ethnographic approaches to research are well-suited for child care settings because of their many different purposes,

> …including the elicitation of cultural knowledge, the holistic analysis of societies, and the understanding of social interactions and meaning-making (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983)… In interpreting social behavior, ethnography privileges contexts and meaning, as well as the systems of power that constrain them (Agar, 1996)…Ethnography involves the intensive, continuous, and often microscopic observation of small samples (Corsaro, 1996). (p. 48)

To fully explore the topic of democracy as it functioned in the Springhill community during the 2009-2010 school year, I aimed to understand both the macro-processes (structure and larger context, rituals, and traditions) and micro-processes (the various perspectives, meanings, intentions, and shared understandings) that shape the daily interactions, relationships, and practices of the school community. As part of the

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[11] It should be noted that, while I did not spend several years at the school, which is the length of time that as often expected in the ethnographic research tradition, I nonetheless consider myself influenced by ethnographic methods.

writing process, my goal was to construct a tapestry of these different voices, actions, and meanings (including the children's voices) to fully describe this unique case.

Research Questions

The primary research question I used to guide my study was: How does the school culture support and hinder democratic practices in preschool classrooms? Some sub-questions included: How does the overall school structure foster or devalue democratic principles? How does the curriculum support or hinder democracy? How do classroom management, decision-making, and discipline practices reflect or contradict democratic principles? How do the children's interactions and activities build or discourage children's experiences and understandings of democracy? What are the teachers' and parents' roles in the school, and how do teachers and parents influence the school culture? How do corporate, consumer, and popular culture values influence preschool education?

Context of the Study

To capture a fully detailed and multi-layered portrait of the school community's experiences and how participants practice and understand democracy, I proceeded with a single-case design.

Site selection. In selecting a school, I sought out suggestions from many early childhood professionals across the country, talked to several directors, and visited several programs. I searched the NAREA (North American Reggio Emilia Alliance) website that lists information on schools (Reggio-Emila inspired programs) throughout the United States that are members of this alliance, and from there, examined the link to various school websites. Through this process, I found a handful of schools that self-described as

at least, in part, democratic. From there, I explored these schools further and continued to narrow my options. For example, one preschool cooperative program had written an article about their "democratic community" in an early childhood publication, but upon meeting with the director and touring the school, I felt there was too great a disconnect between their written philosophy and their actual implementation and lived experience.

Another program that was originally interested in participating in my research became hesitant when they discovered that their NAEYC accreditation process would fall at the same time as my field work and worried that it would be too much for their faculty to take on simultaneously. I also met with a school that had an interesting public/private school partnership with a democratic structure, however I felt there were too many other structural constraints (e.g., set curriculum, strict adherence to state standards) to fully explore the topic of democracy, especially because my primary interest was in exploring how democratic forms of curricular and pedagogical practice shape children's and teachers experiences, not just structural democracy. Finding a preschool with democratic values and/or a democratic mission was more challenging than I had anticipated. Yet, just as I began to fear that I would not find the right setting for this case study, I went back to NAREA's website. After reading some information about Springhill's preschool program on the NAREA website's "map of schools and organizations," it seemed that they had a democratic philosophy and they also said they welcomed visitors. To further investigate, I went to their website and read the posted articles and information about their school mission, values, curriculum, and educational approach. I also looked at their faculty and discovered that the director of early childhood education had co-written a chapter of a book on collaborative learning and teaching which I used in weekly meetings

while I was a director of a child care center with my new teacher group, as a catalyst for

discussion. On paper, Springhill looked like a good prospect, so I called Mary, the

director of early childhood education at Springhill at Stonewood to find out a little bit

more about their program and to see if they would be interested in participating in my

research. Mary was immediately responsive and open to my research project. After

checking with the rest of the faculty, she expressed their willingness to participate in the

project and expressed how they looked forward both to having me at their school and

learning from this research project themselves (their reflective, constant interest in

learning remained steadfast throughout my entire experience with them). My final

decision on school selection was based not only on researching that school's program, but

also in part upon an intuitive process of what felt like the right match (e.g., a school that

was open to the research process, that actively pursued their democratic vision of

community, and was a fairly established program).

The Springhill at Stonewood School, located in a mid-sized city in the eastern part

of the United States, is a high-quality program that intentionally strives to create a

democratic community. Their school's philosophy illustrates, in part, why I selected

their program for this exploratory study: "At Springhill at Stonewood, the learner is a

member of a *democratic community* that provides support and collaboration so that no

child, teacher, or parent learns in isolation. In our approach, everyone teaches and

everyone learns" (retrieved from Springhill's website, 2010). It wasn't until I began my

field work that I came to see how closely Springhill's officially declared values and

philosophies reflected their actual daily practices.

Historical context. The Springhill preschool is rooted in a strong commitment to community. Their preschool program was founded in 1972 as a parent cooperative. Although it has had several different locations and several different directors, their founding mission and values have remained intact. During my visit in the 2009-2010 school year, the Springhill preschool was still renting space from a small church (in their basement and a small house off the church's parking lot. They had been at that location for approximately 10 years.

In 2007, the Springhill Preschool merged with the Stonewood School (an elementary and middle school program) to become The Springhill at Stonewood School. The Stonewood school was opened in 1966 and was located on a 28-acre property in the southern part of the city, adjacent to a state park. In the Fall of 2010, the Springhill preschool moved onto the previous Stonewood campus as the final transition of their merger. During my 2009-2010 fieldwork, Springhill had not yet made the move to their new campus but was in the process of making preparations.

As described in a Springhill at Stonewood document titled "History and Mission," the new school's educational mission will evolve from Springhill's mission statement[12] which reads,

> *We provide a dynamic school for young children that acknowledges children as*
>
> *powerful thinkers; brings children, faculty and parents together as researchers,*
>
> *learners and teachers; equips children to approach life and learning with energy,*
>
> *intellect and wonder, and; fosters joy in learning.* (p. 2)

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[12] The Springhill philosophy and constructivist approach to preschool education was slowly implemented into the older grades after the two programs merged. The fact that the lower and middle school programs adopted the preschool methods (instead of vice versa) is very unusual and is worthy of study in its own right.

School demographics. There are approximately 58 students enrolled in preschool classrooms (ages 2½-6), 62 students enrolled in lower school (grades K-5), and 34 enrolled in Middle school (6-8). Approximately 10% of the children are non-white. Eight percent of students receive some sort of financial aid. The school is governed by a Board of Directors, consisting of parents and community professionals, and ex officio members (e.g., executive director and director of administration). Most of the parents are socio-economically middle class and have college degrees.

The preschool hours are from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., with before- and after-school program options ranging from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. The primary schools hours are from 8:30 a.m. to 2:45 p.m. with additional options for before and after school.

Entry. After talking with Mary on the phone, I met with her in late September 2009 and toured the Stonewood campus (lower and middle school program). At that time, I also met Lisa, the executive director of the school. As Mary and I toured the school, she introduced me to the (K-8) teachers and some of the administrators. The faculty was very open and welcoming; in fact, one faculty member offered me a place to stay shortly after our meeting.

The following Monday, Mary and I met at the Springhill campus and I was introduced to the rest of the preschool faculty. There are five preschool classrooms. Three of the classrooms (the 3, 4, and 5 year-old classes) along with the studio and multipurpose room are housed in the church basement. The other two classrooms ("Forest room upstairs" and "Forest room downstairs," both with two-year-olds) are housed in a separate building (a converted house), along with two administrative offices on the opposite end of the church parking lot. Each classroom has two co-teachers.

Although I interviewed two of the four teachers in the Forest rooms and spent several days observing and documenting their experiences, my primary research focus was on the three older preschool rooms and in particular the Gardenia room.

Following introductions with the staff, Mary wrote a letter to all faculty and parents, along with an attached letter and consent forms from me inviting them to participate in the study. I set up folders outside of each classroom with mailboxes for parents and teachers to return the forms. On Monday, October 5, I attended the preschool faculty's weekly meeting and introduced myself, shared some of my background, and told them about my study. The teachers all appeared to be open and excited about the study. On Tuesday, October 6, I attended a "parent coffee" that Mary and Lisa were holding to build relationships with parents and to discuss various school issues. I introduced myself to the parents attending the coffee. I also arranged times to meet with parents in the hallway during drop-off and pick-up times so they could meet me and ask any questions they may have about their (or their child's) participation in my study. I also sent out reminder letters for parents who forgot to return the consent forms.

During my first week and one-half at Springhill, I spent one day in each of the five preschool classrooms and the studio. This gave me a better understanding of how each classroom operates and a chance to talk with the teachers in each class. To select one primary classroom in which to focus my research, I used purposeful sampling (Patton, p. 230) to select a classroom that seemed to best represent the school culture, based on the director's input, the teacher's willingness to participate, and my assessment

after "casing the joint" (Dyson & Geneshi, 2005).[13] I first sought Mary's (the director of

early childhood education) input. She gave some suggestions and described each class,

but also indicated that really any of the classes would be appropriate.[14] She also

suggested talking to Alice (the studio teacher) for input because she works intimately

with the teachers in each of the classrooms. I spoke to Alice and she suggested various

classrooms, but like Mary, felt that each of the classes had certain benefits. For example,

the five-year-old classroom had an intentional "democratic project" going on involving

the classroom environment. The teachers began the year with very little furniture and

equipment in the room so that the children could collaborate and share in decisions about

how the room space would be organized and what materials would be used. In another

classroom, the children's interest in the natural outdoor spaces led them to a year-long

exploration of the outdoors. Several factors influenced my decision. For example, a

teacher in one of the classrooms was having some temporary health problems, and I

worried that she might be absent for too much of the time in which my study took place.

In addition, some of the teachers had not been at Springhill for quite as long as others. I

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[13] "Casing the Joint" as described by Dyson and Geneshi (2005, pp. 19-20) refers to the process researchers use to, "slowly but deliberately amass information about the configuration of time and space, of people, and of activity in their physical sites. Such information will allow them to transform general questions and interests about the phenomena they are curious about into particular and answerable questions. Moreover, it will help [researchers] make informed decisions about project design, that is, about what documents to collect and what people and activities to observe and interview."
[14] This was a unique experience in itself for me, as I have visited dozens of programs throughout my tenure in early childhood education, and have never seen an administrator so open and "proud" of each of their classrooms. Nor, had I previously experienced such uniformly coherent classrooms that seemed to be proud of their school. Typically, my experience has been that administrators strongly steer you into particular classrooms, or almost apologize for certain classrooms. Or, there are immediate red flags in certain classes. I immediately noticed teacher's gentle tone of voice, respect for children, and deep engagement in children's work.

decided that the Forest rooms would probably not work as the primary units of study for the intentions of this study because the children were more in the toddler age range (2-3-year-olds) instead of preschool age range (3-6-year-olds).

I found it challenging to pick one classroom. However, I ultimately decided on the 3-year-old, Gardenia room. When I visited this room, the teachers (Sophie and Jess) were very open and shared lots of information with me right away, including the reasons why they were doing certain things in the classroom. They were always very open in answering questions. Sophie has been involved with the school for nearly 20 years and Jess for 10 years, so it seemed that their classroom would be good choice. A final reason was related to the fact that the Gardenia room children were the youngest of the three preschool classrooms. Many of them had been in the toddler classrooms last year (the Forest rooms) but only attended two or three days a week. I thought selecting this class for intensive focus would provide insight into how the children are socialized into the school culture.

Participants

Researcher role. I did not have a relationship with Springhill at Stonewood Preschool prior to beginning my research other than my prior contact with Mary. I began my research in the last week of September 2009 shortly after the start of their school year[15] and continued my field work until December 15, 2009, which corresponded with their winter holiday closing (3½ weeks). I spent approximately 5-6 hours per day, five days per week at the school. I returned to the school for 10 more days in May and June until the end of their school year on June 4, 2010.

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[15] The phase-in period began on September 9, 2009 and the regular schedule began on September 15, 2009.

For my field work, I strove to be a participant observer who "shares as intimately as possible in the life and activities of the setting understudy in order to develop an insider's view of what is happening, the *emic* perspective" (Patton, p. 268). From this perspective, I strived to see and feel what it was like to be part of their school culture. For example, I often joined small groups of children and teachers working on a morning project. When necessary, I would follow-up with the teacher to briefly discuss how the project came about and/or her perceptions or reflections about the experience. While observing children, I used what Corsaro (1997) describes as a "reactive strategy;" I sat down near the children to observe but always waited for them to approach me. On the few occasions when children asked me why I was there, I explained that I was interested in finding out about their school, about all the things they were doing and learning. I explained I was a teacher too and that I wanted to share their ideas with other teachers and preschools. When they invited me into their play, I always followed their lead and I would typically only initiate conversation if I had a particular question to ask for clarification about a project, but I mainly listened and documented their experiences. By the end of the day and each day thereafter, children seemed very comfortable with me (e.g., sat in my lap, made me "tea," requested stories, and showed me their work and often invited me to take a picture). In fact, at the end of the day, each class would come together for a closing circle. Part of the daily tradition of that circle was to have children point out and acknowledge "visitors" who have joined the class for that day and thank them for coming. After several weeks of being at the school, the children started saying, "Amy's not a VISITOR!!"

In building children's trust, it was helpful that the Springhill faculty use documentation as an integral part of their program. The children were already accustomed to being photographed, video-recorded, tape-recorded, and having notes written about their work on a daily basis. It seemed to have helped children (and parents) feel more at ease with my constant jotting of notes and recording events, compared to other schools, where this type of documentation was not a such a regular occurrence.

Most of the children enjoyed having photos taken of them and oftentimes asked me to playback the pictures or videoclips of them. Occasionally, they asked me to read to them what I had written down. There was one child, Zach (discussed further in chapter 9), who sometimes did not want me to take his photo or video. In his case, I always asked him permission prior to taking a photo and would only do so if he said it was okay. By the end of the year, he would ask me to take photographs of various pieces of work of which he was proud.

Faculty. *Lisa is the Executive Director of Springhill.* Lisa has her Ph.D. in Special Education from the University of Virginia. Her research focused on the critical relationships between parents and educators. Prior to the 2007 merger of the Springhill Preschool and the Stonewood School, Lisa served as Springhill School's Director for 14 years. She was appointed Consulting Head of Stonewood School for the 2006-2007 academic-year and in 2007 became the Executive Director of Springhill at Stonewood since their merger and has remained in that position. She has been in the field of education for over 30 years and has been involved in many community grass-root efforts related to education including the start-up of a middle school for girls. Prior to heading the school, Lisa's children attended Springhill preschool.

Mary is the Director of Early Childhood Education. Mary joined the Springhill faculty in the mid-1990s. Currently, she both oversees the development and implementation of Springhill's educational program and serves as a support for the teachers. As described on their school's website,

> [Mary] has spent more than thirty years working in the early childhood field, as a teacher, teacher-researcher, program director, and consultant. Her undergraduate degree is in anthropology, and she earned her Master's in child development from Virginia Tech. Mary has visited the schools of Reggio Emilia, Italy, three times. Her writing is published in Teaching and Learning: Collaborative Exploration of the Reggio Emilia Approach and in the Early Childhood Journal."
>
> (Administration, Springhill website)

Prior to working full-time as director of early education, Mary was both a Springhill parent with children enrolled in their preschool program and a teacher in the preschool classrooms for many years.

Alice is the Atelierista (also referred to as the Studio Teacher). Alice has been teaching at Springhill since 1996. Several years ago, she moved into the full-time atelierista role. Alice has created a studio blog for, "people from around the world who are interested in progressive education" (Alice, Atelierista: Stories from the Studio, 2009). She explains her role (which is not a typical position offered in most U.S. preschool programs) on her studio blog (August 17, 2009):

> [The atelierista position] is a job that combines my experience as an artist with my interest in teaching. I help the children make their ideas visible by showing them media and techniques, by asking them questions and setting out provocations that

might help them take their ideas further. I help the teachers follow the childrens'

theories by assisting with documentation and suggesting media, materials and

avenues that might work well in each situation. Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the

Reggio Schools, described the *atelier* as a laboratory: "a place for researching

motivations and theories of children from scribbles on up, a place for exploring

variations in tools, techniques and materials with which to work." In other words,

the studio is a place for children to explore media and ideas and a place for

teachers to try to understand children's intentions, thinking and learning. For

Malaguzzi, it was very important to respect the "plurality and connections" in all

of the expressive media that children might use, an idea that he expressed more

fully in his "Hundred Languages of Children." My goal is to expand both

children's and grown-ups' understanding of the media (which become languages)

that children can use to communicate.

In this role, Alice works with all five of the preschool classrooms. She has a fine

arts degree in photography and works with a variety of media (e.g., paint, printmaking).

She also has a Master's degree in art education, and is an adjunct professor in art

education and education at a local university.

Sophie and Jess are the co-teachers in the 3-year-old Gardenia room. Sophie was

one of the primary participants in my research. She has been teaching for over 14 years

at Springhill and was a Springhill parent prior to her teaching tenure. As described on

Springhill's website, Sophie has,

Over the years…worked with children in Ireland, Scotland, France and the United

States, both as a teacher and as a children's librarian. As part of her ongoing

fascination with education, she has visited the preschools of Reggio Emilia in Italy, established a strong relationship with a Reggio-inspired school in Northern Ireland and studied for a year with a group of Freinet teachers in France."[16] Sophie has a Bachelor's degree in both French and library studies.

Jess has been at Springhill for over 10 years and has been co-teaching with Sophie for several years. She has a Bachelor's degree in fine arts, specializing in textiles and crafts. She worked as a freelance artist for many years before joining the Springhill faculty.

Nicole is Springhill preschool's resource teacher. Nicole has been working at Springhill for over 20 years. She is currently the resource teacher but has been a classroom teacher for most of her tenure at the school. As a resource teacher she oversees the playground, and divides her time between the five preschool classrooms to support individual and small group work.

Terra and Gina were the co-teachers working in the Rainbow, 4-year-old classroom. Terra came to Springhill as a parent and currently has all three of her children attending Springhill. Her background is in nursing, and she has a Master's degree in public health administration. Terra had been teaching for two years prior to my study. Her co-teacher, Gina, has a Bachelor's degree in crafts and art education with both a

---

[16] Celestin Freinet was a French progressive philosopher and educator (1896-1966). His pedagogy emphasized natural and inductive methods that support children's interests and curiosities, productive work that involves ongoing teaching and learning, inquiry-based approaches of trial and error, and cooperative and democratic learning (Institut Cooperatif L'Ecole de Moderne, "History of Freinet," n.d.).

dance and art background. She had previously taught at another Reggio-Emilia inspired preschool program for many years. This was Gina's second year at Springhill.[17]

Children. My primary focus was on the children in the Gardenia room who ranged in age from 3 to 4 years. There were 14 children in the class, with 8 boys and 6 girls. A secondary focus was the four-year-old children in the Rainbow room and the five-year-old children in the Magnolia room. There were 16 children in the Rainbow classroom, with 8 girls and 8 boys. In the Magnolia room, there were a total of 14 children, with 8 girls and 6 boys.

Parents. In selecting parents for participation in the interviews, I tried to purposely choose parents from several different classrooms and with various experiences and perspectives. For example, I selected one parent who had several children enrolled over the last 10 years, a parent who was relatively new to the school, a parent who was also a teacher at the school, a parent who was highly involved in volunteer work for Springhill, and a parent who was less involved in the daily life of the school. I also selected parents who have unique experiences compared to other Springhill parents (e.g., a mom with a transgender child and a mom situated in a more traditional behavior-based discipline paradigm). I also sought Mary and Sophie's input on parents that they thought would be informative and forthcoming.

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[17] For a more detailed exploration of how Springhill's current faculty came together and how their personal histories contributed to their high-quality, democratic program, see the "History and Evolution of Springhill as an Exemplar Program" in chapter 11.

Data Generation and Analysis

In entering the Springhill preschool and beginning my research, I tried to remain open to the unique ways in which they come to understand and practice democracy within their school context. As Liberman describes (as cited in Ezzy, 2002, p. 60):

Openness to transformation means openness to *the local contingencies* that complicate one's agenda and may even force one to reset or abandon one's priorities. The contingencies of field inquiry are not to be viewed only as obstacles to one's inquiries but as opportunities to learn which inquiries are the ones that really matter. These contingencies should be celebrated, for they are where all real discoveries lie (Liberman 1999:50).

Thus from the beginning of this research process, I integrated data collection and analysis together in a nonlinear fashion. In the process, I strived to be both descriptive and interpretive in order to create a multi-layered, multi-voiced narrative of Springhill's democratic culture.

Data generation. To support the validity of my interpretations, I triangulated my data. As described in Shank (2002), *triangulation* is,

the process of converging on a particular finding by using different sorts of data and data-gathering strategies. Each set of data or strategy, on its own, might not be strong enough to support the finding. When these different "strands" are taken together, though, there is stronger evidence for the finding. (p. 134-135)

Or as Stake puts it, triangulation is "working to substantiate an interpretation or to clarify its different meanings" (Stake, 1995, p. 173). To create a full narrative report and

to triangulate my data, I collected multiple forms and sources of data. I will briefly

describe below the different types of data I collected/generated:

First, I collected field notes based on observations of the children's play,

interactions, and overall routines and participation in the daily life of the classroom (Fine

& Sandstrom, 1988). Each day, I brought a notepad into the classroom and took notes.

When I returned home from school each day, I typed up my notes and added them to my

ongoing field report.[18]

Second, I generated field notes based on my observations of the teacher's daily

routines and practices, including their curriculum approaches, scheduling of activities,

approaches to conflict and discipline,[19] overall management of the classroom, and

interactions with children, co-teachers, administration, and parents. These observational

notes were also typed up and became integrated into the aforementioned field report.

Third, I collected field notes on several *group meetings* that took place with the

adults in the community. For example, at least once a week after school, teachers had a

planning meeting with their co-teacher. (They referred to these meetings as "Pod"

meetings.) I took notes during several of these *Pod meetings*, typed them up, and

incorporated them into my field report. I primarily attended the Gardenia room's

planning meetings because it was my primary unit of study. However, I also attended

some planning meetings in other classrooms (e.g., a meeting between co-teachers in the

Forest room upstairs; and a joint planning meeting with the Forest room upstairs, Forest

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[18] As I typed up my field notes for my field report I developed them into "thick
descriptions" (Graue and Walsh, 1998; Patton, 2002) which I will discuss in more detail
in the "data analysis" section of this chapter.
[19] While developing field notes on these approaches, I did not go in with a priori codes,
but approached field notes based on observations and previous experiences.

room downstairs, the studio teacher, and Mary) to gain a variety of perspectives and to see how the groups functioned similarly and differently within various classrooms.

I also attended and collected field notes on several faculty meetings and parent meetings. Each Monday afternoon at around12:30 p.m. the teachers and Mary (and oftentimes Lisa) gather for a *faculty meeting* lasting between 1½ to 2 hours. During the first few meetings I took notes during the meeting, went home and typed them up and incorporated them into my field report. However, after the teachers seemed to be sufficiently comfortable with me, I started recording their meetings on a digital recorder to gain a closer look at the subtle dynamics of the group that I may have missed with note-taking alone. This process allowed me to focus on different aspects of the meeting such as turn-taking and/or body language on which I was unable to focus while simultaneously trying to write down the words being spoken. Although I was unable to attend a faculty meeting in May which focused specifically on a discussion around small group work, the teachers (who also regularly record their meetings) provided me with a digital copy of this meeting which I later transcribed and added to my data records. I also transcribed three of the faculty meetings after completing my field work at the school (one in November 2009 and two in May 2010).

In addition, I attended and took field notes during several of the school functions held for *parents* throughout the year. These included: a "Parent Coffee" held by Lisa and Mary that was set up as an opportunity to foster school communication, build relationships, share information, and garner ideas from parents; a "Parent Circle," which was a night meeting that focused on a discussion around children's conflict and aggression; and a "Parent Evening (K-4): Constructivist Classroom" held by faculty and

administration to share with parents how they came to develop their new progressive

literacy program, including examples of its implementation in each of the classrooms.

From each of the parent group meetings, I typed up my notes and incorporated them into

my field report.

Fourth, I collected for examination and analysis various types of *artifacts* (or

personal and public documents) related to Springhill's program including teacher's

documentation, schedules, lesson plans, Springhill blogs, group emails from parents and

teachers, children's portfolios and journals, assessments, state standards (Five Star

Program), memos, and children's work (Graue & Walsh, 1998).

The ongoing documentation that teachers wrote throughout the year ended up

being an essential data source for my research, in particular helping me to understand the

intentions and thought processes behind both teacher's thinking and children's projects.[20]

Throughout the year, the teachers in the preschool classrooms emailed me copies of their

documentation which I downloaded and printed, including all of the Gardenia room's

documentation for the entire 2009-2010 school year.

In each of the preschool classrooms, the teachers kept binders of past years'

documentation of significant experiences and projects undertaken with that particular

year's group of children. I examined several classrooms' documentation, but specifically

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[20] As described on Springhill's website ("Documentation," 2010): "Through
documentation [the Springhill teachers] capture traces of the visual, verbal, cognitive and
sometimes even the meta-cognitive processes present in the classroom. This
documentation serves as the basis for our own reflection and articulation of the journey
undertaken by the class as students work, play, research, explore and experience their
environment in groups. Documentation is shared on panels in the classroom, on the
teachers' blogs at the Springhill at Stony Point website and through teachers' informal
presentation evenings with parents."

photocopied the Gardenia room's yearly documentation to add to my data records, starting from the 2002-2003 school-year to the end of 2010, to help illuminate past threads and to trace the history (and evolution) of the program.

I also collected documents from two ongoing blogs created by Springhill community members. Each year the Springhill faculty participates in a collaborative research project on a shared topic, called an "Umbrella Project." The faculty and parents keep an ongoing blog about this ongoing investigation and share how it is manifesting in the various classrooms. I downloaded and placed in a binder each of their blog entries for the 2008-2009 school year for later interpretation. The second blog was created by Alice, the atelierista. She created the blog to share her work (including her questions, theories, reflections) in the studio and to highlight (and make sense of) the children's studio experiences. I downloaded and printed her blog entries from the 2009-2010 school year and included them in my data record.

I was included on the group listserv and received classroom emails where faculty and parents engage in ongoing dialogue related to classroom investigations and project work. This data source allowed me to hear multiple voices in the community as well as how adults in the community participate in the learning process.

Mary, the director of early childhood education, also gave me full access to documents in her office that helped shed light on their school culture, including articles and handouts used with parents and teachers, orientation packets for parents, orientation schedule and meetings for new teachers, board minutes, old VHS tapes of past projects, written documents on their philosophy and approach, fundraising documents, board

minutes, and documentation panels of past years' projects. I carefully examined the materials and made copies of pertinent documents and added them to my data record.

Another source for my data record includes the articles and materials provided on Springhill's school website. For example, several different faculty members have written articles about Springhill's educational program, and they were featured on the school website's "Faculty Forum." Some of the article titles include: "Teachers as Researchers," "We Each Teach," "A Democratic Education," "The Social Constructivist Classroom," and "Our Inquiry Into Place."

Children's journals and portfolios[21] were also a useful source in generating data. The children keep the same portfolio for all of the years they are at Springhill. The portfolio remains with them each year as they move into new classrooms. I explored many of the children's portfolios and specifically made photos of two children's entire portfolios in the Gardenia room from the time when they started at Springhill (in the Forest rooms) until the end of the 2009-2010 school year. This gave me insight into what type of work or experiences the teachers perceive as worthy of documenting and leaving in each child's records (e.g., collaborative endeavors, development of children over time, processes of constructing knowledge, specific interests of that child).

Fifth, photographs and video-recordings were collected during my field work and incorporated into my data record. Each day during my field work I carried a camera and

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[21] At Springhill, the portfolio is "a collection of each child's most significant work—is an artifact of the child's experience in class and an assessment tool that documents the continuum of his or her learning. Many pieces include reflections by the classroom teachers. The portfolio allows children to reflect on their own learning as they share their portfolio with others and discuss the significance of the projects in which they have engaged. Children select pieces to be included in their portfolios, further extending the possibilities for reflection." (Springhill Website, "How We Know What Children Know," 2010)

video-camera around my neck. I photographed and videotaped children's experiences, their interactions between children and teachers, small group experiences, room arrangements, and/or any aspect of the classroom that seemed salient. When I returned home, I downloaded all of my photographs and video clips and created a file folder for each day's recordings. I labeled each picture and wrote a short descriptive tag. I also placed reference markers in my field record in order to correlate specific video clips and photographs within their appropriately-ordered sequence of time. Later (after I completed my field work) I transcribed some of the video clips into text for further "readings of" and interpretation of the data. (I will discuss this further in the following section). It should be noted, that I did not begin video-taping during the first week or so, to allow time to build trust with participants and to wait until the IRB consent forms were returned.

Sixth, I recorded and transcribed interviews with teachers, administrators, and selected parents. I used the *interview guide approach,* as discussed in Patton (2002, p. 349) where "topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, in outline form; interviewer decides sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview." For an example of the interview questions that I used to guide the interview process, see Appendix B. During a faculty meeting in early October 2009, I asked the teachers that were interested to please sign up for an interview. I placed a sign-up sheet in the hallway (as well as passing it around in the meeting) for teachers to pick a time most convenient for them. Some of the teachers asked me about the questions ahead of time, so I decided to send them to all teachers over an email prior to their interviews. I had them choose the location in which they were most comfortable for doing the interview. A couple of the

teachers chose a nearby coffee shop, but the majority of teachers selected their classroom or offices in the school. In total, I interviewed six classroom teachers, the resource teacher, the studio teacher, the director of early childhood education, and the executive director. Although I originally intended them to last approximately 30 minutes, most of the interviews ended up lasting between 1½ to 2 hours. During the interviews, I also included questions that were not initially included on my interview guide, but were relevant to my research questions. For example, during my interviews I asked teachers to tell me about some of the specific strategies which I observed them using with the children and their intentions behind them; I asked clarification questions, such as some of the meanings and background behind some of the shared language they used (e.g., "thinking pens," "checking-in," "messing about"); I asked them questions related to specific incidents or stories that had been shared with me informally (e.g., information on the history of traditions like the "Springhill dragon's visit"); and I asked questions about critical incidences and significant topics at the school (e.g., the conflict around children's gun play) to garner a variety of perspectives within the community.

Beyond informal conversations with parents after school, I also formally interviewed, recorded, and later transcribed interviews with five of the Springhill parents with children enrolled in their program. I arranged the parent interviews around their schedules. Two of the parent interviews did not take place face-to-face because of scheduling issues. Instead, one parent did the interview over the phone, and the other parent answered questions in a back-and-forth email exchange (see Appendix C for sample interview questions). Most of the parent interviews took place in May and June 2010 so I also had several questions that went beyond the protocol and were specific to

that particular family. For example, one of the Gardenia room children had an unusually close relationship with a girl from the Magnolia room. I was interested in how this friendship initially began and asked the parent to tell me about their relationship. All interviews were transcribed and added to my data records.

Upon finishing my data collection and generating a massive/substantial data record, I took several weeks to simply read and reread the data (as well as review the photographs and replay all of the video-clips I had recorded). I will describe the process in which I undertook in the analysis of all this data in the following section.

Data analysis. After completing my field work, it took me nearly one year to fully interpret the data. I approached the task of analyzing my data with three considerations. First, I aimed to understand the situated meaning and perspectives specific to the participants in Springhill's democratic community. Second, I tried to locate those situated meanings "interpretively within [the] broader social, cultural and political contexts" (Ezzy, p. 102). Third, I proceeded with my data interpretation under the assumption that "theory is developed through a continuous movement between preexisting interpretive frameworks, both theoretical and popular, and the data of observation, collected during both initial observation and everyday life" (Ezzy, 2002, p. 25). In this case study, "continuous movement" was between my preexisting theories of democracy and the "local contingencies" of this particular case.

The process of analysis I describe in this section is primarily a process of *description and interpretation.* This is to differentiate my approach from the kind of analysis that involves more in the way of *taking apart and fragmenting the data,* for the primary purposes of deriving generalizable content for theory-construction. As I am

using the term, "interpretation" involves a reflexive and recursive process of *preserving the narrative coherence of the Springhill experience.* Put another way, my process was more about meaning-making and contextualizing the data than about strictly creating codes and typologies in which to fit the data.

In using this interpretive approach, I tried to remain flexible in employing a diversity of analytic tools (e.g., creating thick descriptions, memoing, internal and external coding, video clip analysis, and writing), to best "synthesize and illuminate" (Shank, 2002) this unique case. This interpretive process began as soon as I started generating data and continued well after I had completed my fieldwork. I will describe this process below.

Thick descriptions and memos. One of the first phases of the interpretation process actually started simultaneously with the data collection. As I began typing up my field notes into a field report (as described above), I created thick descriptions (Geertz, 1973).[22] As described by Denzin (as cited in Graue and Walsh, 1998),

> Thick description…does more than record what a person is doing. It goes beyond mere fact and surface appearances. It presents detail, context, emotion, and the webs of social relationships that join persons to one another. Thick description evokes emotionality and self-feelings. It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience, or the sequence of events, for the person or persons in question. (p. 134)

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[22] Thick description goes beyond mere description. According to Shank (2002), thick description "is an interpretive process that seeks to understand a phenomenon in its fullest meaningful context" (p. 75). In other words, the aim of thick description is to make meaning clear.

This process of writing thick descriptions allowed me to layer multiple meanings into a contextualized report that went beyond merely describing observed behaviors and towards a deeper understanding of how the participant's actions were situated in specific cultural settings and interactions. As described by Graue and Walsh (1998), "action is populated by meaning and intentions and is tethered to particular communities and individuals" (p. 41). In using thick descriptions I attempted to move beyond decontextualized descriptions of behaviors that remove action from their "local characteristics" (p. 41). Writing thick descriptions was an initial step I used in the process of interpreting my data.

In addition to thick descriptions, I created "memos" (Graue and Walsh, 1998; Lofland and Lofland, 1995) and incorporated them into the field report. These memos[23] included my questions and reflections, initial theories and patterns that emerged, related literature, theory, and research that seemed relevant, and links to other pieces of connected data.

In later stages of the analysis and rereading of the data, I continued to develop, elaborate, and connect significant memos together. In the process of writing and elaborating on various ideas, questions, or concepts that emerged from this "memoing" process, I was able to develop deeper understandings of Springhill's culture as it related to my research questions. To distinguish memo writing from the coding process (see

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[23] Memos are "written notes to yourself about the thoughts you have about the data and your understanding of them" (Graue and Walsh, 1998, p. 166). Lofland and Lofland (1995) describe various types of memoing as an analytic strategy, as the "written-out counterparts or explanations and elaborations of the coding categories" (p. 193). My use of memoing seemed to be less focused on delineating separate codes, although they were included in the process, and more on elaborating my thoughts, including larger social, political, and cultural implications.

below), Graue and Walsh (1998) explain that memos "are at a higher level than the codes in that they are conceptual and theoretical in nature, exploring the meaning of your observations or interviews. Memos often catalyze a new round of coding as you begin to make connections and distinctions in your understanding" (p. 166).

    Coding. Another part of my analysis involved the transcription and coding of all of the faculty and parent interviews, as well as the three recorded faculty meetings. By transcribing and reading the transcriptions multiple times, the iterative process helped me to see emerging patterns and themes in the data. In "On the Case: Approaches to Language and Literacy Research," Genishi and Dyson (2005) explain,

> Through analytic coding, researchers aim to figure out the conceptual importance
> of the human actions and reactions that have been inscribed in the data
> set…[D]ata about individuals, behaviors, and contexts will become the discursive
> substance of analytic narratives about a studied phenomenon. (p. 84)

    My coding process took on several forms, which I will describe here. During my initial coding for themes and patterns, I did not try to develop "trails of causes" so much as what Shank (2002) refers to as elucidating "facets" of the whole. To distinguish the subtle difference between a *discrete* theme (a recurring pattern that can be interpreted apart from the whole) and a "facet" (a pattern that is more tightly contextualized by the whole), Shank offers the following suggestive clarification:

> Each facet provides an angle to look at and understand the diamond, but it retains
> the nature of the diamond as a whole…Facets are the sides and angles that they
> turn to the world...People and phenomena are complex, and we can only see parts
> of them at any given time. These parts, however, enhance the whole, much as a

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facet cut heightens the sheen..and [in the process] creates new angles for seeing.

(p. 139)

As part of my case study analysis, I attempted to illuminate the important "facets" or themes of Springhill's democratic culture made visible in the process of coding my data record. Many of the "facets" or (descriptive threads) presented in this study emerged from *internally-derived* codes (Graue and Walsh, 1998), or "issues that come up within your reading of the data" (p. 163). As part of my internal coding process, I searched the data for recurring issues and events that seemed to be "salient" (Graue and Walsh) to both me as the researcher and to those being researched. For example, during my interviews several teachers and parents mentioned their special tradition where the "Springhill Dragon" makes a yearly visit to the school. The tradition seemed to hold much significance to community members, so I started coding my various forms of data each time this tradition was discussed. By focusing on this particular "salient code," I was able to see how (both individually and as a group) Springhill community members participate in this tradition of creating shared memories, as well as supporting children's right to transform the tradition.

I also used *externally derived* codes "which can be seen as codes that come out of theoretical and conceptual perspectives brought to this project" (p. 163). These external codes will be discussed further in the following paragraph. Often these internal and external codes overlapped, but exploring the data from multiple frames helped me to think both about "externally-derived" conceptions of democracy, as well as "internally-derived" threads and patterns that I had not considered prior to data generation and analysis. In other words, I searched my data for the pedagogical, curricular, and

structural aspects of democracy (using my research questions, definition of democracy,[24] and topical outline as a guide), as well as striving to uncover the many facets that shed light on their unique culture. For example, "slowing down as an intentional teaching practice" was a recurring thread that continued to emerge from the data. This "slowing down" process came up in interviews, documentation, and classroom practices I observed. While ultimately I came to interpret this process of slowing down as important for democratic practice, it was originally coded simply as a recurrent theme that was significant to their particular community and their perspective on best practices in general.

In my analysis, I used "external coding" of my data to demarcate categories and themes that emerged related to my preexisting conceptual framework of democracy. As described in "Qualitative Analysis: Practice and Innovation" (Ezzy, 2002), the data gathering and interpretive process "recognizes the importance of discovery," but also "engages with the effect of preexisting theoretical frameworks" (p. 30). Democratic theory (as discussed in chapter 1 and 2) informed my data collection, analysis, and writing. As the intention of this study was to explore democracy in one particular setting, I entered the data collection phase with a certain conceptual framework of the different theories and research on democracy, with a working definition of educational democracy described in chapter 1. I used this working definition heuristically to help me explore my research questions and analyze the data, in an attempt to sensitize and broaden my observational scope to include a variety of phenomena relevant to my investigation. To clarify, my purpose was *not* to substantiate an unwavering definition of democracy, but to

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[24] See the "Overview of Study and Rationale" section in chapter 1 for my definition of democratic educational practice.

use the concept of democracy as a reflective, analytic and framing tool, put to the service of the narratives (and not the other way around). By pulling out implications from a democratic perspective, my hope was to add another layer of meaning to my interpretation and the discourse on early childhood education.

As I explored the data, I tried to discover not only the possibilities that arise out of democratic cultures, but also the challenges that may hinder the pursuit of democratic values and practices, even within exemplar programs. For example, while interpreting my data, I discovered that the Springhill faculty's process of sharing their documentation with parents so they can participate in the ongoing discourse on children's classroom experiences had both positive implications and challenges for the school. As indicated in democratic theory, transparency is an important democratic value; and shared documentation of the children's learning experiences offers a high-level of transparency and facilitates the kind of co-participation among parents and teachers that is consistent with democratic practice. However, this type of democratic engagement can also be intimidating to new parents and faculty entering the program and may prevent some parents from participating in the process, reflecting an unexpected tension between the democratic values of transparency and shared participation. Thus, this well-intentioned approach to transparency and shared participation may not necessarily guarantee that all voices will contribute to the dialogue. In other words, by using a democratic frame as part of my inquiry process, I attempted to uncover some of the more subtle challenges that may arise in democratic environments.

My coding process took multiple steps and did not follow a direct, linear path. As the process developed and I completed an initial coding, I went back through the data to

create new codes, cluster, refine, and readjust my existing codes. For example, various

types of relationship-building kept emerging as I analyzed the data. However, as I

continued to connect different "facets" through the coding process, I was able to

distinguish several different critical aspects of Springhill's relationship-building

processes, and hopefully, move beyond surface-level coding.

Video clip analysis. As described in the data generation section earlier in this

chapter, I created a file for each day's video clips and photographs, labeled each clip with

a brief description, and made a connective note in my field report. While reviewing my

videoclip segments of children's conversations, interactions, play, and work, I began

selecting certain significant segments or key experiences that seemed to warrant closer

examination. To take full advantage of the rich data contained in the video clips, I

transcribed these segments and created a "text" for further "readings of" and

interpretation of the data (Reifel, 2007).[25] This interpretive process resembled, and drew

inspiration from a combination of both "microethnographic analysis" (Walsh et al., 2007)

and "hermeneutic text analysis" (Reifel, 2007) with the intent of creating an additional

layer of granularity to the interpretation of my data. According to Erickson and Wilson

(as cited in Walsh et al., 2007, pp. 56-57), a "microethnographic approach" focuses on,

> reporting the what of face to face interaction in key scenes in people's everyday
>
> lives. In addition, the microethnographic approach is concerned with the detailed
>
> analysis of how people do what they do interactionally…[It] depends upon a
>
> combination of participant observation (direct, continuous observation and

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[25] This hermeneutic approach to the interpretation of text ("text" in my particular case is children's and teacher's conversations) searches for meanings as "cultural production" where text is "negotiated socially" (Reifel, 2007, p. 29) and often requires deconstruction in order to understand the complexities and sources of meaning.

reflection, recorded in running fieldnotes) and microanalysis of…videotapes of everyday happenings in schools…(Erickson and Wilson, 1982, p. 43)."

As far as hermeneutics analysis is concerned, Reifel (2007) explains, "A hermeneutic approach requires that any narrative case be considered critically within larger theoretical contexts, including the conditions that contribute to creating the text; only then will such texts become more meaningful" (p. 26). Using a similar type of contextualizing approach seemed to be the most appropriate interpretive method for answering several of my research questions, in particular the question of "How do the children's interactions and activities build or discourage children's experiences and understandings of democracy?" This type of analysis also seemed well-suited for uncovering how teachers' perceptions of, and interactions with children reflect the teachers' decision-making priorities (e.g., as part of their small group work, conflict resolution, and classroom management), as well as how these interactions support and/or challenge democratic values.

As an example from chapter 5 of how I used a similar method of analysis, I transcribed a videoclip and relevant field notes from a "key scene" in the children's day, as the basis for a detailed analysis of a small group exchange between two 4-year-old boys and their teacher. By focusing on the details of their conversation and work, I tried to provide a multi-voiced (e.g., researcher's, teacher's, and the children's voices) and multi-layered (e.g., intersubjective, cognitive, emotional, hierarchical, critical, and structural layers) interpretation within the larger context of the democratic school culture. In other words, to best illuminate the many facets of Springhill's unique case, I tried to attend to both to the micro-details of the interactions among community members (in this

example small group work), as well as the larger macro-processes of the school-wide

culture and their structures in which meaning is historically, socio-culturally, and

politically situated. As Erikson and Wilson explain further (as cited in Walsh et al., p.

57),

> [E]ven when analytic focus is at its narrowest and most precise—in the
>
> transcription of the actions of individuals in fine grained behavioral detail—this
>
> approach emphasizes the social and cultural ecology of meaning just as does more
>
> general ethnography. This is not "micro" study in isolation from macrosocial
>
> processes, nor is it behaviorist in orientation despite its close attention to details of
>
> interactional behavior…Fundamentally, such analysis is not "micro" at all, but
>
> "macro" in its interests…(pp. 222-223).

For example, when I initially coded my data for recurring themes, the theme of "strong

image of the child" and related images (child as "powerful" and "capable") emerged from

several data sources (e.g., interview transcripts, faculty meeting discussions, and

teacher's documentation). However, I wanted to understand how, for example, teachers'

"strong image of children" looked not only at the macro-level (e.g., setting up the

environment in ways that allow children large amounts of freedom, suggesting a strong

image of children), but also how this "strong image of the child" might look

interactionally at a micro-level. By analyzing conversations between children and

teachers, I was able to illuminate some implicit meanings behind the specific words and

actions of how teachers' "strong image of the child" manifested in their interactions in

ways that were not obvious without this level of detailed analysis. For example, in

several vignettes highlighted in chapter 9, Sophie supports children as they negotiate

conflict. As the process of supporting the children's negotiations often took a significant amount of time, Sophie's approach indicated a tremendous faith in the children's capabilities in eventually solving the problem, further illustration of her strong image of the child.

While interpreting my data with this type of analytic approach, I used a critical framework, particularly relating to my research question, "How do corporate (consumer and popular culture) values influence Springhill's preschool education?" This process helped me uncover the less visible power and equity structures that were not always obvious to the social participants in my case. By using a critical lens while analyzing children's conversations, I aimed to bring forth the complexity of competing values that can arise, even within democratic school communities. For example, after coding my data record, it became evident that certain images and scripted narratives from popular culture were significantly embedded in children's conversations, drawings, and play. To further uncover these subtle influences on children's thinking and to illuminate how they unfolded in the Springhill community, I returned to specific video-clip segments and recorded field notes of children's conversations, developed them into a readable text for further in-depth analysis (and deconstruction) of the text. In this interpretive process, I used a critical gaze and focus to help shed light on how power dynamics and equity issues unfolded in their unique context, hopefully adding another layer of interpretation to my study.

Writing as analytic tool. Of final note, my data analysis did not stop before my writing began, but instead continued as an integral part of the writing process. For

example, while expanding my memos, organizing my narrative report, and creating vignettes and narratives, I often made new discoveries and understandings of the data.

In addition, throughout the writing process, I have tried to include my own voice in the form of "confessional tales" (Ezzy, 2002) where my experiences and subjectivities, as well as "the broader political and economic situatedness" (p. 139) of the case were included, creating additional layers of meaning to my interpretation**.**

Confidentiality, Trustworthiness, and Validity Issues

I developed several strategies to ensure trustworthiness and confidentiality. First, all of the participants included in the study received and signed a consent form. Second, I used pseudonyms for all of the participants in this study to protect their identity. Third, I followed the policies and guidelines required by the Institutional Review Board. Four, I tried to always respect specific requests made by participants during the study. For example, one teacher asked me not to include a certain video-clip of a situation which she thought she had not handled well. In addition, this teacher asked me not to record part of our conversation during the interview. I honored both of these requests and did not include them in my dissertation. As mentioned earlier, there were also certain occasions when one of the children in the Gardenia room did not want to be photographed. I always honored his request.

In relation to trustworthiness, throughout my research process and field work, I shared my research questions, the purposes of my study, and the topic of my investigation. On several occasions, I shared copies of my video-recordings, photographs, and transcripts of dialogue between children. I also shared links to articles

and book suggestions to various school faculty members when requested. This reflexive sharing was by no means equal, in that it seems I required more of them in the exchange.

I have included long passages of primary data in my dissertation to help the readers enter into the experiences of Springhill's school culture. As an added benefit, by including significant amounts of primary data in my dissertation, it allows readers and fellow researchers to assess my interpretations of the data, hopefully adding another layer of trustworthiness to my dissertation (Ezzy, 2002).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, I included my own subjectivities and perspectives during the research process, including the writing of confessional tales in the final analysis. In addition, by gathering multiple sources of data, I was able to triangulate my research and provide validity to my interpretations.

I used "member-checking" (Patton, 2002) when I was unclear about certain aspects of the collected data that involved teacher perspectives and or intentions. I would check-in with them to make sure I had appropriately understood their meaning. I also used "peer de-briefing" (Ezzy, 2002) to discuss my findings throughout the process.

Summary of Upcoming Chapters

As discussed in Patton (2002), I have presented my findings in a case study narrative that is a "readable, descriptive picture of or story" (p. 450) of my case. I strived to make "accessible to the reader all the information necessary to understand the case in all its uniqueness" (p. 450). I have attempted to present my findings in a holistic, contextual manner. The following chapters are arranged in the following order:

In chapter 4, "A Composite Narrative of the Springhill at Stonewood Preschool," I created a composite narrative describing several days in the life of the Springhill

community. Throughout the narrative, I included conceptual tags to mark the underpinnings of democratic practice that emerged from my observations. I concluded the chapter with a summary of the recurring themes that flowed throughout my analysis of Springhill's culture.

In chapter 5, "Pedagogical Foundations of a Democratic Community: Inquiry-Based Engagement and Curriculum Design," I describe a year-long project in the Gardenia room to illuminate how the Springhill faculty have developed an ongoing system of intentional and responsive planning, dialogue, and documentation to support their democratic, inquiry-based curriculum design.

As it is important to understand the daily routines, rituals, and traditions of a community to gain a clearer understanding of and insight into how their unique culture operates, chapter 6, "Culturally-Shared Routines, Rituals, and Traditions in the Springhill Community" describes Springhill's cultural routines, rituals, and seasonal traditions and follows with a discussion of the ways in which they relate to democratic values and practices discussed in early childhood literature (e.g., active participation by all community members in the construction of traditions, encouraging initiative and relationship-building).

In chapter 7, "Democratic Learning Communities: Where Everyone Teaches and Everyone Learns," I describe Springhill's non-hierarchical, social constructivist approach to teaching and learning. I discuss how the adults (including teachers and parents) and children engage in a collaborative learning process. I also highlight parent's integral role in Springhill's democratic learning community, including examples of how the process supports their shifting perspectives and continued growth as a lifelong learner.

In chapter 8, "Social Responsibility and Concern for the Common Good in Democratic Environments," I discuss the many facets of social responsibility and concern for the common good of fellow citizens that took place in Springhill's community. I also situate their unique context within the larger U.S. political and cultural discourse.

In chapter 9, "Social Connections and Relationships in Democratic Communities," I create an intimate portrait of the interactive processes that occur as children develop friendships and make connections, how the Springhill faculty creates a democratic, relationship-based environment, how teachers support all children's inclusion in the social life of the community, and how these practices fit into the broader democratic framework.

As discovered in my field work, many corporate, popular, and consumer values and stereotypes inevitably seep into children's identities and the school culture. I discuss this complex issue in chapter 10, "Stereotypes, Status Quo, Gender Differentiation: Active Production versus Passive Consumption." I highlight some of the ways that gender stereotyping, consumer culture, and popular culture in United States society influence democratic preschool communities. I share examples from the Springhill community that provide insight into the possibilities that may arise when community members intentionally address and challenge some of these stereotypical assumptions, which seep into our individual identities and community culture. Finally, I share examples of how intentionality, dialogue, narrative, and active participation within a safe, trusting, democratic environment can foster the development of new, more nuanced, and shared understandings of these complex and difficult concepts.

In chapter 11, "Conclusions: Springhill as a Democratic Community with Implications, Inspirations, and Challenges for Other School Communities," the concluding chapter of my dissertation, I review some of the overarching themes that emerged from my data, how the teachers' and administrators' individual histories contribute to the shaping of this unique school culture, and broader implications and challenges for both Springhill specifically and for other U.S. preschool communities.

CHAPTER 4

A COMPOSITE NARRATIVE OF THE SPRINGHILL AT STONEWOOD

PRESCHOOL

To help make visible the daily life of the Springhill at Stonewood preschool, I created a composite narrative of four days in the life of the community, subdivided by headings and conceptual tags (in italics) marking the key underpinnings of democratic practice that emerged during my observations at the school. This text is written in present tense to allow the reader to experience the settings as I, the researcher, did. Included in this composite narrative are vignettes from the Studio Room and Outdoor Playground (both shared spaces, open to all classrooms), highlighting their reciprocal and interconnected relationships with the primary classrooms. I conclude the chapter with a summary of the emerging themes that arose during data analysis.

Gardenia Room

The first two composite days took place during the early months of the 2009-2010 school year in the Gardenia Room, with co-teachers Sophie and Jess and 14 three-year olds. This sketch highlights the "rich normality" that happens in the daily life of Springhill's democratic classroom community.[26]

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[26] "Rich normality," as described by Ceppi and Zini (as cited in Cadwell, 2003, p. 109), is "a whole made up of different parts in harmony, balanced interaction of different elements (objects, situations, iconography, materials). This effect of intense and interesting normality is not generated by a monologic environment, but the balanced combination of many different elements (pp. 10-26)." To elucidate further, Thornton and Brunton (2009) explain, "Time is valued within the day through the 'rich normality' of

Day one.

Welcoming: the importance of a warm, unhurried greeting

Children gradually begin arriving at school circa 9:00 a.m. and are dropped off in the carpool line. Each morning, Alice, the studio teacher, is there to greet the children and help them out of the car. As they walk onto the playground and into the building, Mary, the director of early childhood education, and a volunteer parent are there to say "hello" and to make sure they make it to their classroom safely. Children are not rushed but make conversation and greet friends as they move along the corridor. Once they're outside their classroom door, they hang their belongings (e.g., lunchbox, coat) on their individual hooks, come into the classroom, greet more friends and teachers, wash their hands, sign in, and transition into a variety of activities/provocations set out for the day.

Democratic practice in education puts a primacy on relationship-building and sets up the environment with that in mind. Arrivals and departures set the emotional tone of the educational experience.

Oscar and Sophie: paying attention to the emotional life of each child

Every morning, on the large round table next to the classroom door, teachers put out a "sign-in" sheet which lists each child's name with his/her corresponding picture symbol (see "Symbols" section of chapter 6). Children are expected to circle, trace or mark their name and/or symbol each morning to indicate their attendance. The teachers vary writing utensils (e.g., crayons, markers, pastel, and colored pencils) on a regular basis to give children a variety of experiences with different media. On this particular morning, Sophie and Jess have put out an assortment of colored pastel crayons (see "Signing In" section of chapter 6, for further explanation about this process). Oscar is

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everyday experiences - time to meet, to be, to do, to think and reflect, to talk and listen, to rest and to eat" (p. 71).

sitting next to the sign-in sheet, but has a grimace on his face, seems a bit distressed, and isn't signing in. Sophie notices his grimace right away, asks him about it, and helps him figure out a solution. Oscar tells Sophie that he doesn't like getting the pastel on his fingers. She suggests using a tissue and shows him how to wrap a tissue around the pastel so that his fingers are protected. But, he continues to show signs of dissatisfaction and says, "It's too hard."

"What is too hard?" Sophie asks Oscar, as she continues to try and figure out why he doesn't want to use the pastel. He lightly shrugs his shoulder, in an "I don't know" sort of way, and doesn't verbally respond. After a moment, Sophie gently responds, "I'm wondering if the piece is too small. That makes it hard for me sometimes."

In a democratic community, teachers are attuned and responsive to children's feelings.

Oscar and Zach: friends recruited as mentors

Oscar says, "Can you make it for me?" Instead of merely doing it for him, Sophie suggests that he find a friend to help him. Oscar looks at Zach, who is also sitting at the table, and says "Zach, can you sign me in so I can play?" Zach doesn't immediately respond to Oscar but continues signing himself in.

Sophie then helps explain the problem to Zach and asks him, "Zach would you be *willing* to sign in Oscar?"

Zach agrees and begins signing Oscar in. When he gets to the "r" in Oscar's name, Zach says, "I don't know what that one is."

Oscar responds, "an r."

When Zach completes the task, Oscar thanks him and heads off to play.

In democratic environments, learning is not in isolation, but rather a collaborative process.

Lizzy and Lila: the social motivations of learning

Along with the sign-in sheets on the table are several provocations put out by the teachers. On this day, there is a set of Legos, magnifying glasses with miniature bugs, and a wooden container with an assortment of hardware components (e.g., nuts, bolts, miniature brass piping). Stella is creating a robot out of the metal pipes.

Nearby, Matthew and Grace are sitting on the floor at the light table. Today, Sophie and Jess have covered the light table with a large transparent tray filled with sand, and clear glass stones. Matthew is pretending one of the stones is a "boat" going through the "water."

Jess is sitting in the cozy corner, on a wooden platform covered with pillows, next to several shelves covered with many picture books and the children's journals, reading a silly book to Evelyn, Lila, and Oscar. As Jess finishes up the story, Lizzy, a 4 ½ year-old from the Magnolia room, comes over to them holding a note. Lizzy explains to Jess, Lila, Oscar, and Evelyn, that she wrote the note to find someone to play with, because no one in her room wanted to play house. Jess asks the group if anyone wants to join Lizzy. Lila says that she'd like to go with her. Lila and Lizzy head to the writing table so Lila can write a note to join Lizzy in the Magnolia room (see "Notes" section in chapter 6).

On top of the writing table sits a container holding several pencils, a pencil sharpener, a glue stick, scissors, and a stack of paper cut in quarters. Above the writing table, along with the alphabet, hang several cards with important words used by the children (e.g., Mommy, Daddy, Studio, Magnolia Room, Rainbow Room). Several hang with their corresponding picture symbols (e.g., Rainbow Room's classroom symbol made by children, a drawing of a rainbow; the studio symbol, a child's drawing of flowers) [see "Symbols" in chapter 6]. Children often use these words as references when they write

notes. Jess comes over to the table to help them write the note. Lizzy asks Jess which

hanging word card says, "Magnolia room." Jess shows her and points out the

corresponding symbol for the Magnolia room. When they finish the note, Jess signs it,

and the two girls head over to play house together in the Magnolia room.

Writing skills are developed in a meaningful, purposeful context in ways that support children as self-determining citizens.

Missing backpack: problem-solving as an important context for learning

When Duke comes into the classroom, he explains to Sophie that his backpack

and coat have disappeared. After checking his hook outside the classroom, they decide to

write a note to take to the other classes to see if anyone else may know what happened to

his possessions. Sophie asks him what he'd like to say in the note, prompts him with

some questions, and transcribes Duke's words. Sophie asks Duke, "And what does it

look like?" Duke describes his backpack and coat, and Sophie writes down his words

verbatim. Duke replies, "It has a cow with farm animals." Sophie repeats his words

verbatim, as she writes, "It has a cow with farm animals."

Teachers take the time to slow down the learning process, scaffold children's learning, and allow them to actively solve their own problems.

Choices for Duke and Matthew: supporting the development of an internal locus of control

Sophie turns to Duke and asks him who he'd like to ask to go with him. Duke

says he wants Matthew to go with him. When Duke asks Matthew, he responds with a

non-sequitur, "I have good looking eyes." (He seems to be repeating what someone said

to him.) On Duke's second attempt requesting Matthew's accompaniment, Matthew says

that yes he would like to go with him.

Sophie gives the note to Duke to sign. Once he signs it, Matthew and Duke leave the room together with the note. As they are leaving, Sophie asks them, "Which room are you going to ask?" (I think Sophie asks them this question to intentionally help them focus on their task.) They tell her the Magnolia and Rainbow rooms and head out.

The Springhill faculty consistently supports the development of children's internal locus of control.[27]

"Summer Memories" wire weaving: connecting memory, narrative and identity in children

At the beginning of the year each child took home a small paper bag and returned it filled with memorabilia representing highlights of their summer experiences (e.g., photos, child-made maps and pictures, a baseball, a pinecone, and seashells). During the first few weeks of school, children shared the contents of their bag, first in pairs, and then with the whole class. On this day, a large basket sits atop the large white art table filled with the children's summer memory bags (see *"Summer Memories"* documentation in Appendix F for more detailed description). Along with the basket, there is a large piece of wire board, several rolls of wire (in varying thickness), and wire cutters. Jess invites Evelyn over to work on attaching her "summer memories" onto the wire weaving, in this case, a pine cone. Jess asks Evelyn how she'd like to attach it and Evelyn decides that she'd like to hang her pinecone with a green ribbon. She says she has to get a "LONG piece." As Evelyn works on attaching the pinecone, Jess talks with her about her summer memories.

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[27]Several studies (Bulus, 2007; Dollinger & Taub, 1977; Findley & Cooper, 1983) on *locus of control* suggest that "a person's perception of whether he controls his world or it controls him—show that a person is stronger—cognitively, socially, emotionally—if he feels in control" (Lewin-Benham, 2006, p. 107).

Teachers and children are engaged in meaningful conversations throughout the day. Teachers understand the importance of first-person narratives in the formation of the self.[28]

Sharing work in circle: validation and provocation

Walter is also sitting at the table working on a self-initiated project. He is making a "robot with pants" out of construction paper and brad fasteners. Interest in robots has been keen over the last several weeks (see "Robots and Shooters" documentation in Appendix G on how this project emerged). On the other side of the room, several photos of robots are hung in a mobile, along with Sophie's robot documentation and children's robot creations in different media. When Walter finishes making his robot, he tells Jess that he'd like to share it in circle.

Sharing with the larger group validates children's work and prompts further dialogue and thinking, which has become a regular habit cultivated in the Springhill community.

"I didn't do it": non-shaming guidance as an essential quality of democratic practice

Ethan, talking to Oscar, is also sitting on a stool at the sign-in table, holding a crayon. He makes several marks on the stool with the crayon. Sophie says to him in a very calm voice "I'm noticing your crayon made a mark on the chair." Ethan quickly replies, "I didn't do it."

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[28] In "Development of the Mind: Toward a Neurobiology of Interpersonal Experience," Siegel (1999) explains, "'narrative memory' is a term referring to the way in which we may store and then recall experienced events in story form. 'Co-construction of narrative' is a fundamental process, in which families [and children and teachers] join together in the telling of stories of daily life" (p. 60). To explain further, "As a child develops, the mind begins to create a sense of continuity across time, linking past experience with present perceptions and anticipations of the future...to integrate these varied representations and mental models is within a narrative process…Such capacity appears to be central to secure attachment relationships (p. 5). In fact, "interpersonal relationships may facilitate or inhibit this drive to integrate a coherent experience" (p. 4).

Sophie does not argue with his statement or engage in a power struggle, instead she says, "What could you do to clean this mark?" Ethan ignores her.

Sophie after a minute or so calmly asks again, "What could you use to clean it?"

Grace playing at the light table next to them responds for Ethan, "A wet paper towel?"

Sophie acknowledges her idea and says to Ethan, "Let's get a wet paper towel." Ethan continues to ignore Sophie. Sophie gently rubbing his back starts to say: "Let's stand[up]..." but Ethan tries to move away from Sophie and the stool and over towards the sand table. She calmly talks to him and holds his body.

Sophie, focusing on the problem and continuing to talk in a very calm and nonjudgmental voice says, "Let's take the chair over [to the sink] and see if the paper towel works. If not, I've got some other ideas."

Sophie moves the stool over to the bathroom area and says, "Okay, let's come over here."

Ethan scoots and crawls slowly over to the bathroom area with his head down and avoiding eye contact.

Sophie says to him in a kind and gentle voice, "Are you feeling a little embarrassed about the chair? It's okay. Let's just clean it up."

She hands him a paper towel and he stands up and takes it to the sink. Then he goes back over to the chair and starts scrubbing.

In a frustrated tone, Ethan says, "It's not working."

Sophie, kneeling on the floor next to him, says, "What else could we use?"

Ethan suggests, "Tissue?" Ethan gets a tissue and tries removing the crayon but it doesn't work.

Sophie says, "Hmmm. What about soap?"

Ethan goes to the sink and gets some liquid soap and puts it on the stool.

Sophie starts scrubbing the stool along with Ethan. She starts using her fingernails and shows Ethan. In an excited tone she says, "Look Ethan! It's coming off with my nail! It's working really well." Ethan gives a slight smile and nod in agreement that it is working.

Sophie says, "So two things are working, nails and scrubbing." As they continue to scrub, Sophie engages Ethan in conversation and asks him if he ever scrubs dishes at home.

Sophie says, "I think it's working. We're going to have a really clean stool."

Evelyn comes over to find out what they're doing. Sophie explains that they're trying to get the crayon off the stool and invites her to help. Evelyn wants to help and gets a paper towel, wets it and joins them in the scrubbing.

After a few minutes, Evelyn says, "Okay, we're almost done."

Ethan responds with excitement, "This is working!" When they finish up, Ethan dries the stool and returns it to the table and then heads off to play in the pretend kitchen.

Teachers respond to behavior challenges patiently and non-judgmentally, carefully upholding the responsibility, self-respect, and citizenship of every member of the community.

Grace and Kate's creative pursuits: teachers take children's work seriously

Grace joins Jess at the art table and starts creating a "birthday box," birthday hat, and "party game" at the art table (see "Parent and Faculty Discourse: A Child's Eye

View," in chapter 5 for further explanation of birthday box). Kate is also making a game called the "Panda Bear Game." Jess asks each of the girls to tell her about their games as she records their responses. Jess records the girl's ideas, rules (e.g., "two people can play"), and directions of how to play their games (e.g., "with moving flaps").

Children have the freedom to express significant and meaningful rituals in their lives in a variety of different ways. In democratic communities, teachers support children as active producers of their own ideas and investigations, and not merely as passive consumers of prefabricated curricula and projects.

Choices in the classroom: a "rich normality"[29]

Evelyn gets a baby doll from the kitchen area and starts washing it. Evelyn works on getting her baby doll dressed. She says, "My baby is cold, that's a problem." Evelyn struggles to put on the baby's clothes and Sophie supports her. Instead of dressing the baby for Evelyn, she gives her several tips: "Remember the first thing you have to do is put the legs out." After several minutes, Evelyn gets her baby dressed and continues to play with her.

Stella meanders over to the upright chalkboard and draws for several minutes.

Sophie heads over to the computer and invites Larry, the photographer of Walter's birthday circle, to look at the photos with her and to pick out the one he likes best and would like to feature. Stella joins them to look at the pictures (see "Parent and Faculty Discourse: A Child's Eye View" in chapter 5 for further explanation).

When they're finished, Evelyn asks Sophie to look at pictures of herself. Sophie puts on a slideshow of "Evelyn" pictures throughout the year so far.

Kate wants to play with the baby dolls and brings one over to Sophie and asks Sophie to put her baby's clothes on. Sophie says, "Well I know that Evelyn is very good

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[29] See footnote 26 for definition of "rich normality."

at that, how about you ask if she could help you?" So Kate asks Evelyn, but Evelyn says

"no." When Kate tells this to Sophie, she recommends asking Lila this time. Lila agrees

to help.

*Democratic educational environments are designed to create a "rich normality" of
teacher-facilitated choices, materials and interactions in the classroom, in order to
support children as self-determining protagonists and collaborative learners.*

"Dance of the Pants": the role of child-accessible documentation in supporting the co-construction of meaning and narrative

Grace and Larry are playing with babies on the child-sized couch. Above them is

a large bulletin board with some documentation titled, "The Dance of the Pants," along

with children's various "pant" creations and stories displayed around it. I read the

documentation typed out and displayed on the bulletin board:

THE DANCE OF THE PANTS

September 30, 2009

It all started with **Stella** messing about with the scissors and paper at the art table. She was mastering the fine art of cutting with zig zag scissors. She cut through the middle of her paper, but not all the way to the top. Then she held them up for everyone to see and she said, "Look, I made pants!"

When children mess about with a material they sometimes discover images that they can recognize. **Stella** realized that she could represent a pair of pants in paper. Sometimes children start out making one thing and it turns into something completely different.

Zach had already made three pairs of pants, so I challenged him to think about what would go above the pants.   **Zach** took my cue and added a square for the body, arms and a round head with ears.

A few days later in the studio **Grace** dictated and illustrated a story about pants and she read it to everyone at circle. Representing pants moved into the medium of storytelling.

The very next day several children came to the art table and proceeded to make pants too. It became very contagious – we talk about contagion when children influence each other and share ideas. Sometimes they will form small groups around an interest or a concept.

Larry made "wind pants"

Ethan decided that he had made "jeans"

I was not surprised to see that other children were influenced by **Grace's** idea – the next day another group formed to create a collaborative story about pants.

So, here we see another kind of dance: the dance between the individual child and the group. One child, **Stella,** had the idea to make paper pants. This influenced other children to make their own paper pants. Then another individual child, **Grace** created a story about pants and this again influenced another group to write a story.

This dance between the individual child and the group is often where learning takes place.

The dance of the pants continues – today **Grace** made pants using two small metal straps. It will be interesting to see how far they will take the pants idea.

Grace and Larry notice me reading this documentation posted on the bulletin board and get excited about sharing it with me. They pull over several white stools to stand on so they can remove their hanging "pants" and illustrated pant stories to show me. Sophie comes over to help them take it off of the bulletin board.

We sit together on the floor and Grace retells her story to me, "One day there was wind pants. One day there was 3 babies. They walk down the street and the same dog knocked on the door, and the pants didn't say nothing at all. [The dog] knocked again…" Once she finishes telling her story, Sophie asks them, "Should we make a new story?" They say yes and Sophie invites Zach and Duke to tell the story.

Throughout the day, Sophie intentionally draws in children who tend to reside on the periphery.

Grace suggests their pants can "jump into the story." But then asks, "How can they jump in the story when they're metal pants?" She was using the metal strap "pants" that were hanging on the documentation board. Grace comes up with an idea, "I know, we'll get the computer." [Computers meaning the foldable, plastic rulers.] She brings several "computers" over and pretends they are pants. Grace excitedly says: "Yeah! They did it!"

Sophie: "Okay, now let's hear from Zach and Duke about what happens in the story." (Sophie brings Zach and Duke into the conversation and storytelling.) Duke says the pants are: "walking down the street." Sophie encourages him to go further with his story: "Where are they going?" Duke continues the story. When they've finished playing with their pants and telling stories they stand on the white stools and put back their documentation.

In a democratic community, the co-construction of meaning requires that past experiences be made available to children as a resource for present narratives, learning, and creativity. Child-accessible documentation is an important tool in this process. On-going documentation and displays are dynamic, not static finished products. Children are included in the process of displaying their work.

Searching for "The Cave"

On the previous day, Sophie had taken out a small group of four children to explore the forest.[30] The children explain to me that during yesterday's forest explorations they went to the labyrinth and were running around it and then went to the stream. One of the children adds, "We saw a vine but thought it may have poison ivy, so we didn't touch it." Later in their explorations, they wanted to look for the "cave" the Rainbow room children had discovered and told them about. However, they were unable to find it. So they decided to seek help from the Rainbow room children, knowing they were the cave experts.

So today, Dave, a child from the Rainbow room, comes in with several photos and a note about the "cave" written by him and his classmates to share with the Gardenia room and assist them with their search. Sophie re-gathers together the small group of children she took out yesterday and reminds them, "That's why Dave is here today with information from the Rainbow room children, to help us find the cave." Dave shows the small group the pictures, describes the cave, and heads back to his room. Sophie and this small group put their jackets on and head outside again, this time with the cave pictures so they can try and find it again.

In democratic practice, children are encouraged to collaborate both in small groups and across classrooms. System-wide collaboration reduces artificial boundaries between children, replacing "otherness" with "solidarity."

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[30] The "forest" is defined loosely as the space outside of the playground fence including the labyrinth (a spiral path made out of monkey grass), a large creek, a "cave" (a large hole or indentation on the side of the creek bank), a large patch of trees, and a pavilion.

Flexible time for snack: acknowledging children's right to exercise control over classroom routines

Duke tells Jess he is starting to get hungry, so they prepare the snack table. Duke cleans off the table and Jess puts out the snack tray. The snack tray is put out each day so that children have free access to tools that will help them prepare their snack food (e.g., scissors to open granola bars, spray bottle for cleaning table, paper towels cut in half, cups, spoons, child-sized pitchers of water, and a "go" sign indicating snack table is open). Duke and several other children begin to wash their hands, take out their snack, and place their lunchboxes under the stool on which they're sitting (see "Snack" section in chapter 6).

When children make decisions about the timing of their snack, they stay closely attuned to their bodily rhythms and can more easily learn to self-regulate their needs.[31] In a democratic environment, teachers are intentional about putting out materials that help children develop responsibility and a feeling of control over their daily routines.

Snack time: a social focal point of the day

Sophie's small group returns from their cave explorations and several of them head to the snack table. There is much lively conversation at the snack table including discussion about finding the cave, drawing maps, and riding helicopters. Nicole, the resource teacher, joins the class, preparing to take the first group that's ready to go out to

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[31] Johnson and Birch's (1994) research suggests, "the optimal environment for children's development of self-control of energy intake is that in which parents provide healthy food choices but allow children to assume control of how much they consume" (p. 653). The researchers found that the mothers who were more controlling of their preschooler's food intake had children who were less able to self-regulate the appropriate amount of food consumption (or energy intake). In contrast, the children who were given more freedom to make their own choices about food consumption were better able to self-regulate appropriate intake and had lower body fat scores.

the playground. Grace wants to know who has "lunch bunch" today so Nicole reads her the names of children on the list.[32]

Matthew eats popcorn from a Ziploc filled bag packed in his lunchbox. Yesterday, he was upset because he wanted popcorn for snack but had something else. So Sophie helped him write a note to take home asking his mom and dad to please pack him popcorn instead. Today, Matthew excitedly shows Sophie his popcorn and she affirms how happy she is for him that he wrote a note and has popcorn now.

There is a great deal of silliness at the table. Oscar pretends his "mailbox is on the ceiling." This brings lots of laughs and is contagious with other children imitating this joke. Then a discussion of their birthday age turns into silliness.

Grace announces: "I'll be five on my birthday."

Evelyn laughing says: "I'll be one or two on my birthday."

Oscar laughs heartily at Evelyn's joke.

Stella asks Oscar: "Why are you laughing?"

Oscar explains to Stella: "Because Evelyn said 'I'll be one *and* two on my birthday.'"

While repeating Evelyn's words to Stella, Oscar starts laughing again.

Evelyn repeats it for another laugh: "I'll be one and two on my birthday."

Stella: "No!"

Oscar: "I'll be zero and one on my birthday!"

Laughing continues.

Evelyn: "I'll be zero on my birthday and one, two."

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[32] "Lunch Bunch" is the name for one of Springhill's after school programs.

Grace joins in the silliness: "I'll be 6 or 14 on my birthday!"

Oscar: "I'll be 7 and 14!" This continues for several minutes, interspersed with laughter.

Duke accidentally spills most of his goldfish crackers on the floor and starts crying. Jess hugs and comforts him. She offers him several other options for a different snack and suggests that he could eat the ones that didn't spill. Duke says he doesn't want any more snack. Jess accepts this, continues to validate his sad feelings, and helps clean up the crackers.

As children finish up snack, each child packs up his/her bag, sprays their spot at the table with a soapy-water mixture in a spray bottle, and wipes it with a paper towel. Evelyn has extra water left in her cup after snack. Instead of pouring it down the sink, she takes it over to one of the classroom plants and pours it in the soil.

As children begin to finish snack, Nicole invites them to go outside with her. When several children are ready to go outside, she takes the first group to the playground. A few children (Kate, Grace, and Walter) decide to stay in the classroom after snack.

Democratic practice respects the natural rhythms of social life, which include time for the pleasures of eating, being silly with friends, and just "hanging out." The plant-watering routine helps children learn ways to care for plants and prevent water waste.

Walter builds the "Brooklyn Bridge": one-on-one scaffolding of child-initiated projects

After snack Walter heads to the other side of the classroom to try and build the Brooklyn Bridge. He puts two chairs and a stool together, and starts adding several wooden blocks and planks. Walter frequently stays in New York City with his mom and dad and has seen the Brooklyn Bridge in person. When he seems to be stuck at a certain point with his building, Sophie comes over to offer some support. Sophie says to him,

"So, you're trying to get this piece to touch this one." She pauses for a moment to allow him time to think and then adds, "What do you think you need to get them to touch?"

Walter shows Sophie where "the water" is on his bridge. He goes back to building his structure and discusses with Sophie what pieces would work to fit underneath the bridge. Sophie discusses what shape blocks he needs. Sophie takes notes of his work on a clipboard. Walter checks with Sophie to see if she is writing down the words, "bridge" and "car" on her paper. He also wants her to write down the word "blocks."

Walter takes several small rectangular blocks and puts them on the legs of the stool as supports "so it doesn't fall." But the pieces begin to fall down as he places them in different positions. Sophie helps extend his thinking by asking questions and waits while he "tries again." Walter says to her "It just broke right there and I don't know why." Sophie asks, "Is it supporting it? Does this piece need to be on top? What else do you need?" as Walter continues to work on his structure.

Sophie validates his struggles by saying, "It is so tricky."

After several minutes, Walter starts to lose a bit of focus and Sophie asks him, "Oh, Walter what happened here? I wonder if there is anything you can do so it won't fall down."

Walter responds, "See it doesn't move because of the big blocks."

Sophie says, "Oh, they're pretty heavy."

Walter adds two pieces on top and says, "Those are the gates." He opens them with his hand and says, "Then the train comes in."

Sophie clarifies, "So they open and close when a train goes by?"

Walter says, "Yeah, see watch." He takes the truck and drives it through.

Walter continues to work and discuss his progress with Sophie.

Teachers take children's work seriously and respect their ideas and help them follow their pursuits. Teachers help by providing helpful questions, observations and verbalizations of children's actions.

Transition time: the importance of laying the groundwork for extended work

It is nearing time for closing circle and Walter's bridge is situated directly where the children gather. Sophie says, "I'm looking at the clock and see it's clean-up time." She asks him if he'd like to move his bridge to another location rather than cleaning up the materials. He tells her his idea and she confirms, "So your idea is to move it over there?" as she points to the block area in the corner of the room and Walter says, "yes."

They carefully move his structure to the block area and discuss further plans. Sophie says, "So, let's write down a plan for what you need to do tomorrow." He says he will need a certain-sized block. Sophie traces a block on the paper and has him show her how big of a piece he needs. Walter says he also needs scissors.

In a democratic approach to education, children are helped to sustain focus on self-chosen activities, an important aspect of acknowledging the right to intellectual freedom and self-determination.

"Big scissors that will crack the wood": allowing children to test their own theories

Sophie asks, "Do you think scissors will cut the wood?"

Walter responds, "BIG scissors that will crack the wood."

Sophie says, "Okay. So big scissors that will crack the wood," repeating his words. Sophie adds, "So we'll need wood and scissors." Walter looks while Sophie writes notes on her clipboard.

Teachers facilitate learning by allowing children to make mistakes, experience some disequilibrium, try out their theories, and generally figure out things for themselves.

Making an 'A': providing a system of social supports

Walter tells Sophie, "You need a W for Walter." Sophie invites Walter to write his name for her. Walter says, "I can't make an A."

Sophie turns to Fiona (visiting from the Rainbow room) and says, "You can make an A. Can you show Walter how to make an A?"

Fiona draws an "A" as Walter watches. Sophie asks Walter if he'd like to draw one now. He replies, "You do it, it's hard for me."

Sophie asks him, "Can I show you?"

Walter answers, "Alright, I'll try." Walter works diligently on writing an "A." When he finishes, he takes some masking tape from the art shelf and a stop sign to attach to his bridge. The stop sign is a universal symbol understood and used often in the Springhill community, in this case meaning, the bridge is a work in progress, please do not move or take apart (see "Stop Signs" in chapter 6 for further details).

In democratic environments the full social resources of the community are mobilized to support the learning of each individual.

Making "stop signs:" shared responsibility and control of the classroom space

After snack, Grace and Kate work on hanging "stop signs" they've created for the double doors that separate the Gardenia classroom into two large spaces. For safety reasons, several doors throughout the school, as well as the fence gates, have stop signs on them, indicating that when the doors are closed, children need to check in with a teacher before opening them and exiting the space. Oftentimes when one teacher is on the playground, with only one teacher remaining in the classroom, the double doors are closed, leaving only one half of the classroom space open. On this day, Kate noticed that the double doors were closed but didn't have stop signs on them and decided "stop signs"

were needed. So she and Grace create several "stop signs" out of construction paper and use several pieces of colorful tape from the art shelf to attach the signs to the doors [see "Classroom Decorations and Documentation" section in chapter 6, for further explanation].

In a democratic community, when children are given the freedom to contribute their ideas and work towards the shaping of the classroom environment and identity, they develop a sense of pride and shared responsibility for its overall functioning.

The purple pastel: democratic conflict resolution

After putting lots of tape to ensure the stop signs are securely attached to the door, the girls start to color them with pastels. Kate wants a purple pastel, but Grace is already using it. Grace offers Kate a pink pastel, but Kate still wants purple. So Grace tries another approach; she offers Kate a purple crayon and purple scissors. This still does not satisfy Kate. After a brief pause, one of the girls suggests, "We could take turns," and the other responds, "Yeah!" They decide that Grace will give it to Kate when she's finished using it. They negotiate and compromise on how much time Grace will use the pastel:

Grace suggests: "7 minutes, 6 minutes."

Kate responds, "2 minutes."

Grace asks, "How about 3 minutes?"

They both agree on three minutes and excitedly shout, "Yeah! Yeah!" and ask Jess to tell them when it has been three minutes.

Grace and Kate resume work on their stop signs. After a minute or so, Jess says to Grace, "I'm going to remind you, you've got about 1 ½ more minutes." Kate and Grace start to compare their colors. Kate says, "I don't want pinks." Before the three minutes are over, Grace gives Kate the purple pastel.

When teachers respect children and adopt a problem-solving approach to conflict in the classroom, children learn to do the same. The result is a democratic culture where everyone's rights are respected, and children are empowered to solve their own social conflicts. In this case, both children are empathic, respectful, caring and able to verbalize feelings and stand up for themselves and negotiate in appropriate ways.

Clean up time: avoiding unnecessary power struggles

Jess tells the children that it is nearing time for closing circle and time to start cleaning up. With several puzzle pieces on the floor, Evelyn responds: "I can't clean them up because they [the puzzle pieces] ran away and I can't catch them." Instead of Jess telling her again to clean up she tells Evelyn to "try and catch them." Evelyn does so, cleaning them up. Jess says, "Thanks for catching them!"

Teachers avoid power struggles and develop creative clean-up solutions, including use of children's play scenarios and imagination.

A smooth transition to circle: avoiding unnecessary wait times

Kate, Grace, and Evelyn read books at the large circular table until Alice, the studio teacher, comes in and rings the "chimes," which indicates that it's time to gather for closing circle. All the children, including those arriving back from the playground, studio, and Magnolia Room, assemble for circle time.

In a democratic community, time is appropriately valued, and "wait-around" downtimes are avoided. There is virtually no passive wait time during transitions at Springhill. In contrast, adult-imposed wait time on children creates unnecessary power struggles, prevents children—as self-determining citizens—from having control over their self-chosen activities, and results in meaningless (empty) time.

Closing circle: incorporating child-invented rituals into the group experience

Sophie opens up the double doors and children and teachers sit down together for closing circle. Each day, Sophie starts the closing circle with the "Hello Song." Several children bring in "chimes" from the playground to tap together to the rhythm of the song, a ritual started by Zach at the beginning of the year (see "Child-Created Rituals" in

chapter 6 and "Shared community rituals: avenues for making social connections" in chapter 9, and "Chamomile Tea: Rituals and Relationships" documentation, Appendix H for further explanations). Today, Kate brings two "leaf" chimes to circle, Zach brings "mulch" chimes, and Duke brings "rock" chimes.

Sophie talks about the word "staccato" and demonstrates the concept, "short and sharp," tapping her knees to the beat. On the count of three, Sophie leads the whole class in singing the "Hello Song" and playing their chimes staccato style: "Hello, hello, hello! Won't you be my friend? And every morning we can sing, Hello. How are you this fine day? Hello, hello, hello!"

In a democratic environment, teachers understand and support children's natural desire to connect and feel like they belong to a community. Feeling like a valuable member of the community is deepened when children themselves invent/create the rituals that help signify this togetherness.

Friends helping friends: making solidarity visible in the community

After welcoming guests to circle (e.g., a parent, an occupational therapist, and me), Sophie shares several examples of times she saw Gardenia room friends helping each other over the last few days. Sophie explains, "Yesterday, when we were getting ready to go outside, everybody was trying to get their coats on, and it was just really hard, and guess what?"

Children with eager anticipation ask in unison: "What?"

Sophie continues: "Matthew helped NOT one, NOT two, but THREE PEOPLE put their coats on. He held their coats so they could put their arms down into the sleeves. (Sophie mimics this gesture pretending to put her arms in coat sleeves.) And he helped THREE people put their coats on. It was such a nice thing to do." (Matthew suddenly realizes Sophie is talking about him and grins widely.) "And THEN when we went out

onto the playground there were THREE sleds and there were three hula hoops and Oscar, and Ethan, and Orson were playing with the three sleds and the three hoops…"

Ethan shouts, "No, I wasn't outside!!"

Sophie responds in a calm and understanding tone, "This was yesterday; we're talking about yesterday, not today. And Walter was running after them and they thought Walter was trying to grab their sled, so they were running away from Walter and Walter was running after them [Sophie moves her arms speedily back and forth in a mock run], and they were running away and Walter was running after them and they thought Walter was trying to grab their sled. BUT, do you know what Walter was trying to do…?"

Children excitedly ask: "What?"

Sophie continues: "He wanted to PLAY with them. That's why he was running after them."

Orson chimes in with a great big grin: "And I gave something to him."

Sophie, nodding her acknowledgement continues the story: "And Orson realized that Walter wanted to play and he gave his sled to him and that was sooo nice. It's just so nice to see [everybody] helping each other. And then today, Nicole was in the Magnolia with oh, lots of children and lots of hula hoops and lots of clothes and it was time to clean up. And do you know what the children were saying?"

The children respond: "No."

Sophie continues: "They were running around and they were saying, 'We'll help you Nicole! We'll help you Nicole! We'll help you!' And they did! So that was really nice too."

Teachers intentionally focus on the altruism and helping that occurs in the classroom community. This approach is markedly different than a system of superficial praise and rewards (see chapters 8 and 9 for further explication).

Circle time: progress reports and discussions

Several children share projects on which they're working. Walter shares with his class the "robot with pants" that he made earlier in the morning and demonstrates for them how he can make the pants move on the robot (see chapter 7, "Democratic Learning Communities: Where Everyone Teaches and Everyone Learns," for further explanation about this process).

Sophie then invites Walter to tell the class about the bridge he's building. He describes how he made it, shares his plan to continue working on it tomorrow, and explains that's why he has a stop sign on it. Sophie asks the children to think about ideas that may help Walter with his bridge building and invites them to share any suggestions they may have. Abigail suggests using tape so it doesn't fall apart. Larry says, "Maybe you could put another piece under, and on top, and this way," demonstrating with his hands, "so it won't fall apart." He makes several other suggestions, including, as Abigail did, to use tape to connect some of the pieces.

Kate chimes in, "I think we should put it up high so nobody could snatch it."

Sophie gently asks, "Was anyone trying to snatch it or knock it over, Walter?"

Walter says, "No."

They discuss the bridge for a few more minutes, and Sophie explains the way Walter figured out how to move the bridge.

Still thinking about the tape, Grace adds: "I think we should put tape on the bottom."

Sophie then shares with the group a note that Duke had written earlier that morning. She explains that he really wanted a pink pen but couldn't find one in the classroom so he decided to write a note asking, "How do you make pink?" Sophie then asks the group for their help and poses the same question to them, while Jess records their responses.

Sophie: "Does anybody know how to make pink?"

Larry: "You'd use purple glue."

Grace: "And you'd have to heat it up."

Zach makes gestures with his hand: "put some glue on it and push really hard."

Sophie replies: "Push really hard? What color would you use?"

Zach: "Purple."

Oscar: "Orange and white."

Orson: "Black and orange would do it."

Matthew: "You can use black and red."

Grace: "I think you should use pink, orange, yellow, and white, and pink."

To continue their theory building, Sophie asks: "If you didn't have pink, what colors would you use to make pink?"

Evelyn: "A little purple and a little brown."

Duke: "Red and orange."

Abigail: "Black and purple."

Stella: "Black and blue."

Oscar: "White and red."

More children share their ideas and Sophie says: "If you still have an idea, lock it in your head and we will talk about it tomorrow." Sophie puts her hands on each side of her head pretending to lock in her ideas and several children imitate this action.

Sophie asks Jess about setting up paint mixing tomorrow and Jess agrees. Sophie tells the class that tomorrow "we can experiment to see if we can make pink."

Sophie picks up the "Summer Memories" Wire Weaving and holds it up to show everyone the progress they're making and possibilities of where they may hang it when it's complete. Evelyn and Oscar share the work they did on it.

Teachers invite both individual children and small groups to share their questions, ideas, and projects, with the larger group during closing circle. Children connect various projects and interests together in the dynamic, open, and fluid community. Here we see Walter's growing interest in "Robots" merge with the "Dance of the Pants" project.

Circle time: providing a narrative for ongoing cave explorations

Sophie explains to the children, "Yesterday we [the small group] walked by the labyrinth and creek and someone said they saw a cave and a snake. So we tried to find the cave. We saw the Rainbow children who knew where the cave was. So we asked them and this morning they [Dave] brought pictures of the cave. So today we took the pictures with us and we think we found the cave and we drew some pictures and made some maps. So maybe tomorrow we'll take our pictures to the Rainbow class and ask if we found the cave."

One child, gesturing with his hands, responds, "I think the cave is this BIG."

Following his lead, Sophie suggests, "Maybe we can ask our Rainbow friends how big the cave is."

Sophie transitions into the "Pumpkin Song" for the end of circle. It is a little after 12:00 p.m., and Sophie and Jess open the classroom doors and welcome Gardenia room

parents into the classroom to pick up their children. Several children remain in circle before getting picked up for the Extended Day Program, and Sophie reads a book to them during the brief transition.[33]

Democratic practice in education requires that teachers provide enough narrative scaffolding to children's investigations to make those experiences meaning-rich and memorable. Research shows that narrative is an important binding element in the integration of identity and retained learning.[34]

Day two.

The day begins: with a "rich normality," children are engaged in meaningful activities

As I enter the classroom several children are signing in. Grace tries signing in using a white crayon on her name and it doesn't show up on the paper. She looks over at Jess and Jess says to her, "It's invisible!"

Grace agrees, "Yeah!" They laugh together and then Grace tries another color on top of the white.

Larry and Oscar have signed-in and sit at the table too, building with wooden dowels and cubes. Larry makes "a robot." Oscar sits next to Larry, playing with the same manipulatives. He makes a "violin" and "bow" and pretends to play it.

Duke has made a robot out of construction paper and brad fasteners and Sophie helps him decide where to hang it on the robot documentation panel displayed above the book corner. Duke accidentally pokes his finger with the pushpin and starts to cry. Sophie rubs his back and validates his feelings (see "Shooters and Robots" documentation in Appendix G).

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[33] Springhill offers a variety of different extended day options for children, including "Beyond the Classrooom" activities such as "Fun with Printmaking," "Lego Robotics," "Suzuki String for Violin," and "Art in the Forest."

[34] See Seigel (1999)

A democratic environment assures that meaningful experiences happen regularly in the classroom. Teachers engage children in meaningful conversation, building their vocabulary throughout the day. Teachers understand that children have strong feelings and allow them as much time as they need to process them.

Mixing colors and making pink: the importance of testing theories

Earlier in the morning, Jess covered the large art table with white butcher paper and put out a variety of tempera paint colors and brushes for the children to use while they test out their theories and experiment with mixing paint colors together, a follow-up activity to yesterday's circle discussion. After washing their hands and signing in for the morning, Abigail and several other children migrate to the table, excited to test out their ideas.

Abigail tells Jess that she forgot what colors she said make pink. Jess looks on her notepad and reminds Abigail that she hypothesized that "black and purple" would make pink.

Abigail takes the black and purple paint and mixes them together. Jess asks her if they make pink and Abigail responds, "No." Jess writes down the results next to Abigail's work.

Zach wants to mix yellow and red. He mixes them on the white paper and says, "Hey, it made purple!" Jess asks, "How'd it make purple?" And they discuss the results. Zach wants to try mixing other colors together too. He tries yellow and white paint, mixes them together and says to Jess, "Wow. Look!"

Larry joins them at the table and says he wants to try "white plus red." Jess writes his words down on the butcher paper besides him, saying aloud as she writes, "white + red =" and leaves a blank space to record the findings after Larry mixes the paint colors and see the results. He tries mixing the red and white paint and says, "It didn't work, I

want orange." After discussing and recording the results with Jess, Larry decides to try making orange again this time with different paint colors.

Zach looks over to Grace's space on the table and excitedly announces, "Grace made pink!" Jess, Zach, and Abigail all share in the enjoyment of this discovery.

The painting continues and Oscar wants to make purple. On his first attempt, he tries blue and red and makes black. Jess reminds him of yesterday's theory when he said "orange and black" might make pink.

As the children finish mixing their colors, they place a copy of their symbol onto their work (see "Symbols" section in chapter 6).

Grace joins Orson at the adjacent water table. It's filled with pink-colored water and a number of miniature cups and bottles. They take turns carefully pouring the water into each other's bottles and lids and pretend to take sips and "drink tea."

In democratic educational practice, it is essential to allow knowledge to be co-constructed from a foundation of children's theories. The expertise of the teacher is not primarily in subject matter, but rather in facilitating the social process of discovery.

Bridge building continued: individual building develops into collaborative play

On the other side of the room, Sophie has set out a large poster and a book of bridges next to Walter's bridge. With a great big grin, Walter walks over to it and proudly announces to me, "I'm going to make a bridge today."

Then he says, "I can't make it with the book there, it may knock it over." Walter moves the book onto a nearby shelf. He walks back over to his bridge, takes the tape off the stop sign, removes it from his bridge, and says to no one in particular, "I'll move the stop sign right here so I'll know where it is."

Walter sees that I'm videotaping his work and shows me his shirt from "the equality march" he went to.

Duke comes over and says to Walter, "I have an idea for your bridge!" He explains that his idea is to make the bridge big enough to go across the WHOLE classroom and to add lots of sticks. Sophie joins them and asks them about the ideas they have. The three of them look through the photos in the bridge book.

Teachers take children's work seriously and provide supports to extend and deepen their thinking.

Small group visit to the Rainbow Room: cave explorations follow-up

Sophie and Duke leave with the rest of their small group to show their maps, cave drawings, and photos to the Rainbow room children to find out if their discovery during forest explorations yesterday was, in fact, the cave.

In democratic practice, following up on plans is vital to building a sense of self-efficacy and meaning in children.

Brooklyn Bridge continued

Walter continues to add pieces to his "Brooklyn Bridge." His focus starts to evolve into more social and dramatic play. He adds miniature plastic frogs to his bridge and says: "This is the mommy, dad. They're people." He plays with them for several minutes.

Walter takes out some plastic colorful bead necklaces from the play kitchen area and adds them to his bridge: "Maybe we could put the beads here so the bridge won't move."

Walter calls Grace over. They play with his bridge for a few minutes. They start a silly game, swinging the beaded necklaces through the air, in a back and forth motion,

trying to knock the frogs off the bridge. After several minutes, Grace and Walter move over to the couch and whip the beads to try and knock other things over too.

Democratically-based classrooms leave ample room for projects to take unexpected twists and turns, allowing the children the freedom to change directions, and incorporate peers into their play.

Stool drumming: facilitating boisterous play in the classroom

(*Note conceptual remarks embedded throughout this section*)

Walter and Grace each take out two wooden rectangular pieces from the block area, make up a chant about Walter's bridge, and start drumming the chant on the plastic stools nearby. Matthew, now back from the Rainbow room, joins them in the loud drumming. Larry and Orson, sitting on the nearby couch, cover their ears and complain that it's getting too loud. Walter suggests that they could [go into the other room and] close the doors. However, Larry and Orson begin to crack a smile and along with Oscar decide instead to join the group in this contagious drumming activity. With the noise level getting quite high, Sophie joins them and supports their play.

Duke wants to join in the drumming too, but needs some wooden sticks. Sophie suggests to Duke that he ask the other children where they got their sticks. Eager to help, several children jump up and run over to the block area eager to show him where the wooden pieces are. (*Teachers cultivate an altruistic classroom community where people help each other.*)

At this point, Walter, Grace, Matthew, Orson, Oscar, Larry, and Duke are all squeezed together around the two small stools. They drum loudly, put the wood pieces up to their ears, and start laughing. Sophie laughs with them and says "big ears." They resume loud drumming. (*Teachers follow children's lead and join them in silliness and delight.*)

A few of the children start making whining noises because of the noise level.

Sophie in a whispering voice: "I'm hearing some people say it's too loud. It's too loud? Okay, let's think about this for a minute."

Larry suggests doing a quiet song.

Sophie asks the group: "[Do] you want to do a quiet song?"

A couple of other children shout out: "Me too!"

Oscar says loudly over the other children's voices: "I know a quiet way." He then demonstrates by rubbing his wooden pieces very softly together.

Sophie says: "Okay, let's watch." The children watch Oscar and start to mirror his actions. Walter softly taps the stool back and forth with each wooden piece. Sophie says: "Walter's showing us how to do it quietly."

The other children follow suit. Then Oscar shows another way and Sophie reinforces by saying in a whispering voice, while modeling the technique: "He's rubbing his sticks. He's rubbing his sticks." They start singing a quiet song. After a few moments, Matthew starts grinning and moving his sticks quite energetically against the stool again. Sophie gently reminds him that they're doing the quiet song right now.

Duke suggests ending the song louder. Sophie "checks in" with the other children: "Is that okay with everybody that it gets louder at the end?" The children agree that it is okay. (*Teachers pay attention to and take children's feelings seriously.*)

As they drum on the stools, Sophie asks them: "Did you know that Oscar has been to quite a few concerts?" She also asks them if they know who the person at the front of the orchestra is, as she mimics a conductor's baton waving with her arms. (*Teachers know children intimately and build bridges between home and school experiences.*)

Oscar says: "The conductor."

Sophie agrees: "The conductor and he's the one that all the musicians look at. He makes signs."

Matthew starts banging and chanting loudly again and Sophie says: "Matthew, the thing is when they're [the conductors] reading their music, it has signs to show them when to get louder and when to get softer…" She seems to be trying to redirect his attention and bring him into the conversation in a non-punitive way. She then teaches them the words "crescendo…get's louder and louder like going up a hill" and "decrescendo."

Larry makes a whining sound and Sophie asks Larry: Can you use your words to tell him [Matthew] what the problem is Larry? Larry says "I want a quiet song." Grace responds "I want to do a loud song."

Sophie: "Well here's one idea. Should we try…singing a song that has crescendo and decrescendo so that it gets loud and soft?"

Matthew: "Let's do loud!"

Sophie says she's going to be the conductor and that they'll be the musicians. They do a song, Sophie starts out quiet, then louder and ends soft. The children follow the patterns and are engaged in the activity. Sophie says with excitement: "You did it! You did a crescendo and a decrescendo. That was beautiful."

Larry says he wants to be a conductor. Sophie replies, "You'd like to be the conductor? Okay. May I borrow your sticks then?" Larry says "yes" and passes them to her. Sophie asks, "Are we doing crescendo and decrescendo?" (*Teachers share control with children. Sophie provides children with many opportunities to take the lead.*)

Larry: "No. I have different signs and it's called 'Bridge, Pants, Head.'"

Sophie, follows his lead and repeats: "Bridge, Pants, Head." (*Interesting to note that Larry selects words connected to their "Dance of the Pants" project, a project which has shared meaning and significance to the class.*)

Larry, gesturing with his hands, in two different moves says: "You need to do criss, cross."

Oscar, with a musical background, says: "That doesn't make any sense. You can't play something like that. You can play any note, 'crisss cross' isn't a note."

It starts getting very loud again, and Larry and Sophie both start making the conductor sign for ending/stopping. Sophie points over to Larry and says very quietly: Here's the conductor. Here's the conductor. This seems to quiet the children down as they look over at Larry and see the sign he's making. After children take a few turns conducting, their interest begins to wane. Oscar starts to pretend that he is playing the violin with his two wooden sticks and the playing evolves into conversation. One child looks over at Oscar and says, "Oh a violin."

Sophie responds, "Yeah, that's how Oscar plays the violin. Does anybody else have an instrument?"

A few respond: "I don't."

Orson responds: "I have a piano at my home!"

Sophie asks if Oscar wants to get out the instrument book from his portfolio that he made last year in the Forest Room. He agrees and shares it with the group. Each page of "Oscar's Instrument Book" has a different drawing of an instrument along with the

corresponding written word. Oscar reads each of the pages to Sophie and the remaining

children before putting it back in his portfolio.

Several children start to meander to other areas of the classroom as their interest

begins to wane. With the remaining children, Sophie brings over and reads a small

picture book, featuring an orchestra and conductor. Later, she adds it to their book

corner.

Instead of separating or prohibiting this type of play, Sophie is respectful of the
children's desire for boisterous and loud play. In fact she supports them as they figure
out how to play on the stools, work out their conflicts, and channel their energy in a
positive direction, while introducing some new concepts into their play.

Crowns: giving meaningful acknowledgement to children

Jamie and Adam, from the Magnolia room, come into the classroom with a basket

full of hand-made paper crowns they've made and want to share. They let Sophie pick

one out to wear. She tries on several crowns, picks one, puts it on and thanks the boys.

Stella sits at a small table with Michelle (from the Rainbow room), playing with

the play-dough. Stella announces that she is making "cookies for everybody."

In democratic environments, children are given many opportunities to share and help
their fellow members of the community and experience the accompanying joy and delight
it brings to all involved.

"Snail's Pace Race": an emphasis on collaboration

Sophie has the *Snail's Pace Race* game out for the children to play. Sophie has

put the game out on several occasions and developed a non-competitive strategy to play

it. The goal of the game is for the different colored snails to make it past the finish line.

In order to move, the die must be rolled and land on the corresponding-color featured on

that side of the cube. Children take turns rolling the die and whatever color the die lands

on, the child whose turn it is moves that same colored snail. This continues until all

snails reach the finish line. Nicole, the resource teacher, plays the game with a small group of children on the floor. Kate and Larry stay with game the longest and create several of their own techniques and rules for playing it.

In democratic communities, teachers intentionally support collaborations among children rather than individualistic, competitive goals. Rather than requiring a strict adherence to the rules, teachers allow children the flexibility and freedom to create their own strategies and rules for play.[35]

Portfolio and journals

Matthew and Grace pretend to be ghosts. They have wrapped large pieces of silky fabric over themselves. Grace tells me, "I'm a baby nice ghost." Matthew says he's a "ghost with fireworks." Matthew is pretending to shoot fireworks out at the portfolio shelf. Grace watches Matthew near the shelf and then turns to me and says, "I'll show you where my portfolio is." She walks over, gets it and says, "Here's my nice portfolio!" She puts it onto the floor, flips it over, opens it, and says: "This is the beginning." Matthew follows Grace's lead and gets his portfolio off the shelf too. They excitedly shared the contents of their portfolios with me, and provide a running commentary of the highlights (see "Journals and Portfolios" section in chapter 6, for further explanation).

Matthew opens his portfolio and shows me some of the artwork inside: "I'll show you what I made. Mine's really cool. Look what I made!"

Reading the description attached to his drawing I say: "Oh! Let's see, it says 'a seal.'"

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[35] See "*A Collaborative Ethos: Does Competition Fit in a Collaborative Environment?*" section in chapter 8 for further discussion of this topic.

Matthew turns the page and points to another page with a collage made out of small wooden pieces: "Look what I made in there. And look at this."

Amy: "Oohh…It says, 'One day Matthew wanted to make snacks but had to wait for a spot, while waiting he went over to the art table and created the beautiful collage completely unassisted'...."

Matthew: "I remember this."

Grace pointing to some of her work says: "Here's some of my sewing." She turns the pages with several more samples of her sewing: "And here's some of my other sewing, and my other sewing, and my other sewing."

Amy: "Wow."

Matthew shows me his watercolor painting in his portfolio: "Look what I made."

Grace: "And here's what I made with my [brother]."

Matthew, points to a tempera painting in his portfolio: "Look what I made too."

Grace: "And I made some painting in my [portfolio],… but…" She pauses and starts flipping through her portfolio pages, looking for her paintings.

Grace: "Here's my painting!!"

Amy: "Oh yeah."

Grace: "I made my name." She shows me some of her early attempts at writing her name and says, "G-R-A-C-E. That's G-R-A-C-E."

Grace: "That's my class." Grace starts looking at photo-documentation in her portfolio from the Forest Classroom she was in last year.

Matthew, looking at photo-documentation in his portfolio from last year, says: "That's my friend Ojas. That's me. That's my green shirt."

Grace is still looking at photographs and documentation from last year and comments: "That's Springhill school! That's… [pause], Michelle's in *my* class, but she's not in *this* class." Michelle was in the Forest Room with Grace last year but is in the Rainbow Room this year.

Grace places some of her work back in the pocket sleeve and says, "Hey I couldn't scoot this thing, but now I can, because now I'm three." Children often take their work in and out of the portfolio's plastic sleeves. This time she does it with ease.

Matthew wants to show me his journal and says, "I'll show you my journal *and* my portfolio."

Matthew places his portfolio back on the shelf and goes to the book shelf to retrieve his journal. Matthew looks at the family photos and pictures of sharks (a favorite animal of his) glued to his journal.

Walter and Duke see us looking at the portfolios and journals and get theirs off the shelf to join us. Duke and Matthew look for pictures of their mommies. Duke takes out puppets that he made last year and plays with them for several minutes.

Grace looks at several pages of written and photo documentation from an extended train project titled, "Train Play: Study in Representation and Relationship" in which she participated with her two-year-old class last year. She says to me: "Come on! Read this!"

Amy: "Okay," I say and read aloud the following documentation: "*The train play slowly involved the entire class. The teacher supported the train play by asking 'Where are you going?' I'm going to the museum' said Michelle. Walter said 'I'm going to New*

York to see my daddy.' Oscar declared, 'I want to buy a violin and a new bow.' Michelle at the light table says,' Let's make a train.'" Grace studies the pictures.

Matthew, still looking at his journal, says to me: "Look at my sharks in mine. See, look at my sharks."

Amy: "Wow. There are sharks in your journal."

Grace turns the page and says to me: "Now, now, now, read this page!"

Amy: "You want me to read that page?" She shakes her head yes, and I read a few more pages of the "Train Play: Study in Representation and Relationship" documentation as she looks at the pictures: "*Open ended materials were used as props. Here you see colored panels as wheels, white stools as smoke stacks, and shakers to make the sounds of train. Sleeping on the train continued to be a favorite part of their play. The teachers brought in books on trains to extend the children's interest. We sang train songs in circle which the children often sang spontaneously throughout the day. Here they look at a book that has a train trestle and decide to add one to their train. They also used unit blocks to make their train tracks. Again we see materials being used in different ways. Walter is using shakers as a steering wheel, and Peyton has made a seatbelt out of the colored panels. The white stools are placed on top of the bear block, challenging their physical abilities.*"

Grace turns to Walter sitting next to her: "Hey Walter! Walter! Walter, we can make a train! Another train in our classroom!"

Walter: "Yay!! Let's make another train in our classroom!"

Grace and Walter head off to start building a train with chairs and a variety of hollow and wooden blocks. Re-ignited train play goes on for several days in new and

deeper ways, including making and selling tickets, more complex building and dramatic play scenarios (e.g., going to "Copenhagen," rescuing people, and taking them to the hospital.)

Teachers provide tools for revisiting past experiences, building memories, and creating a narrative. Portfolios and journals are essential resources for children's developing self-narrative, the basis of a secure sense of self-efficacy and identity.

Oscar needs a picture of a piano

Oscar tells Sophie and Jess that he needs a picture of a piano. Jess tries to print one out on the computer but can't get the printer to work. So Oscar decides to write a note to go to the studio to see if Alice may have one there.

Not only do democratic teachers show children they are fallible as well, but when necessary, they also point children in the direction of alternative solutions to problems.

"You have to make it crunch": a deep culture of collaboration

Kate is already at the writing table working on a note to go to the studio so she can make a "birthday card." Oscar joins her and notices that she is having trouble sharpening her pencil. She turns the pencil inside the hole but doesn't push it down with enough pressure towards the blade. Oscar says, "You have to make it crunch," and demonstrates with his pencil. Kate tries again but puts the small pencil in the big hole. (There are two holes in the pencil sharpener, one for small pencils and one for larger pencils.) Oscar says, "You have to decide whether it's a big pencil or a small one." Oscar takes out several different-sized pencils as examples to show her. Kate takes out several of the fat pencils and says, "This is big, and this is a little bit big." Kate starts to compare the pencil's lengths (rather than their width). She says, "See they're not the same age," as she aligns the pencils from longest to shortest. Kate says, "This is the big

girl one [the longest pencil] and this is the big boy one [the second longest pencil]." She

gives the "big boy pencil" to Oscar.

*The Springhill community has developed a deep culture of collaboration, where
"everybody teaches and everybody learns." Teachers are not the only experts.*

Literacy as contextual learning

Sophie joins a couple children to help them sound out words for their notes to go

to the studio. Oscar works on the word "room." He figures out the "r" and Sophie helps

him figure out the spelling for the /oo/ sound. Kate asks Sophie what "want" starts with

and starts to repeat the "/w/…/w/…/w/…/w/" sounds and then says, "y?" Sophie doesn't

say yes or no, but instead refers Kate to Walter (because his name starts with W). When

Kate tries to spell the word "to" Sophie references her to some other familiar words that

make that sound. She points to the table and reminds Kate that her mom's name has a "t"

in it, saying, "Juanita."

*Teachers make contextual connections to literacy skills/letters, taking full advantage of
clues provided by other children and families in the community.*

Oscar's piano: support from many community members

Oscar finishes his note and heads to the studio, but finds out that Alice is home

sick. Instead, Stella's mom, the star parent for the day, helps Oscar look for a picture of a

piano in both the studio and the books on the hallway bookshelf.[36] They can only find

one small cartoonish picture of piano keys in a board book. Oscar brings it back to the

room and uses it temporarily as a reference for his plan to build a piano keyboard, but is

not quite satisfied with the picture. Upon his request, Jess and Sophie print out a more

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[36] Each day, a "star parent" volunteers to spend the morning at the school helping out
with a variety of school routines. See chapter 6, in the "Star Parents" section for more
details about this role.

realistic representation of piano keys once they fix the printer. Oscar takes the photo over

to the block area and fills a basket with a pile of wooden planks that resemble piano keys.

Carefully lifting the basket of wooden planks, he heads over to the wooden

platform in the reading corner and begins to build his piano, continuously referring back

to the picture. He meticulously lines up the "keys" across the platform and pulls out

every couple of planks to represent the black keys. Once his plan is actualized, he

satisfyingly pretends to play "his piano." After he finishes playing, he takes a stop sign

and places it on his work.

*In a democratic classroom, materials are made available to support the individual
interests of all children. All members of the community, including parents, are involved in
the educational process.*

One-on-One Attention: the importance of asking children useful questions

Zach spends much of the day drawing pictures, oftentimes related to "Thomas the

Train" cartoons. Sophie sits with him at the art table and asks him about the train

pictures he is making. She asks him what is happening in his picture and connects it to

the drawings he did yesterday. Sophie asks: "Is he going to go down the sewer again?"

Zach shows her, "Look, James is in the sewer. He's all grubby in the sewer. Look his

funnel got bent and his whistle is hanging back." Sophie asks, "So did it get broken?

Poor, poor James! How's he going to get out of trouble?" Zach: "I don't know." After a

few moments pause, Zach adds: "His driver is going to spray water all over him." Sophie

asks, "To get him clean?" They discuss his picture for several more minutes until he

heads to the snack table.

*In democratic practice, teacher-child conversations feature lots of adult questioning
designed to draw out and deepen children's thinking. This approach helps children
solidify their understandings and take ownership over the direction of their learning.*

Snack time: providing nurturing emotional support to children

Children have conversation at the snack table on a variety of topics. Sophie tells them that the small group room will be open because it is raining. Children start to shout their names in a sort of collective silliness and Sophie redirects them into a fingerplay/song. Sophie says, "That's making me think of a song." She holds Matthew's hand up and starts doing the "Johnny Whoop" song but replaces Matthew's name with the "Johnny" parts of the song. Sophie starts: "Matthew, Matthew, Matthew, Matthew, whoops, Matthew" and repeats. Zach requests the fingerplay as well and Sophie gives him a turn. As Sophie sits next to Ethan she massages his neck and arms.

In democratic communities, teachers understand the importance of showing children physical affection and care, especially during times of high emotional arousal.[37]

A case of the sillies: the social-construction of humor

At the snack table the children start telling me and each other silly stories about their mommies:

Evelyn tells about a tiger that sat on her mommy's car, broke it, and had to build her a new one.

Larry joins in: "Guess what happened to my mommy's car Monday. When my mom was ill, she was driving around and brrrr, brrr [making a steering motion] she was going faster and faster and faster and suddenly she pushed the fast button and was going too fast and then the fast tire and went too fast and then the tire got faster! But they're building her a new car [makes hammer motions on the table].

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[37] Brazelton and Greenspan (2000) discuss how warm and caring emotional connections and attachments are requisites for children's cognitive learning. Children begin to "know things through [their] emotional interactions and then apply that knowledge to the cognitive world" (p. 5).

Matthew joins in the storytelling: "Something happened to *my* mommy!"

Amy: "What happened to your mommy?"

Matthew: "She was driving and driving and a bear sat on her car!"

Amy: "A bear sat on your mommy's car!?"

Matthew: "And the bear was chomping on my mommy's car and then it went BUU-SHHOO and then it broke."

Amy: "Wow."

Evelyn: "Amy, this is what happened to my mom, one time she was driving down the road and an elephant sat on her head and she fell backwards and then, and then, then she fall back and five… a million frogs."

Amy: "A million frogs! Oh my goodness!"

She shakes her head. Seeing me videotape them, she asks if she can see my camera to playback her story. I tell her "yes" and show her how to replay the video.

Larry eats an orange for lunch. He keeps his orange peels in a cup to save for the class worms. After snack Sophie helps him put the peels in the "Worm World" container.

Oscar asks me: "When I'm done with my snack can I take pictures…when I'm done with my snack?"

Amy: "Yeah. Sure."

Oscar says: "I have dirty hands. Look see."

Amy: "Oh yeah, so you'll probably need to wash them first. Right?"

Oscar: "Yeah."

In a democratic classroom, the socially-constructed cultural norms are often developed through the ingenuity of the children—in this case, the definition of what's funny. For

this classroom, snack time is frequently used as a time to create stories and try out different ways to make each other laugh.

Oscar and the Camera: child-centered use of technology in the classroom

Oscar finishes his snack, washes his hands, and asks me to take a picture of his shirt with the guitars on it. Then he asks to take his own pictures with my camera. He looks around the room to try and decide what to take a picture of and decides on a panda bear magnet above the children's mailboxes. He takes one picture of it, reviews it on the LCD screen, and then moves closer to the panda magnet this time to try and take a close-up shot. He repeats this process with the cat magnet. On the close-up shot of the cat he hits the video button instead of the camera button. He asks me how to play back his images and I show him the button that has that function. Then Oscar decides to take a picture of Zach and says to him, "Say cheese." Zach complies. Then Oscar takes a picture of me. Intentional about what he photographs, he decides he wants to take a picture of his "violin" symbol. He goes out to his coat and lunchbox hook and takes a picture where his violin symbol hangs above it and carefully takes a picture of it. He asks Jess to print out his symbol on the computer and she consults with him about making the image bigger, and enlarges it to his specifications. Once she prints it out, he takes a picture of it. Ethan asks Oscar to take a picture of the wooden musical instrument with which he is playing.[38]

In a democratic classroom, technology is made available to children in ways that help children express their thoughts, feelings and stories. Technology is also provided to help children stretch their thinking and build their perspective-taking abilities as they actively pursue their investigations.

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[38] The following day, Oscar asks to playback the pictures he took, and deletes several of them, and leaves only the ones that he thought were good. Children's interest in photography continues throughout the year and is supported by the teachers (see chapter 5 for detailed discussion of Gardenia room's year-long photography project).

Extending "Dance of the Pants": the freedom of children to opt out

Today Sophie extends the children's "Dance of the Pants**"** play. She brings out a xylophone and lets them take turns putting their "Dance of the Pants" stories to the music. Sophie invites them to choose what stories they want to tell with the xylophone. After transcribing the children's stories, she reads them aloud, pausing for children to play the story in-between various passages. This has gone on for several days.

Sophie has the xylophone down and asks Grace which parts she wants to tell with it. Grace picks "The Reagan Story" she made up on a previous day. Kate and Valerie (visiting from the Rainbow room) are watching. Kate is holding her baby doll and says that the baby is also listening to the story. Grace starts her story, "Once upon a time there was some pants…The magic pants walked across the street and saw a door. They knocked on the door. The baby said, 'Who is it?'…Then the pants knocked on the door again. The baby said "who is it?" but the pants didn't say nothing at all."

Valerie takes a turn, tells her story with the xylophone after Sophie writes it down and reads it back to her. The other children listen quite intently.

Sophie pulls out a story that Larry and Matthew did together. She had typed it up. She reads it to them.

Dancing Pants with Musical Accompaniment

October 2009

Once upon a time there were some pants with nobody in it. And there was a baby called Reagan.

MUSIC

The baby flies in the music to New York City.

Walter sings "WOO WOO BEEP BEEP"

MUSIC

The baby flies out of New York City and thinks about it.

MUSIC (Tap, Tap, Tap)

The cat and the hat breaks the trampoline.

They go to the mommy and they said "Can we break the trampoline?" They jumped on this trampoline. The trampoline BREAKED!!!

MUSIC

The machine is broken!

MUSIC

The End.

Matthew and Larry each want to play the xylophone by themselves. Sophie tells them they will have to figure out how to play the music together. Matthew says: "Share, wait, or do it together."

Sophie gives them "some ideas." For example, she says, "Larry you could read a part and then Matthew."

Larry says to Matthew: "You're having a grumpy day!"

Matthew: "I want to do it myself!"

Matthew to Larry: "I'm ANGRY!"

Sophie very calmly validates his feelings: "yeah, sometimes when you have a problem, it makes you feel angry." (*Sophie validates children's feelings and connects their feelings to words.*)

Matthew starts growling. Sophie reminds him that growling won't solve the problem and asks about more ideas he may have.

Matthew then suggests playing the whole thing by himself with Larry waiting.

Sophie to Matthew: "Would that be fair to Larry?"

Matthew: "Yes."

Sophie: "Well, if Larry got to play and you waited would that be fair?"

Matthew: "No!"

Sophie: "Well, we have to figure out a way to do it." Matthew offers another idea and Sophie responds, "Well, you can ask Larry."

But then Matthew says he doesn't want to play the xylophone anymore and leaves. Sophie reads the story and Larry plays the xylophone. Meanwhile, Zach waits his turn. Each child plays the xylophone with intentionality and in accord with the story (e.g., loud for thunder).

Even in a democratic community, not all conflicts will be resolved in a tidy manner. It is more respectful to allow children to opt out of conflict resolution when no one is harmed, than to coerce children into a process from which –from their point of view—they stand to gain little.

Clean-up: helping as a cultural norm

Sophie and Jess announce that it is time to finish up activities and clean up for closing circle.

Grace announces: "I need help."

Sophie: "Uh-oh. Grace needs help."

Matthew: "I'll help!" He helps Grace put her shoes on.

When cleanup is complete they read books together at the table.

In this deep culture of collaboration, children feel comfortable asking for help from their peers, knowing that help will likely be offered in response.

Circle time: continuity

Sophie reinforces the words "crescendo" and "decrescendo" she taught the children earlier in the day when they were drumming on the stools by incorporating the

techniques into their "Hello Song" with which they start closing circle each day. She also

reviews the word "staccato" and teaches them a new word, "legato."

The whole class sings the "Hello" song legato style: "One, two, three. Hello,

hello, hello! Won't you be my friend? And every morning we can sing, hello how are you

this fine day, hello, hello, hello!"

Sophie: "That is legato!"

The children laugh. Oscar says: "That is a funny way."

*In a democratic community, when new concepts are introduced to children, repetition
and practice are provided in meaningful contexts.*

Circle time: supporting friendships

Sophie and the children welcome guests visiting today (e.g., Stella's mom, Rita, a

child from the Magnolia room, and me). Oftentimes, Abigail writes notes to be with Rita

and vice versa. Today, Rita has written a note to join Abigail in the Gardenia Room

closing circle.

*In a democratic educational setting, artificial boundaries between children are
permeable and even set aside when they get in the way of friendship. Here, the
conventional separation of classrooms is modified to support the friendship of Abigail
and Rita.[39]*

"Blast-Off Song": Larry creates a song and shares with the class

Larry raises his and hand and Sophie asks, "Larry did you have something you

wanted to tell us?"

Larry: "I have a new rocket song called 'Rocket Blast Off Song.'"

Sophie: "The Rocket Blast Off Song?"

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[39] See chapter 7, "Rita and Abigail's Friendship" to see how their special relationship
came about.

Larry: "Yeah. It goes rocket blast off, PPFFF!" (Larry shoots his hand and arm straight up into the air.)

Sophie: "So it goes like this, 'rocket blast off PPFFF!' Like that?" (Sophie imitates Larry's arm gesture.)

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Should we try that?"

Teachers and children respond: "Yeah! Let's try that!"

One child shouts out: "No!"

Sophie in a kind and understanding voice: "And if you don't want to do it you can just watch."

Ethan: "I don't want to do it!"

Sophie: "Okay, if you don't want to do it you may just watch."

Larry: "So you need to go, one, two, three, BLAST OFF!"

Everyone joins in, "One, two, three, blast off!"

Sophie: "Oh do you have to say 'rocket blast off' first?"

Larry: "You need to start from here, and when you say, 'blast off' that means you've already had blast off, okay?"

Sophie: "Can you show us again? If I say, one, two, three can you show us how to do it Larry?"

Larry: "One, two, three, four, five, blastoff!"

Sophie and the rest of the class joins in: "Okay so we go, one, two, three, four, five, blastoff!"

Sophie: "Okay. Let's try it again, we'll say it together. Matthew [who starts the countdown ahead of everyone] we're going to say it together."

Everyone joins in: "One, two, three, four, five BLASTOFF!"

Sophie: "Larry thank you for teaching us a new song!"

Larry: "And then this is the other side."

Sophie: "There's more?"

Larry: "Yeah. And then this one they blast off FAST."

Sophie: "Let's watch Larry. Larry is going to show us first."

Larry: "You push these buttons on the rocket ship." Larry uses his pointer finger to pretend to push buttons in the air and continues, "One, two, three, four five, six, seven, eight, AND…. Blast off, FAST! WISHUU, WISHUU!" Now Larry waves his pointer finger and arm through the air in a very fast motion, up, down, and all around the air.

Zach suggests: "What about a race car song? I want to [do] a race car song? It goes one, two, three, VRRMM, VROOM."

Sophie: "Right now Larry is showing us his rocket ship song, so let's look at Larry. He's going to show us the last bit. So let's press the buttons this time."

The whole class counts together while pretending to push rocket ship buttons in the air: "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight…FAST! PFSHOO, PFSHOO!" At the word FAST the children, in unison, take their pointer finger and pretend it is a rocket ship flying fast all through the air.

Sophie: "Okay. Great," and turning to Larry says, "Thank you."

Larry: "And there's more."

Sophie: "You know what, I'm going to ask you to hold your ideas. I'm going to ask you to save your ideas. It sounds like some other people have some ideas. And we can work on them tomorrow." Sophie takes her hands and puts them up to her head pretending to lock her ideas into her brain.

Eager to share their ideas, several children shout out: "I do!"

Sophie acknowledging their excitement says: "Zach has a race car song and Matthew has an idea. We'll work on them tomorrow."

Several more children start shouting out their ideas and to refocus them Sophie starts singing in a quiet voice: "Boys and Girls, Boys and Girls, get your ideas and save it." The children start singing along and pretend to lock their ideas in their head.

In democratic communities, teachers support children as active producers of knowledge. Teachers share power with children and make decisions based on what's best for the group, in this case to move forward with a discussion of other projects

Cave follow-up

Sophie reports that she and her small group of children took the pictures they drew yesterday to the Rainbow Room children this morning and asked them, "Is this the cave?" She said that "One person said 'no' but everybody else said 'yes.'" Sophie adds, "The Rainbow room was going to take flashlights because the cave was very dark." Larry stretches out his arms as far as he can and asks, "Is the cave bigger than this?" Sophie replies, "Tomorrow, they're [Rainbow room children] going to tell us if the cave is bigger than this." As she makes the same gesture with her arms stretched out. They discuss for a few more minutes.

In democratic practice, teachers assume responsibility to sustain project momentum.

Collaborating and finding solutions

Sophie places the snail game in the middle of the circle. In a serious tone, she says: "I'm just going to show this [the snail game] because actually, something…there was a problem." Turning to Nicole, the resource teacher, Sophie asks, "Nicole would you like to tell us about what the problem was?"

Nicole says: "Well boys and girls, earlier, Larry and Ethan, and then Larry and Kate were trying to play the snail game, but there was a problem! And the problem was, 'Who was going to throw the dice first?' So we talked about it and some of the children had different ideas, but one of the ideas that worked with Larry and Kate was when Kate suggested that both of the children would hold on to the dice and they would shake it together; and I said 'Well, how about if we count to three because that was confusing?' So they held onto it and then I counted to three, 'one, two, three,' and they dropped it. And before we had done that, they had done something different too. Kate had chosen three colors that she would move and Larry had chosen three colors [of snails] that he would move, and so whatever the dice fell on the children would…Kate what colors did you have, do you remember?"

Kate: "Yeah, I had red, and pink, and orange."

Nicole: "Yes!"

Larry: "Ah, green, yellow and blue."

Nicole continues, "So when they both shook them…if it dropped on red, Kate would move the red snail. And if they shook it together and it dropped on blue, Larry would move the blue snail" Larry interjects, "Just like my blue shirt!" as he pulls out his blue shirt to show the group.

Nicole continues, "…and they were able to play the game. I was able to leave and they played the game all by themselves. It was just really lovely that they figured that out. You know what was really neat, was that they both stopped and listened to each other and were patient and they figured it out together."

Sophie adds, "That's great, when we have a problem and then someone figures out what to do. So now we have some ideas of how to play the snail game."

Larry: "I want to show us. I want to show us."

Sophie: "You want to show what?"

Larry: "How we play by ourselves."

Sophie: "Did you want to show how you and Kate would throw the dice together?"

Larry: "Yeah and…[inaudible]."

Sophie says she thinks they have time to demonstrate one rolling of the die. She invites Kate and Larry to come to the center of circle and demonstrate to everyone how they rolled the die together while counting to three. Larry and Kate hold the die together, count to three, and show the class how they did it. It lands on yellow, Larry moves the yellow snail.

Sophie exclaims: "So that's how they did it, they shook the dice together."

Collaborative problem solving is highly valued in a democratic community.

Circle book

Sophie ends circle by reading a book about going to grandma's house. She explains that she chose it because Larry just visited his grandmother, who lives in an old fire house.

Sophie intentionally picks books in relation to children's experiences and consistently makes meaningful connections to children's lives.

Gardenia Room and studio support. Some of the primary functions of the studio teacher, Alice, are to offer support to the classroom teachers, their emerging curriculum, classroom intentions, inquiries, and ongoing project work. Some projects emerge spontaneously in the studio and some are closely connected to classroom pursuits. When several children in the Gardenia room's interest in robots emerged, they were supported not only in the classroom, but also in the studio space, as highlighted on the following excerpts from Alice's (2009) blog titled, *"Atelierista: Stories from the Studio"*:

Tuesday, October 13, 2009

Robots, Hole Punchers and Plans

A group of three year olds came to the Studio to work on Robots. They had been constructing with nuts, bolts and metal pieces in their classroom. I asked them what makes a robot and they described someone with a head, eyes, body, arms and legs. That sounded like a person to me, so I asked them what the difference between what they described and a regular person. Duke said "Robots are like persons, but say funny talk, like 'R-O-B-O-T'" (in a machine voice). Larry and Matthew agreed.

They used cardboard and brads to assemble their robots, a happy robot for Larry, and Cat and Car robots for Duke. The hole punchers were too challenging for them to use. I wish I could find a very easy to squeeze, durable hole punch. The brads were very satisfying since they made robots with movable parts.

   We usually have the children make drawn or verbal plans before starting work. This helps them think through their idea along with the process and materials they will need to bring it to fruition. Slowing them down in this way promotes deeper thinking and more mindfulness about resources and problem solving
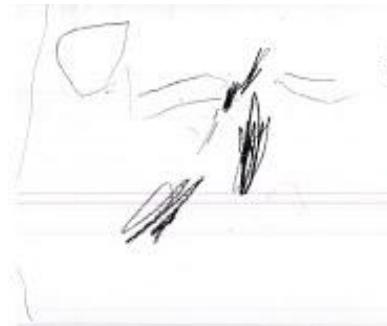
Matthew initially didn't understand what I meant by 'make a plan'. He just wanted to do what was necessary to be able to use the scissors and hole puncher. Eventually with coaching, he drew the plan at left- "A crab robot."

He began to cut this paper up, still not understanding that the plan is the reference for the rest of the work. I asked him to find a piece of cardboard that looked like the round shape (the crabs head), which I put my finger on. He selected one and lay it directly on the circle in the plan. Eureka! Now I knew how to help. I asked him to choose a long piece to correspond with one of the dark shapes on the plan.
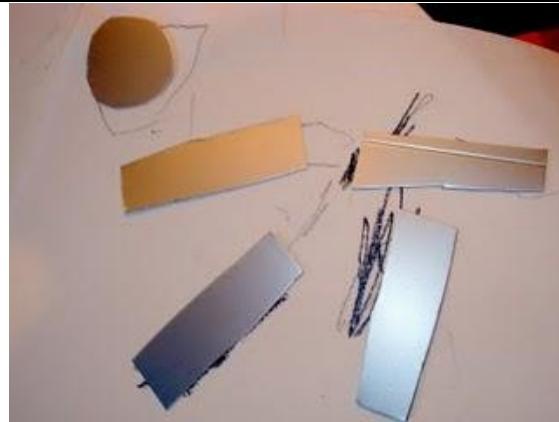
One by one, he chose pieces for each element in his plan, and then assembled his crab robot. After that, he repeated the steps and made another, this time with tape instead of brads.

I wonder if Matthew will know what a plan is next time a teacher asks him for one? Does he understand the one-to-one correspondence between the plan and the project now, or will it take more practice?

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2009

Robot Revisited

Duke came into the studio to make another robot. I asked him to draw a plan, and he drew his favorite picture, his Mom driving her car.

Brads have been available in his classroom, so he had been practicing with them for about a week. He found the tray of silver cardboard and chose his pieces for the car. He could not punch the holes himself, but was very particular about where they should go, so I asked him to make a mark in the right spot and I would punch them. After he built most of the car, I suggested he use plastic for the windshield. He liked the see-through quality very much, and then made a Mommy robot that could go in and out of the car. After seeing the sophistication of this construction, I am excited to see where Duke might go next with these materials, but I wonder what the word robot means to the Gardenia room children?

In democratic environments, teachers consider themselves learners and researchers along with the children, and use a process of observing, reflecting, and documenting classroom experiences to improve their practice.

Rainbow Room

As in any authentic democratic environment, both differences and similarities are embraced and reflected throughout the community; and both shared and individual identities are nourished and made visible. The following composite of the Rainbow room, highlights how each classroom within the Springhill community is built on a foundation of *shared democratic values* (e.g., respect, trust, dialogue, collaboration and transparency) while, at the same time, reflecting the *unique identity* of that particular group.

The Rainbow room is a group of sixteen four-year-olds and two teachers, Gina and Terra. One of the intentions the Rainbow room teachers have this year is to spend a significant part of each day outside exploring the "Forest." At the beginning of the year, teachers develop both individual and classroom intentions (see chapter 6, "Individual and Classroom Intentions" section for more details). The forest is defined loosely as the space outside of the playground fence including the labyrinth, creek, cave, large patches of trees, and pavilion. This ongoing, yearlong exploration of the Forest has manifested into many different investigations and projects (including theory-building, representing place through a variety of media, creating stories connected to the Forest, and many different types of multi-dimensional mapping). The following composite days highlight a few of these projects, show how they emerge and evolve over time and specifically, how they fit into the daily life at the school

Day one.

Cave project

As I enter the room at around 9:00 a.m., Dave is working at the large rectangular art table with a sizeable chunk of clay. He is in the process of forming a "little sculpture" and "big sculpture" representing the "cave." Gina is reminding him that he can use the photo-documentation of the cave displayed on the easel as a reference for his work. The "cave" has been of significant interest to the Rainbow Room children. They discovered the "cave" one day on the side of the creek bank, during their forest explorations early in the school year. This brought about a lot of focus and attention centered on the cave, including making various maps of the cave, trying to figure out how to measure its size, creating a cave out of clay, painting and drawing the cave, building a cave out of the blocks, incorporating the cave into their make-believe stories, and lots of hypothesizing

about what lives inside the cave (e.g., "bears," "fairies," a "big elephant," "monsters," and possibly "the Springhill dragon").

This project approach supports many democratic values, above all a strong image of the child's capacity for initiative, imagination, analysis, persistence and collaboration.

The child as competent problem-solver

Dave finishes his work and is ready to wash the sticky clay off of his hands. As he starts to get up, he somehow gets his foot stuck in the chair and says, "I need help getting out of the chair." While moving into close proximity, Terra does not remove Dave's foot, but encourages him to try to figure out how to get it unstuck, saying, "I bet you can do it." Dave, remembering a new favorite word used in his class, shouts excitedly, "It's a conundrum!" After a few moments he successfully works his foot out of the chair.

In democratic communities, teachers scaffold children's learning and support their growth as confident and capable problem-solvers.

Another version of "rich normality"

Ryan and Timmy are over on the floor playing together at the light table with transparent-colored magnet blocks and building rocket ships. They both need a square piece but there is only one left. Ryan remembers that two triangles make a square so he tries to solve the problem that way. He picks up two triangle pieces, but they are different sized triangles. When he puts them together he discovers that they do not make a square, negating his hypothesis. Next, he tries a new strategy; he takes Timmy's square away. But this is not acceptable to Timmy and he tells Ryan that he wants it back. With some negotiation, they eventually come up with a solution together that they're both comfortable with; Timmy will give Ryan the square when he is done using it. A few

minutes later, Terra joins them at the light table as they build and try to put more pieces together to see what shapes they'll form.

On the opposite side of the Rainbow Room sits an overhead projector. The projector is projecting a picture of a cave onto the wall, serving as a provocation set out by the teachers for the children's play. Next to the projector is a basket of silk scarves, wood pieces, mirrors, a large plant, and various other natural materials. A couple of children are waving the scarves through the air as they dance around the carpet.

Lisa (the Executive Director of the school) is sitting at the round table listening to a story Valerie has created. Lisa is writing down the words, verbatim, as Valerie recites them. When finished, Valerie comes over to Terra and retells the story to her, which is about a dog that gets "hit in a crash," a girl being chased and captured by aliens, and a ride in a "rocket ship." Terra and Valerie discuss different elements in the story. Terra asks her about creating a title for her story and they discuss the different characters in it. Valerie says that she is "the little girl that grows up as a teenager." Valerie and some other children decide they want to act out the story in the Forest this morning after snack. But Valerie realizes that they will need a "rocket ship" in order to act out the story. She says, "I bet Nathan will build a rocket ship for me," knowing that he likes rocket ships. But this morning he's not interested in helping her build one. Valerie seems disappointed and Terra suggests that she check in with some other children to see if they'd be interested in helping. Undeterred, Valerie asks Robert, but he is also not interested in building a rocket ship. Terra points out that Timmy and Ryan are building rocket ships at the light table. Valerie makes the connection that they may be interested in making one for her story and upon inquiring finds out that, yes, they would be interested in helping.

Terra sitting at the light table supports their collaboration, reading the story aloud and brainstorming with them, "I wonder if you put all these tiles together, if you could make one big rocket ship."

In a democratic community, the teachers are attuned to the interests and initiatives of the children.

Circle time: a time to collaborate

Shortly after, the children and teachers clean up and gather for morning circle. After morning greetings, Valerie's story becomes the main focus for discussion. The children are excited about acting out the story and brainstorm about how they will create the various props that go along with the story. Here is some of the children's dialogue and conversation planning Valerie's story:

Ryan points out, "another conundrum," they need a door and roof on the rocket ship for "Valerie to get out of."

Another child has an idea to solve that problem, "Maybe we can *pretend* there is a top [roof]."

Ellen suggests materials they may need to solve this problem, "We need screws, door knob, glue, and strong muscles…I bet that's Sam" [meaning Sam, the largest boy in the class, will supply the strong muscles].

Sam suggests that "maybe [they] could pretend the dirt is evil soup."

When Sam also suggests using a paper airplane for the rocket ship, Celia reminds him that "it's too small for people to climb."

Children are given facilitated opportunities to learn from each other through meaningful dialogue.

Snack time: an outdoor experience

Each day, unless it is raining, the children eat their snack "picnic style" outside in the Forest. The children load up their snack, blankets and water into a wagon and take turns pulling it to the forest space. Two children are in charge of the wagon (one in front and one in the back). On this particular day, the wagon gets stuck as they are trying to navigate it through the narrow door space. The children instantly rally together and figure out how to get it through the door. Although it takes some time to get it unstuck, the teachers don't rush them or try to step in and fix it themselves. When they get to a patch of trees overlooking the creek below in their Forest space they park their wagon and start to play.

Teachers have a strong image of the child, and see them as capable problem solvers.

Reenacting Valerie's story in the forest

The children are very eager to recreate Valerie's story. They decide who's going to be which characters and they begin their reenactment. They decide to use natural elements in the Forest for their props (e.g., the large tree is the rocket ship). Gina reads the story aloud as the children act it out. It brings them so much joy that they spontaneously join together in a group hug as the story is completed, and start chanting, "Let's do it again! Let's do it again!" They do the story several more times; taking turns in different character roles.

From the perspective of democratic practice, clearly no two classrooms are alike. For this class, the forest is the focal point for activities, learning and imaginative play.

Snack routine in the forest

When some of the children start getting hungry, they start setting up for snack. Several children take out the blankets and spread them out on the ground. Another child

puts the water pitcher and cups out. There is a log, standing vertically, approximately 2

½ feet tall, on which they place their water pitcher and cups each day. Children eating

mostly organic snacks help each other open their granola bars and applesauce containers.

Teachers also eat their snack and sit on the blanket with the children joining them in

conversation.

Snack time is a time for conversation and making enjoyable connections with one another. Establishing trusting, authentic relationships is an essential foundation of a democratic community.

The forest as learning context: the super-rich normality of nature

As they finish snack, the children start migrating to different parts of the forest.

Several children head towards the labyrinth to run through it. The teachers mention that

several children have been stung by bees in the labyrinth and caution them to keep their

eyes out for any nearby bees.

Ryan and Fiona have taken clipboards (out of the wagon) and started making

pictures. Ryan is creating a map while making up a story to go along with it. When

Fiona finishes her drawing, she takes it to show Gina. Gina carefully writes down

Fiona's words as she describes what she drew.

Several of the children start to climb down the hill and into the creek in their

rubber boots. Once at the creek, Michelle and Ellen get almost knee-deep into the water,

play for awhile, cross to the opposite side, find large sticks and pretend to fish. Peyton

seems to prefer to remain perched on the edge of the steep hill but offers words of

encouragement to Nathan and Tonya as they help each other climb up and down. The

children figure out that it's helpful to hold onto the tree roots that are sticking out of the

ground for leverage, as they pull themselves back to the top of the hill.

One of the children picks up a gumball, takes it to Terra and thoughtfully asks her, "Does picking the gumballs hurt the tree?" Terra takes this question seriously and invites several other children to join their conversation. They discuss the gumballs that are on the ground versus the ones that are still hanging from the branches. They collectively decide that they won't pick anymore off the branches but that it is okay to collect the ones that have already fallen off the trees.

At around 10:50 a.m., they pack up their things, load up the wagon, and head back inside. The children put their lunchboxes back on their hooks, use the restroom, wash their hands, and head to several different areas. Some of the children go to the playground and several visit friends in other classrooms. Valerie, Ryan, and Fiona head to the studio to work on various projects. Ryan heads to the studio to make his map sketch out of beads and popsicle sticks.

The social, cognitive and physical competency and sensory awareness of children are fully tapped into when learning takes place in complex, open-ended natural environments. When teachers are trusting of children and allow sufficient freedom of movement and exploration, the "super-rich" normality of nature becomes an optimal democratic learning environment.

Gumballs: the results of outdoor exploration are brought inside

At around 11:40 a.m. the children start to clean up and head back to their room for closing circle. In circle, Gina and Terra talk with the children about their interest in gumballs. Over the past few weeks, teachers have observed the children's excitement and interest in gumballs including playing with gumballs outside, bringing them inside for closer inspection, drawing them, showing them to their friends, and talking about them. Gina invites the children to discuss the similarities and differences of the various gumballs they've collected. She passes them around the circle as they talk. The children start developing theories about how the gumballs will change. Timmy hypothesizes,

"The green gumball is going to turn brown and the brown gumball is going to turn green." They thought that the green gumballs had holes but the brown ones did not. They have not yet discovered that the brown ones also have holes but are covered by the wizened prickles on the gumball. They decide to observe the gumballs over the next several days to test out their theories and see what happens. Timmy and Sam place the gumballs on separate pieces of paper, draw and label them, in order to distinguish which is which and place them on the round table for several days of observation.

Careful observation of the natural world builds up an awareness of life's richness, interdependencies and complexity.

End of day parent communications: the importance of transparent pedagogical practice

At around 12:00 the parents begin gathering outside the classroom door for pick up. Gina and Terra have a glass window in one of their classroom doors where they have the computer monitor facing outward with photographs of the children's experiences that morning for parents viewing.

In democratic terms, transparency in educational practice is an important value, as it assures democratic accountability and builds the trust necessary for collaboration between teachers and parents.

Day two.

"The Labyrinth is Long": making learning visible

After greeting the Gardenia room children, I head over to the Rainbow room just before their morning circle begins. As I enter the classroom, I notice that their evolving wall display has new documentation highlighting their ongoing explorations of the Forest. Specifically, the teachers have added, "The Labyrinth is Long" documentation, a reflection on the children's project involving the measuring and mapping of the labyrinth,

a particularly special place in the Forest in which the children like to play (See photo of
"Labyrinth is Long" hallway display in Appendix I).

*Learning made visible through documentation can become a reference point for adults
and children seeking to extend and deepen past learning.*

Leaf crunchiness: pursuing an in-depth exploration of the forest

As I enter the classroom, I see it is buzzing with activity. A few children are
signing in for the day at the writing table. At the large brown wooden table, several
children are examining the different leaves and flowers collected throughout the week
and have set out on the table. There are also several clear-glass bowls with dried,
crumbled-up leaves. Nathan and Gina are sitting at the table crunching up leaves into the
bowl. They are discussing the differences in the leaves "crunch" potential. Nathan tries
out several different leaves, but has not quite made the connection that the dead brown
leaves make the best crunch. Gina mentions that she can smell the leaves as he breaks
them apart, and they discuss what it smells like. In the large window adjacent to this
table hangs a display of children's leaf representations in several different types of media,
as well as some photos of children outside exploring the leaves. In the windowsill below
there are jars of "leaf-colored" paint the children created earlier in the week. On the light
table this morning, teachers have placed several leaves under white butcher paper, along
with a container of pastel crayons for tracing the leaf shadows, a provocation for
children's ongoing exploration of leaves. In the other half of the room, a couple of boys
sit at the round table flipping through the pages of an Andy Goldsworthy book with large
nature photos. Some girls are talking with Terra in another corner of the room. Nicole
(the resource teacher) is also in the room and Ryan shows her a "map" that he drew with
his grandma.

As more children enter the room, several immediately go to the round table with the gumballs, and their adjoining labeled pictures, that have been left out for some prolonged observations. Gina and Terra have also put out some tools, such as magnifying glasses for deepened, up-close examinations. The children are excited to see if, and how, the gumballs have changed and if it matches their initial hypotheses that they developed in circle earlier this week. Dave, examining them carefully, comments, "It's [the brown gumball] not turning green! I wonder if they never turn." Valerie, using a magnifying glass, notices, "Hey this DOES have holes!," referring to the brown one they previously believed didn't have holes underneath the prickles. Another group of children discover seeds that are starting to fall out of the gumballs and share their discovery in circle. With continued observations and discussion throughout the week, children begin readjusting and refining some of their initial theories about the gumballs.

Teachers support children's inquiry without imposing their sense of "right" or "wrong" in children's theory development.

Morning meeting: welcoming friends visiting from other classrooms

At around 9:30 the Rainbow Classroom children and teachers finish their morning activities and begin to gather for morning meeting. As they start forming a circle on the floor, Evelyn from the Gardenia room comes in and shows Terra a note she has written with Sophie (the Gardenia room teacher). As the note indicates, Evelyn has decided to join the Rainbow room this morning. Terra welcomes her into the classroom, asks her to put her note in the basket with the other notes, and invites her into their circle.

Children have the freedom to choose their own pursuits during the day, within a carefully organized structure that allows for this type of flexibility.

Organizing small group work

During their morning meeting, the children and teachers make their plans for the day and organize themselves into small groups. Once the meeting concludes, children and teachers gather into their designated small groups.

Small group work is a critical part of their program. Groups are formed based on individual interests and pursuits. Therefore, children go eagerly, not begrudgingly to start their projects and investigations (see "Small Group Work with 3 and 4 Year Olds" section of chapter 5 for further information).

The Forest group

The "Forest group," which consists of Gina and four children (Timmy, Ryan, Celia, & Fiona) prepare to go outside. Gina heard several children having a conversation about how there was more water in the river and decided to use this as a springboard for a small group exploration of the creek on this rainy day. The water is noticeably higher because of the rain. Their plan is to explore the forest and creek to see how the rain affects the water flow. Because it is raining, the children take off their regular shoes, place them in the shoe basket and put on their rain boots and jackets before heading out. Each classroom has a shoe basket or shelf for children to place their shoes when they aren't wearing them. Children have the freedom to decide when they want to wear, or not wear, their shoes and/or boots.

Children are not given arbitrary rules to follow. Instead, teachers create organized systems to make this type of democratic environment manageable. Springhill teachers understand that some children don't want to wear coats outside in cold weather, respect these feelings, and take seriously the question of what to do about it. So they consulted a pediatrician about what temperature is unsafe to go without a coat and allow the

children the freedom to decide whether or not they want to wear a coat, until the temperature drops below the doctor's specified temperature.[40]

Where is the water coming from, where is it going: representing theories

When they get down to the creek, they notice several changes, the water is flowing much quicker, there is a lot more water, the rocks have disappeared and the tunnel (the creek flows through) appears smaller. As they continue to observe the creek they start discussing questions that come to their mind, "How is the tunnel smaller?" Where is the water coming from? Where is it going?"

After exploring the creek, the tunnel, and rocks in the area, they come back inside and dry off. They then go to the multipurpose room to talk about their observations and to discuss their theories about "where the water is coming from" and "where the water is going." Gina gives them each large pieces of paper to draw out their theories. Children begin to understand their natural environment in meaningful, deep, authentic ways. In this case, understanding "place" through change is a recurring thread that emerges from their curriculum throughout the year (see chapter 5, "Individual, Classroom, and School-Wide Intentions" section for more about their project on place).

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[40] Rainbow Rooms exploration of Forest, in both rain and shine brings to mind a study described in David Sobel's book, "Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms and Communities" (2004, p. 35). Sobel writes, "In Denmark and Sweden in recent years there's a new kind of preschool program roughly translated as *Outdoors in all Weather* (Gahn et. al., 1997). The core idea is to spend the majority of time, say 60 to 80 percent of the school day, in the out-of-doors. Doesn't matter whether it's sunny and beautiful or foggy and dreary or windy and snowy, put on those willies and out we go. These are programs in rural villages as well as Copenhagen and Stockholm, so four-year-olds may be gardening and fishing, or they may be exploring alleyways and feeding pigeons. What's the result? Students in the *Outdoors in all Weather* programs are suffering from 80 percent fewer infectious diseases (colds, ear infections, sore throat, whooping cough) than children in conventional indoor programs."

In a democratic environment, children are encouraged to represent their ideas in multiple media, often starting with drawing. Visual media allow for the construction of multi-dimensioned understandings of complex subject matter.

Sewing group prepares for studio

Meanwhile, back in the classroom, the "sewing group," consisting of Terra and four children (Franklin, Michelle, Dave, and Robert), head to the table covered with leaves to pick out which ones they'd like to take to the studio to sew. Most of the leaves displayed on the table were collected in the forest and brought into the room by children on previous days.

The remaining children stay in the classroom with Nicole (the resource teacher) to play and work on child-initiated activities.

After picking out the leaves they'd like to represent, the "sewing group" heads to the studio to embroider them (see, "*Sewing Group in the Studio*," in the "*Rainbow Room and Studio Support*" section below, for further details of their studio work on that particular day.)

Children, not teachers, choose which particular leaf they are going to recreate through sewing.

Snack time: building relationships and making connections

At about 10:15 a.m. Michelle, Robert, Dave, and Franklin start getting hungry and one-by-one start to head from the studio back to the room for snack. Gina and her group of children are also all back in the room from their creek explorations. Because it is raining, they eat inside the classroom today.

Zach from the Gardenia room has decided to join the Rainbow class for snack today. (Zach is neighbors with Nathan, a child in the Rainbow room, and plays with him often. So he chooses to spend some of his time with him.)

Some children decide to have a picnic on the floor. They spread out the blanket onto the floor. Another group of children prefer eating at the table and set up their snack there. Terra sits with the group having snack on the floor. Once again lots of lively conversation takes place. They discuss the crunchy sounds that some of their snacks are making and Terra tells them it reminds her of the sound the rabbit she used to have and made when she fed it. They listen and compare each other's crunch sounds, determining which foods offer the best crunch potential.

When this particular conversation begins to wane, Terra asks Ryan about his grandmother's recent visit and whether or not she's gone back to California?

This sparks a thought in Dave's mind and he says, "My grandma lives…." But then stops, seemingly stuck. Terra encourages him to continue, "What are you thinking about Dave?" He responds, "My grandma lives in New York and Florida." Terra replies, "In New York and Florida? You went to Wyoming this summer too, didn't you?"

Teachers are aware of children's significant happenings and bring that information into the conversation. Teachers show authentic interest in children's lives.

This begets a conversation among the group about the various places they've traveled. Robert explains that he went to St. Louis and Dave says he also went to California. Terra listens intently, and says, "Wow. That's a long way away." Dave explains, "It's on the other side of the earth." Terra asks, "It's all the way on the other side of the Earth?" Dave corrects himself, "It's on the other side of the United States. Yeah." Terra replies, "It must have taken a long time to get there, huh." Dave continues, "Yeah because I…because I have a puzzle of the United States." Terra asks, "Oh you do?" Dave says, "And one piece of the capital." Terra inquiring further asks, "One piece of the capital what?" Dave thinking for a moment replies, "It says, Virginia, Richmond."

Terra asks, "Does it show where you went to California too?" He says yes and she says, "Wow. That would be a fun puzzle to see. We're talking so much about different places in the United States."

Teachers connect geography in ways that are memorable to children, through their personal connections and firsthand experience.

Choices

As children finish up their snack at around 11:00 a.m. they start moving to different parts of the school. It has started to thunder, along with the rain, so Nicole (the resource teacher) is unable to set up the playground. Instead, she sets up several gross motor activities in the multipurpose room, including bouncy toys and a large piece of fabric to make a tunnel. Terra and several children join her there. As some of the children tire from these activities, she invites them to join her in an interactive flower and petal song. Another group heads to the studio to work on making beaded necklaces.

Ryan and Timmy decide to stay in the classroom and start taking out the large hollow blocks. They set up the blocks, across the floor, so they can "run across them and jump." When Ryan tests out their structure he almost falls down. Timmy immediately asks him in a concerned voice, "Are you okay?" Ryan responds, "Yeah, I'm fine." Timmy tells Ryan, "I'll go first, so it doesn't happen again."

Ryan then turns to face me and asks, "You know what's cool about this?"

I respond, "What?"

Ryan answers, "We [he and Timmy] can go at the same time, together."

As Timmy and Ryan attempt to walk together, the blocks separate again and Timmy says, "We got to fix this problem!" He holds his hand out to Ryan's. Together, Timmy and Ryan move the hollow blocks back to their designated spot, flush with the

other blocks. Once complete, they both excitedly say: "Fixed it!" Nathan comes over to join in their play after he finishes making his hand puppet.

Children take care of each other in an altruistic community. Springhill has established a culture of problem-solving together (see chapter 8, "Social Responsibility and Concern for the Common Good in Democratic Environments," for more on this topic).

Leaves from the forest

On the other side of the room, Gina sits with Robert at the light table as he works on some leaf rubbings. Finishing up, Robert heads over to play with a basket of magnets and Gina walks over to the large table with the variety of dried and fresh leaves where Michelle and Piper are working.

Michelle and Piper, donning their Halloween capes (silk scarves they've tied around their neck), work on "Halloween Leaves," as decorations for their "Halloween party."[41] Piper shows Gina the leaf she is coloring with a green pastel and says, "The green gets sparkles and when I color with the green it makes sparkles." Gina responds, "Wow." When Michelle tries to color leaves with the pastel crayons, as decorations for their party, she notices some of them are too "crunchy" and unusable for coloring. Michelle tries to color onto one of the crunchy leaves and shows Gina how it breaks apart.

In the following dialogue, Gina tries to stretch the girls thinking and help them make connections about why some leaves are crunchy and some are not. Michelle's leaf is breaking apart so she says, "This one's not working so I'm going to use this one."

Gina asks her, "Which one wasn't working?"

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[41] In Springhill's democratic culture, children are not passive observers of holiday activities created by teachers. Instead holiday activities emerge from children's initiations and are actively constructed by them, in this example several weeks past Halloween (see chapter 6, for more on children's participation in seasonal traditions).

Michelle, showing Gina a pile of leaves next to her, and replies "All of these were not working because they're crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch."

Gina responds, "Oh. Some of them are crunching and some of them aren't. Is that what you're saying? Huh. I wonder why that is?"

Michelle tries to color another leaf and says, "This one's not crunching…Oh, it IS crunching!"

Gina in a sympathetic voice, "Ooohh."

Michelle points to one she has already colored and says, "This one's not crunching." And then trying another leaf says, "Yeah, crunching, crunching, crunching. Let me try this one."

Gina asks her, "Well, Michelle why do you think some of them ARE crunching and some are not crunching?"

Michelle replies, "ALL of them are crunching."

Gina holds up the non-crunching leaf that Michelle had pointed out earlier and asks, "This one crunches too?"

Michelle says, "No. Just ONE doesn't crunching."

Gina repeats, "Just one doesn't."

Piper adds, "Mine's not crunching!"

Gina repeats, "Yours isn't crunching? I wonder why."

Michelle says, "Mine's are."

Piper in an excited voice says, "I know Michelle! I know one you can use…" as she heads over to the light table to get one of the leaves underneath the butcher paper for Michelle to try. Michelle follows her there and they find several leafs that they bring

back over to the table. Michelle and Piper decide they'd like to trace them and cut them out. So, they head to the art shelf to find some tracing paper and scissors.

Explorations are not superficial but involve many sensory investigations/explorations. Teachers are not always successful in their attempts to help children make conceptual "leaps." As we see here, Piper and Michelle don't ever seem to make the connection that the dead, brown leaves are the crunchy ones. In a democratic environment, teachers recognize that their role is not to merely deposit facts into children's minds, but rather to provide opportunities that allow children to make their own discoveries.

Circle time: reviewing children's theories

Alice rings the chimes at 11:40 a.m., in each classroom, which is the Springhill signal indicating that it's time for everybody to return to their classrooms for closing circle.

After gathering in circle, the teachers and children sing the "Hello Song" (similar routine for starting circle in all of the rooms). Gina and her "Forest Group" share their morning explorations with the rest of the class and the theories they've devised. She explains the group went down to the creek to investigate some of their questions including: "Where is the water coming from? Where is the water flowing?" They also study how the creek has changed with all of the rain. [The water is noticeably higher, covering rocks and filling the tunnel with several more inches.]

Gina asks her small group, "What did we notice right away at the creek?"

Ryan first replies, "I don't remember."

Nathan helps out and responds, "It was so full we couldn't see the rocks."

After a little time, Ryan seems to crystallize his theories and explains them to his classmates, "When water rose that made the tunnel smaller and when the water falls, you can see more of the tunnel."

Gina explains to the class that Celia suggested, "Let's see what the tunnel looks like," and when they went to look at it, Celia noticed that the tunnel looked smaller to her. The children also noticed that the rocks were covered. Celia explains her theory about what happened to the rocks, "Rocks [were] there first. The rain makes it deeper and deeper so you can't see the rocks anymore."

Ryan explains his theory about why the tunnel looked smaller, "I think you can't see the inner part of the tunnel when the, when the water gets bigger." He uses his hands to demonstrate.

Another child explains, "When the water drained out you could see the inner part."

Gina explains to the rest of the class that they investigated two other questions, "Where is the water coming from? And, where is the water going?" Gina gives the children their drawings to show their theories that they drew earlier today to the rest of the class. She explains, "Nathan thinks water is coming out of the tunnel and back into another tunnel."

Fiona shares her drawing and theory about the water flow, "The tunnels there, so that the grass and the dirt don't fall into the creek. And where the tunnel ends, there's more grass." Fiona also drew a rain family since it was raining.

Ryan: "the water will go in and out of the tunnel and back in." Ryan requested seeing if anyone has questions for him.

Celia said there's a whole family of fish in the water.

Piper wondered if all the children in boots could go to the creek in a boat.

Gina tells them to lock their ideas in their head and to draw some of the ideas tomorrow.

Gina remembers Celia was wondering what is on the other side of the tunnel. The children have more discussion about what the kids think.

Children discuss their initial theories about the creek and water flow. Through this dialogue and collaboration children are able to readjust and refine their theories. These types of activities help children develop their critical thinking abilities, an essential attribute of a democratic citizenship.

Leaf sewing

Gina shows "hitchhikers" that are "sticking to her pants" from when they were exploring the forest earlier.

When they finish discussing their creek explorations, Terra and the sewing group children share the progress they made in their leaf sewing. [They have brought the leaves they selected and their fabric leaf they started.] They discuss the colors of thread they chose, mistakes they made, and how last year they sewed in the Forest room and how that was a good reference for this project. Terra points out Franklin's unusual leaf. Nathan says to Franklin: "How many colors do you got?" as he shows him his work. Franklin looks and counts, "1,2,3, three." When Dave shows his leaf sewing, Terra points out his close stitching. Terra invites others to participate in the sewing if they're interested.

Children bring their work to circle. Sharing with the larger group is an essential part of social constructivism, and helps to stretch children's thinking.

Literature preview: choosing books to match children's interests

Gina explains that she doesn't have time to read part of the chapter book she brought ("My Father's Dragon"), but tells them a little bit about it and shows them the picture of the map featured on the inside cover of the book because she knows how

interested in maps they've become lately. She reads the words on the map, "Tangerine Island" and "Wild Island" and shows them the stones that connect the two islands. Franklin notices crocodiles on the map. Dave asks what another word on the map says. Gina reads it: "It says big clearing."

Teachers intentionally connect literature to children's interests and ongoing investigations. In this way, teachers demonstrate for children the value of actively seeking outside tools and resources to extend their investigations and model for children how to take initiative in their discovery process, important skills necessary for a democratic citizenry.

Gifts from Valerie: a culture of generosity

Near the end of circle time, Gina tells the class that Valerie has made something with her babysitter, a gift for each of her classmates. The gift is made out of wire and bead and Valerie passes them out to each person (see "Following Children's Individual Pursuits" in next section for related studio project).

Gina asks her, "Can you tell us how you made them?" and Valerie explains the process to the class. She also shows them what they can do with them saying, "You can unwrap them or if you'd like to, you can go like this," as she moves one of them through the air.

Gina clarifies, "Oh, so you're saying you can move them in different ways." Valerie says "yes," continuing to move it around in the air.

A few moments later, some of the parents have arrived and several children join them to go home. The remaining children start preparing for "Lunch Bunch," the afterschool program.

Gift-giving as an altruistic practice builds solidarity in democratic cultures. Here, teachers support children's desires to express their friendship and creativity through gift-giving.

Rainbow Room and studio support. Alice, the studio teacher offers support to the classroom teachers, their emerging curriculum, classroom intentions, inquiries, and ongoing project work. Here is an excerpt from the previous composite day, when the sewing group visits the studio. It highlights the type of small group work that takes place regularly in the studio:

Sewing group in the Studio

(*Note conceptual remarks embedded in description of studio time*)

Alice (the studio teacher) is ready for their arrival and has prepared the materials. She met with Terra and Gina during their planning meeting the previous day. (*Teachers, as well as children, collaborate daily.*)

Alice has the light table covered with white paper. On top, there are several pieces of fabric and black fabric pens. On the large table in the center of the room Alice has a variety of embroidery hoops (metal, wood, and different sizes), sewing needles, and a large bag of embroidery thread. Alice, Terra and the children first head over to the light table with their leaves to trace onto fabric. Alice gives them each a piece of fabric for tracing. Each child approaches this task a little differently. Michelle and Franklin, comfortable with their ability to trace the leaf, prefer working independently. However, Robert has not quite mastered this skill and solicits support from Alice. She helps hold the fabric in place while Robert traces. As he works, they discuss some of the details of the leaf. Dave approaches the task slowly, before he actually begins tracing, he decides to feel the leaf and describe how it feels to Terra. As they work, Terra takes photos and notes of the process. (*Observing and documenting children's work for later reflection is an ongoing practice at Springhill.*)

As they finish tracing their leaves, they write their name on the fabric and head over to the large table to begin sewing. Alice and Terra have them each pick out the color of thread they'd like to use and an embroidery hoop that best fits their fabric leaf drawing. The teachers invite the children to try out several different hoop sizes on top of their leaf fabrics to find ones that fit their leaf "shapes." Dave decides on a hoop that is quite small and does not allow room for his entire leaf. Terra questions him about it not fitting, but Dave decides he still wants to use it. Terra doesn't try to control his decision or make him use one that fits better. (*Teachers understand that children also learn from mistakes and that a certain amount of disequilibrium is necessary for "true" learning. See chapter 7, "A Constructivist Perspective of Learning," for more detail.*)

After he finishes the first part of the leaf that is visible within the hoop, he and Terra brainstorm together about what he should do to make the rest of the leaf visible. Dave and Terra figure out how to reposition the remaining fabric into the hoop. (*Teachers do not focus on the "correct" way to do a project. Instead they help the children problem solve towards their own satisfactory solution.*)

As the teachers help them thread their needles, Alice reminds them that the needles are "real things that are sharp" and not pretend ones for playing. While in the studio and settled into sewing, the teachers and children all partake in a lively, meaningful, and egalitarian conversation on a wide variety of topics. For instance, they discuss: experiences they had trick-or-treating; how old they each are ("4 or 4 ½"); the Springhill dragon (see chapter 6, "Seasonal Traditions: Creating Shared Memories," for information about the "Springhill dragon"); what "conundrum" means, a new and favorite word they've learned; sewing experiences they had last year in previous

classrooms; the boy characters in the Disney movie "Cars" (see chapter 10, "Cautionary Tales in Spontaneous Conversations" for further discussion of specific dialogue); and ideas for how they could sew a map of different parts of the forest. Franklin wants to sew a map of the labyrinth and Dave wants to sew the parking lot. Robert has some trouble thinking of what part of the forest he'd like to sew. Terra suggests a particular tree that she knows he likes to climb.[42] (*By listening and observing children, Springhill teachers know their children well and use that knowledge to support learning and connectedness*.)

Children had several experiences sewing in their classroom last year and seem very much at ease in this project. (*Springhill teachers simultaneously revisit and build on children's previously developed skill sets, "vertical learning," as well as offering many opportunities to explore and use novel mediums, "horizontal learning."*)

As Alice helps them with the needles, she accidentally pokes her finger. Robert immediately starts taking care of her and tells her that he will put a band-aid on her "boo-boo." (*Spontaneous acts of kindness and care arise throughout the day by all community members, non-hierarchically.*)

As children reach a stopping point in their work, Terra shows them a technique to save their threaded needle with their work. "Look at this. This is a great way to put your

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[42] Notice that these types of authentic conversations at Springhill are different from the inauthentic types of "conversations" that so often happen in preschools. By that, I mean, verbal interactions where adults have a tendency to grill children in order to test their knowledge or have them display shallow skills, requiring children to be in a performance type mode (e.g., "What's this letter? What's this word say? Good job! What color is this? You're SO Smart!"). Unintentionally, the adults often laugh at the "cute" behavior displayed by the child and offer superficial praise for the correct answers. Dyson and Genishi (2005) refer to these types of questions as "known-answer questions." Their case study research found that these types of questions dominated in schools and "seemed to socialize children to be experts on the names and attributes of things and people surrounding them" (p. 88). Unfortunately, this type of teacher-child dialogue does not allow for critical thinking, relationship-building, and collaborative meaning-making.

needle with your work," Terra explains as she shows them how to weave the needle

through the fabric, adding, "Like that. So then it won't poke you as easily because it's

not sticking up, but you'll have it with your work." (*Among other things*, *the studio*

teacher is responsible for helping children learn how to use tools and materials

competently and safely.)

Following children's individual pursuits

Alice supports children's individual interests and pursuits as well as the group

work. The following documentation, "Making Your Own Toys" highlights the

connection and close relationship between studio and classroom pursuits, in this case the

Rainbow room and their ongoing explorations in the Forest. It offers a glimpse into the

rich, individualized, in-depth, meaningful work that is possible in a democratic

environment. In this particular case, we see Valerie become an active producer of, rather

than passive consumer of toys.

The following documentation is from Alice's blog, "*Atelierista: Stories from the*

Studio." Excerpts are from blog entries dated "September 30, 2009" and "October 22,

2009":

Wednesday, September 30, 2009, Making Your Own Toys

Valerie, her Mom and I [Alice] talked at carpool about why Valerie was saying she
didn't want to go in the Forest. I had been with her the day before and saw that she
was smiling, and having success measuring the labyrinth with her steps. She said the
reason it wasn't very fun was that there weren't any toys to play with in the Forest.
Maybe she could make some toys!

Later, Valerie came to the studio to work on a plan for some Forest toys.

Alice "What kind of toy are you talking about?"

Valerie "I'm talking about a toy that can shoot all kinds of things—a rock or a pine
cone, er, a gumball (from a Sweet Gum tree). It will throw things at trees. It should be

made out of sticks." (I asked Valerie to go outside with me to find some sticks, but she decided to use popsicle sticks from the wood shelf).

Alice "Will you show me the parts that you are drawing?"

Valerie "These are the stripes from the sun. Well, the real sun has stripes. The Sun makes stripes and then power."

(Valerie works a bit and then makes the toy. Then she goes back to this plan.)

"This is the part that throws things (The pink shape). This is the handle. This is the stripes that show it throwing out of the toy."

After consulting with the teachers, I will try to help the children again to make some 'Forest toys,' next time out of natural materials. It sounded like Valerie was trying to make a catapult out of sticks at first, and then revised her plan to "something more like a tennis game." We will revisit her intention another day.

Several weeks later, Alice revisits Valerie's intentions and their work continues:

Wednesday, October 21, 2009

Toys for the Forest

Valerie continued to come to the studio over several days to try to make another toy to play with in the Forest. She seemed happier going out with her class each day (her class has an intention to go out into our wild space every day), but came into the studio as soon as they came back into the school building. I could see that she wanted to include movement in her toys. Her ideas ranged from a catapult type 'flinger' to something like a marble race. Her drawn plans were very beautiful, incorporating rays

from the sun ("that gives power") and paths along which an object could roll or propel. These seemed to be simple machines disguised as toys.

Pull this Back
Then the tennis ball
Jumps.
You can
shoot
it
4 times
a Day.

Tennis
Ball
In Big
Hole

Plan for flinger
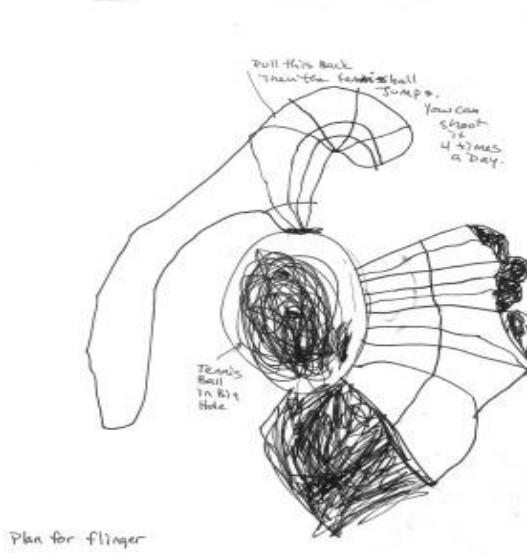
In an effort to stick with the Rainbow room intention to let the children make their own place in the forest (the area outside our playground fence), we went outside to look for materials to build toys with. The tape and popsicle stick toy Valerie had made earlier didn't hold its appeal outside.

I have noticed over the years that natural materials can be very difficult to work with. The standard glues and tape available in the studio don't join bark and rocks together very well. I helped as best as I could by showing Valerie how she could use wire or string, and we made the tunnel part of her plan, and then struggled to fit the ramp part to it. The truth was, these materials were too hard to work with, for both of us.

These plans that she had in her head were not working out in fact. So often children can envision something that their skills or knowledge will not allow them to actually construct. Sometimes my scaffolding is enough, but engineering skills are a weak point for me, and it was the middle of the school day, so I couldn't ask another teacher for help right then. Valerie wanted to turn to the cardboard, plastic and popsicle sticks that were available in the studio.

Thinking quickly, I handed her a gumball and piece of string, and asked if she could make part of the toy with that. She wound the string around the prickly gumball and noticed it stuck. She picked up a stick and wound the other end of the string around that. She began to swing it around. She said "Hey, this is a fun toy! I could play with this in the Forest."

Valerie thought that she could show the other children in her class how to make these toys, so we brought the string and some scissors outside, where the children made and played with toys together.

The story continues to unfold; what started as an individual project is now evolving into a collaborative project, as described by Alice below:

Thursday, October 22, 2009

Toys in the Forest Continued

When Valerie and I brought her toy outside, and she showed what it could do, the other children all wanted to make one. During this time, two things that would become provocations for later inquiry occurred;

1. As they tried to tie the gumballs to the string, they noticed that some worked better than others. What was the difference?
Some of them were mashed down, and others were more "pokey." As we searched for more of the "pokey" gumballs, the children found a tree where they were growing and green. This has sparked an investigation of gumballs in the Rainbow room.

2. After making many toys, the children started asking if they could take them home. With encouragement from teachers, they instead looked for a place where they could keep the toys in the Forest, so that they could find and play with them later. They found a tree whose roots formed a sort of basket, and called it the toy box. Later, a group of forest room children found the toys, sparking questions and curiosity, and hopefully collaboration between the two groups

Note that in circle the toys Valerie made at home with her babysitter very much resembled the flingers made in the studio. (*Meaningful work is contagious, reciprocally influencing both home and school work.*)

Outdoor Playground

Day one: Playground discovery. The playground is abuzz with activity. Nicole, the resource teacher sets up the playground each morning, and as part of this ritual, she brings out a small group of varying children each day to help her set it up. (*Teachers share control and participation with children in creating and maintaining the various school spaces, in this case the playground.*) Earlier in the morning, Orson and Oscar helped her set up the playground. While in the shed (where the majority of the playground equipment is stored), Orson sees the soccer net and asks Nicole, "Can we have that?" Nicole explains to me that the big balls had not been out for awhile because people just weren't interested. So she thinks using the soccer net may be a good way to reignite their interest in the big balls. Nicole tells Orson that they can give it a try but

they may need to negotiate some rules to make sure that it is safe play. (Orson and Oscar are familiar with soccer because of their older siblings.) Nicole says, "Well guys, I know that you've learned how to play soccer outside of preschool but we might have to have some different rules for the younger children." Nicole intentionally puts out some other provocations based on her observations of the children. On the previous day, Nicole noticed a group of girls "baking cakes" in the sandbox. So she decides this particular morning to put some sifters and bowls out as a provocation for extending their play.

On a large picnic table against the fence, Nicole puts out dinosaurs and pieces of wood. These props have been put out for the last couple of weeks because Sam and Matthew (two children in the Rainbow room) have taken a keen interest in using them for micro-symbolic play and have spent long periods of time (over an hour) playing with them. Nicole tells me she will continue putting them out until their interest wanes.

Shortly after the Gardenia room children come out to play, several children and teachers from the Rainbow and Magnolia Room come out to join them. Several children take large shovels and are scooping up mulch into a wagon. Another group plays in one of the sandboxes. Nicole plays peek-a-boo with some children hiding in a large box. More children are on the swings and see-saw.

A large easel, with space for multiple children, sits on the center of the playground. A group of boys (Nathan, Orson, Matthew, and Ethan) suddenly discover several mushrooms growing underneath it.

Terra, the Rainbow room teacher, comes over to see their discovery.

Terra asks them, "How could we make it so that people knew not to break it?"

Nathan replies: "A top tign!"

Terra: "A what?"

Nathan: "A top tign!"

Terra: "You think that a stop sign might help?"

Nathan shakes his head yes.

Terra: "That might help. Where would we put the stop sign? 'Cause if we put it on top…"

Ethan: "There's more! Look…I see more mushrooms."

Terra: "Oh! Look at those!"

Nathan: "And then we could put it right in front of..."

Terra: "you want to put it right in front?"

The boys discover some more mushrooms and begin pointing at them, saying: "Look! Mushy-mushy-mushrooms! Look at this!"

Terra: "Yeah. So guys do we need a stop sign?"

Simultaneously the boys respond excitedly: "Yeah!"

Terra: "Maybe somebody would like to go inside and work on a stop sign so we could put it up? What do you guys think?"

Ethan: "Yeah!"

Terra: "Would you like to do that Ethan?"

Ethan shakes his head yes.

Terra: "Would anyone like to go with Ethan to the studio and see about making a stop sign?"

Matthew: "Why don't we hide it!?"

Terra: "But then people couldn't enjoy it? Could they?"

Matthew, this time more resolute: "We need to hide it."

Terra turning to the other boys: "What do you guys think? Do we need to hide it?"

Matthew: "Yeah. Cause, so, anybody can't bother it."

Terra: "Well, let's check Matthew. Orson do you think we should hide it?"

Orson: "Mmm-hmmm."

Terra: "What do you think Nathan?"

Nathan: "Um, yeah."

Terra: "Hide it. Ethan do you think we should hide it?"

Ethan: "No. We have to make a stop sign."

Terra: "Ethan's thinking we need to make a stop sign."

Terra: "Oscar, what do you think?"

Oscar: "Ummm…Hiding."

Terra: "You like the hiding. But if we hide it and you want to show it to a friend, then what?"

Matthew: "Break."

Terra: "Then you think it would break?"

Matthew: "[It would] go like this." He starts to run with arms extended while making shooting sounds.

Terra: "Then it would definitely break, wouldn't it."

Matthew: "a rocket would shoot into it."

Terra: "a rocket would shoot into it?"

Nicole lets Terra know that it is nearing clean-up time so they won't have time to go into the studio to make the stop sign today.

Terra tells Ethan they can make one tomorrow morning instead, but Ethan still gets quite upset. Terra holds him while validating his feelings, "You were feeling really disappointed because you were looking forward to making a stop sign." She suggests that they make a plan for tomorrow. Terra, along with Ethan, calls over Sophie and tells her what happened. Sophie agrees that making a stop sign tomorrow sounds like a good plan.

Day two: Gardenia Room follow-up. Sophie and Jess follow through the next day with the plans and have the art table prepared for Ethan, Orson, and Matthew to begin work on the stop sign. They have placed a red hexagon wooden block on the table, along with their classroom's laminated stop sign, as references for the children to use while making their own stop signs, marker, and paper. The children approach the table with excitement when they see the materials laid out. Jess helps the boys work as they create their stop signs. The take construction paper and trace the stop-sign lines around it, write the word "Stop" and cut out their hexagon shape Jess helps Ethan cut out his stop sign after tracing the classroom stop sign onto his paper, and she helps Orson form the letters S-T-O-P, again referring to the stop sign.[43]

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[43] Several days prior to this project, Matthew went to the studio with Jess (Gardenia room co-teacher) as part of a small group that Jess encouraged to draw their Halloween costumes. Jess struggled with Matthew in focusing and completing this teacher-led project in which he seemed to have little interest. He typically avoids drawing and writing activities. However, it is interesting to note, that with this mushroom discovery and intrinsically-driven project, Matthew approaches the task of creating a stop-sign eagerly and focuses on his work for an extended period of time.

Once finished with their stop signs, they go out to the hallway with Sophie to put on their coats and head to the playground. Matthew helps Orson, who is having trouble, put his arms into his coat.

Sophie takes the group to the playground to put their stop signs by "the mushroom that looks like a banana."

As they walk over to the easel and look underneath it, at the location where they discovered the mushrooms yesterday, all that is visible are a pile of leaves.

Ethan says sadly: "The bugs…I think the bugs ate them." Sophie lightly pushes aside some of the leaves and pine needles from that space and the children discover the mushrooms are still there.

Sophie: "It looks like there's one there," pointing to a mushroom, "there's one there. We should not touch them with our hands."

Stella: "It's not a bug…It looks like a banana!"

Duke: "Whoa! There's three of them!"

Sophie: "There are three?"

Duke: "Yeah!"

Sophie: "So what do you think, should we put the stop signs on these ones?"

Orson: "Yeah!"

Sophie: "Okay, Matthew where are you going to put yours?"

Duke to Matthew (as he gestures the spot for Matthew to put his stop sign): "Umm, Matthew yours is good enough for all three."

Matthew puts his down by those three mushrooms and says: "I did it!"

Sophie: "Okay. Ethan what do you want to do with your stop sign?"

Ethan: "I can't put it there."

Sophie: "Hmmm."

Ethan moves over to another area that has mushrooms: "I'll put it over here."

Sophie: "Oh so…Oh! So I didn't even see these mushrooms. So there are mushrooms over here?"

Ethan: "Four!"

Sophie discovers one more mushroom after clearing the leaves some more and points to them: "One, two, three, four…Oh."

Sophie to Ethan: "So where do you want to put them? There are four there and one there."

Ethan selects a place where he would like his stop sign to go and shows Sophie the spot. points to it and says: "On the orange one."

Sophie: "On the sticky one, there?"

Ethan: "Yeah."

Ethan: "Now what?"

Sophie: "Well now what? Do you think the stop signs will be safe there?"

Ethan: "Yeah."

Sophie: "You think so?"

Matthew: "But I don't want anybody… a bug to bite into mine."

Sophie: "So what will you do if a bug bites into it?"

Matthew: "I'll just snatch it!"

Sophie: "You'll snatch the bug?"

Matthew: "Yeah. And put it in the creek."

Sophie: "You'll throw it into the creek?"

Matthew: "Yeah."

Grace adds: "and I don't like bugs. I'll hit the bugs."

Sophie: "You'll hit the bugs?"

Grace: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Hmmm."

Matthew: "And I don't like bugs."

Duke: "Me either!"

Ethan: "Me either!"

Sophie: "Do you think the bugs want to eat the mushrooms?"

Matthew: "Yeah! And we don't want them to eat it. So I'll [inaudible] keep

watch."

Ethan and Matthew stand over the mushrooms. The other children start to play in

different areas of the playground. Sophie allows them to play for several minutes before

heading back to the classroom.

The previous composites highlight the ways in which Springhill Preschool is a

democratic, relationship-based environment where children's interests and inquiries are

supported in varied and overlapping spaces, informing one another, and increasing the

potential for deepened and extended experiences.

Overview and Summary of Emerging Themes

Daily life in the Springhill community.

 "Springhill at Stonewood is committed to intellectually challenging education that
nourishes curiosity, intelligence, initiative and imagination. Our collaborative approach
encourages students to find meaning and joy in learning, cultivates respect for all
individuals, and nurtures the skills students will need both to be actively rooted in local

communities and to flourish in our increasingly global future." (Springhill Faculty, Mission Statement, 2010)

Oftentimes there is a disconnect between a school's mission statement and their actual daily practices and lived experiences. However, the Springhill community closely interweaves philosophy, theory and practice in everyday experiences, as described and reflected in the above composite sketch of four days in the life of the school. The richness of everyday experiences within the Springhill Preschool gleaned from this case study offers insight into some of the possibilities and challenges for creating a democratic preschool environment.

Springhill is a complex, democratic community built on a foundation of relationships. These relationships include not only a connection among people within the community, but also connections with place, materials, and ideas. Each experience within the community builds and deepens the associations. These connections are established by many varied and interrelated experiences within an environment of trust, affection, responsiveness, reciprocity, respect, and care.

Overview of emerging themes. Several emerging themes seemed to occur over and over again, as I analyzed my field observations, documentation, and interviews.

- The importance of a cultural foundation of respect, trust, and care among all community members
- Using responsive and intentional teaching practices and making learning processes visible through diverse forms of discourse and documentation
- Shared decision-making, power and control among all community members
- Strong emphasis upon building social relationships and learning collaboratively with each other

- Narrative as a critical tool for making meaningful connections and building memory and identity

- Slowing down the learning process, both for children and adults

- Upholding a strong image of both children and adults as powerful, capable and socially-connected problem-solvers and fellow citizens worthy of equal voice and rights in the community.

- Social responsibility based upon the interdependence of self and others

- A premium is placed on the values of pleasure, happiness, and levity

- Commitment to freedom (physical, emotional, social, intellectual) and foundations of social equality and justice

Conclusion. In a democratic environment, such as Springhill, children's ideas are respected and listened to and children have the freedom to follow their own interests. When children become active agents in their own learning and are supported in developing their critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, they will likely acquire the 'habits of mind' critical for cultivating democratic citizens.

CHAPTER 5

PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF A DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY:

INQUIRY-BASED ENGAGEMENT AND CURRICULUM DESIGN

The *rich normality* of the daily interactions and experiences in the Springhill

community is highlighted in the composite narrative of the previous chapter. In this

chapter, I will show how these daily experiences are not isolated and discrete happenings,

but instead emerge from a curriculum design that cycles between the key elements of

discourse, documentation, and responsive planning.[44] In the context of a deep culture of

collaborative relationships, all Springhill community members participate in this process

of discourse, documentation, and planning, to extend and deepen the children's intricate

web of social and learning connections through protracted project work.

In terms of democratic pedagogy, it is important to underscore the importance of a

social-constructivist, inquiry-based curriculum design to the formation of a democratic

citizenry. As the rich tradition of progressive educational theory, research, and practice

suggests (Apple & Beane, 2007; Dewey, 1938/1997; Glickman, 1998; Goodman, 1992;

Kohn, 1996 & 2008; Parker, 1996), a well-functioning democratic environment requires

its citizens to be able to:1) think critically and creatively; 2) maintain a high level of

intrinsically-motivated curiosity about their world; 3) make intelligent connections

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[44] By "planning," I am referring to the Reggio educator's use of the word meaning "preparation and organization of space, materials, thoughts, situations and occasions for learning. These involve communication among all three protagonists and interactive partners of the educational process: children, educators, and families" (Rinaldi, 1998, p. 118).

between ideas and experiences; 4) develop a sense of voice and self-respect in engaging the wider community; 5) communicate their thoughts and ideas clearly and persuasively; 6) actively engage community decision-making and learning processes; and 7) feel a sense of internal (versus external) locus of control over their lives. As described in this chapter, children have the opportunity to cultivate these necessary qualities of democratic citizenship when they engage in collaborative, sustained, inquiry-based learning projects. At the same time, this type of environment provides children with a truly democratic form of participation in the daily life of their community.

Individual, Classroom, and School-Wide Intentions

Without intentionality and follow-through, it is unlikely that democratic aims will be-successful. Therefore, before describing the discourse, documentation, and responsive planning features of Springhill's approach to curriculum design, I will provide some additional context by discussing the process whereby Springhill develops its individual, classroom, and school-wide curriculum intentions for each school year.

The Springhill faculty has several structures in place to help support individual, classroom and school-wide intentions throughout the community. Intentions are essentially *informal action research* projects on topics that are of interest to members of the community (including children and adults). Intentions vary from classroom to classroom and from year to year depending on each particular group's interests and inquiries at that time (for more specifics see chapter 6, "Individual and Classroom Intentions").

In addition to the individual and classroom intentions, the Springhill faculty collaborates on a school-wide, year-long intention, which they refer to as the "Umbrella

Project." As described on the Springhill website ("The Umbrella Project," 2010-2011, para. 1):

> An umbrella project gathers our learning community under the canopy of a single idea. We all start at the same point – a multi–layered concept, topic, or question chosen by faculty – and delve deeply into it … Teachers plan a series of initial experiences that draw students into the investigation and spark creative thinking. Students carry the inquiry forward through further exploration and discovery, developing synergies and shared perspectives that connect them to one another across classrooms and grade levels.

The Springhill school-wide intention selected for the 2009-2010 school year was an exploration into the concept of "Place." Alice, the studio teacher, explains how this project on place emerged, in an article posted on Springhill's website titled, "Our Inquiry into Place" (2010, para. 4-8):

> This past year, our Preschool has been preparing to say goodbye to the Grace Street campus, our home for 16 years, in order to move to our permanent Stonewood site. It thus seemed fitting to use the umbrella project as a vehicle for learning more about how children's sense of place develops, and what that sense of place means for the school. The Preschool children documented what was important to them about the place they are leaving, and identified what should be marked and remembered. They also considered the extensive grounds and historic building waiting to be explored at Stonewood. Students already at Stonewood have been involved in preparing to welcome the newcomers and introduce them to the greater community.

The focus on place was also prompted in part by the Preschool children's increasing use of photography. Teachers had noticed how children's photographs provide insight into their wonderings, their humor, and their imagination. Perhaps photography could, in addition, provide clues to children's sense of place?

From my perspective as *atelierista* in the Preschool studio, I observed the ways in which maps became a way for young children to show their sense of place. Teachers saw maps based on the usual adult idea of a flat representation of a place but we also saw maps that included feelings and ideas, maps that showed multiple perspectives, and constructed, 3D maps (see "Mapping: Personal Geography" in chapter 7 for examples). Children, some of whom at first had no idea what 'map' meant, began to make complex representations of places both natural and man-made. Watching the development of mapping in our young students showed much about how children form mental pictures of a place, and how those inner maps expand with further exploration. For the children and the preschool teachers, this concentration on mapping was rich with learning and showed the potential of a place to nurture relationships and inspire wonder.

It is possible that the full implications of this inquiry into the idea of place, and what that idea means to children, may not be understood until later. With classroom research, often the learning for teachers does not come until they have time to ponder the happenings of the year and to revisit documentation from a past class. I know that our investigation of photography and mapping will continue, and I am certain that we will continue to venture outside the walls of the school. However, it may only be during the coming year—when children from

both campuses meet, share with each other what they understand about their

places and begin to define what our new 'together' place means—that teachers

and parents will be able to fully appreciate how our inquiry has shaped what we

all know and how we all think about our school.

Glimpses of the Gardenia Room's Year-Long Inquiry into Place and Their Connected Project Work (Through Discourse, Documentation, and Responsive Planning)

In 2009-2010, Springhill's community-wide inquiry into *place* unfolded in

various contexts throughout the school, with the participation of individual classrooms,

small groups, and individual children. I will show how this sustained inquiry develops

throughout the year, with a particular emphasis upon the Gardenia Room. While the

original conception of such a project typically includes initial questions and hypotheses,

the unfolding of the project itself is based upon ongoing observations, emerging interests,

questions, reflections, and a discourse that cannot be mapped out in advance. The

socially reciprocal nature of this process has been likened by Reggio educators to the

tossing of a ball back and forth-- between adult and child, child and child, small groups

and large. As Filippini describes it (as cited in Rankin, 1998):

> Our expectations of the child must be very flexible and varied. We must be able
> to be amazed and to enjoy—like the children often do. We must be able to catch
> the ball that the children throw us, and toss it back to them in a way that makes
> the children want to continue the game with us, developing, perhaps, other games
> as we go along. (p. 217)

Although the remainder of this chapter is set up chronologically for coherence, it is important to stress that Springhill's inquiry-based engagement is a reciprocal and spiraled approach, and *not* simply a linear process that unwinds relentlessly toward some predetermined goal. Instead, Springhill educators are keen not only to follow the children's lead in unexpected directions, but also to sometimes pause an investigation to revisit past experiences with the children, and even reinterpret those experiences. In this light, the analogy of a tapestry comes to mind, where many single threads can be interwoven over time, doubling back forth and coming together in beautiful ways to create a larger whole.

Discourse and curriculum design: Engaging community members as project work emerges at the beginning of the school year. Creating an environment that allows for ongoing community discourse is critical for participatory democratic cultures, as well as necessary for sustained project work. As described by Forman and Fyfe (1998):

> To truly understand the children's talking, we should treat it as discourse, an intelligent pattern of thoughts that is worthy of study…Treating talk as discourse causes teachers to look for theories, assumptions, false premises, misapplications, clever analogies, ambiguities, and differences in communicative intent, all of which are pieces to be negotiated into shared meaning by the group. Discourse analysis carries over into teachers talking to teachers, to parents, [and] to the public. (pp. 246-7)

Discourse also drives curriculum design and documentation in mutually informing and reciprocal ways. In connection to their inquiry into place, and particularly

their interest in photography, I will highlight two examples of how the Springhill teachers

engage children and adults in ongoing discourse.

  Parent and faculty discourse: "A child's eye view." An important ritual in the

Springhill community is the special birthday circle that happens for each child's birthday.

On that day, family members are invited to participate in the closing circle to share

special interests, stories, and memorabilia about the birthday child. The child then lights

candles and the class sings a birthday song. The birthday child also picks out a special

gift from the classroom's "birthday box."

  The story of the Gardenia Room's investigations for 2009-2010 begins, in part,

with Sophie's decision to connect this birthday tradition with an emerging subject of

interest in the classroom---photography. In the following email to parents and faculty at

the beginning of the school year, Sophie shares her idea to include a *birthday*

photographer in the birthday celebrations for the upcoming year ("A Child's Eye View,"

October 14, 2009)**:**

  This year we have added a new dimension to birthday circles in the

  Gardenia Room – we are inviting children to take on the role of birthday

  photographer. We are curious to see how children will capture the experience of

  birthdays and we are interested to learn more about how children use photography

  as a medium.

  Yesterday was the first time a child photographed a birthday celebration. It

  was Walter's birthday and so Duke, who was the first child to celebrate his

  birthday in our classroom, was the designated photographer. Duke took a total of

ninety-three photos. Here is a link to his photographs: [Sophie posted a link to photos here.]

Today we invited Walter and Duke to review all ninety-three photos. We discussed how there were too many photos to print out and that we would like them to select a few photos. We asked them to identify photos that they considered important. Walter selected photos of his parents and Duke selected a close-up of his face and several of the carpet. Here's a link to the new selection of photos: [Sophie pasted a link to selected photos here.]

We are looking forward to seeing how the birthday circle photography progresses.

Sophie's email serves as an example of how teachers make their thinking processes and curriculum design visible to the community right from the start and invite parents into the discussion as co-collaborators of classroom inquiries. In response to Sophie's email, Kathryn, a parent and board member, responds (October 15, 2009):

I, myself, love to see all 93 photos together as thumbnail images. For me, it is a flip book of sorts. A lot of motion and movement in a circle that is overall typically kind of static. This as a result of the photographer's willingness to move his camera around the room. Was this decision to give a child the camera at all related to the school-wide intention of photography and place? I understand that incredible things are happening around this intention in the preschool…Kathryn

And so the dialogue begins, significantly with a response to Sophie's email that comes from a parent *who is not even commenting on her own child's work*. As this project unfolds, we see time and again how the Springhill culture encourages parents to take an

interest in aspects of the group experience that do not pertain directly to their own children. Note also from the email, how seriously this parent takes the child's photographs and *particularly* how willing she is to share her emotional response to the child's work.

Widening the circle of discourse, Mary, the director of early childhood, later shares her response to the same set of photos (October 16, 2009):

I have been to a lot of birthday circles and I can tell you, this project offers all of us an unusual portal into an intimate classroom ritual. It seems to have truly captured a child's view of the experience. Just the sheer persistence and resulting number of photos allows a rare view that we could almost never have from a camera-wielding teacher who has other responsibilities.

Is the series of Walter sitting with his father framed variously by Sophie's hand and the birthday box as carefully realized as it appears? What is so focusing to the photographer here? Teacher support? Walter and Seth's connection? Is the frame Sophie provides a challenge in itself--a kind of photo tunnel? Could it be, as my husband has just suggested, the birthday box's view of the birthday boy?!

Are the multiple closeups of the rug (I have never seen it so clearly) an exploration of color? Of texture? Of light? Of "down-ness" as opposed to the "up-ness" of other photos?

Allowing one child full access to a camera -within well defined limits and then setting it up so that each of the subsequent photographers will face the same freedom and limitations on the camera allows us an unusually rich opportunity to

learn more about three and four year old's individual and collective views of both experiences, the   birthday ritual and the exploration of the photographer's role.

What we are seeing, and likely to see from other children as well, is, at one level, simply the *results* of the child's exploration of the camera itself. But what else are Duke and Walter offering us? What do their choices of photos tell us and what can they tell us about their choices? Their classmates no doubt will help us understand more.

But more importantly perhaps is what are the boys learning? What will this mean to Walter? To Duke? Does the camera in their hands or the hands of their peers provide a link to the metacognitive? A way for the child to begin to understand how they see the world? How they are seen? Exciting stuff!

This email highlights Mary's thoughtful reflection about the children's photography, emphasizing her deep respect for and careful attention to children's individual and collective thinking. By making her own thinking, questions, and theories visible to the group, she models and helps cultivate a group disposition towards thinking of Springhill as a community of learners, where everyone teaches and everyone learns, an essential quality of non-hierarchical, democratic approaches to education (see chapter 7, for further details).

Several days later, the discourse continues when Sophie responds to Kathryn's question, "Was this decision to give a child the camera at all related to the school-wide intention of photography and place?" (October 18, 2009):

Kathryn:

You are correct that the decision to give children cameras relates to the school-wide intention to investigate photography and place. When we first discussed this intention back in May I started to think about how 3 and 4 year olds could relate to this study. Last year several of the classrooms in the preschool gave children cameras to explore their environment and the results were very interesting. However, the children involved were slightly older and I was having a hard time imagining how such a project would work with younger children – keeping up with the photos I take in the classroom myself can be a challenge and the thought of keeping track of photos generated by fourteen children was daunting!

As I thought more about children and photography I remembered the work of Wendy Ewald, who has done remarkable work with children and has pioneered an investigation of literacy through photography: http://literacythroughphotography.wordpress.com/wendy-ewald/. Ewald typically works with much older children, but I began to think about creating some sort of structure for photography in our classroom. I also began to do a little research into the history of photography and was struck by how in the nineteenth century this new medium very quickly developed into a way to capture social stories – weddings, family portraits, etc. Then, over the summer I was back in Ireland going through a huge collection of family photos, trying to decide which photos to archive digitally for posterity. This task helped me to look more closely at photos – I was fascinated by what the photos revealed about

the photographer, for example vacation photographs taken by both of my grandparents of the same places were so completely different. While looking through this collection I started to think about how we "read" photographs. I also thought about the term "Kodak moment" – it's something adults talk about all the time, but I wondered if children have ways of evaluating a photograph. So, this was some of my background thinking about photography.

In terms of studying Place - again, I thought about how this would relate to three and four year olds. The children entering our classroom would be coming from three classrooms, which were in a different building, and there would also be some new students – so I anticipated that it would take time for them to adjust to a new space. I began to think about what a sense of place might mean to children this age and I wondered about how children understand place. Children respond to places that have meaning for them. I anticipated that in a new, and unfamiliar space, the children would start to create meaning for themselves, and that they would most likely do this through building relationships. The rituals and relationships that create the social fabric of our classroom would play an important part in creating a sense of place. I then began to wonder if there was some way that photography could play a role in how the children create a sense of place. Since birthdays are hugely important to children this age I thought it would be interesting to see how children would use a camera to capture an important experience in the classroom. Designating a birthday photographer would enable us to view the same event from the perspective of each child.

This is an extremely LONG answer to your question, but I hope that in some way my response provides insight into the process behind our work – the thinking, research, hypothesizing and anticipating all contribute to the choices we teachers make about what we introduce to our classrooms.

To end, I just wanted [to] report on something that I had not anticipated with this project – when I downloaded Duke's photos and opened up the file, I was filled with a sense on surprise and delight as I started to click through the images. Seeing birthday circle through the eyes of one child, viewing this gathering through Duke's "lens" was thrilling – I felt as though I was opening the birthday box!

Kathryn – I hope you will have a chance to stop by the preschool and see the Umbrella Project board – it is beginning to evolve, which is very exciting.[45]

Thanks for responding. Does anyone else out there have thoughts or comments to add???? Sophie

This email illustrates the deep level of intentionality that goes into Sophie's thinking and planning classroom work. It also highlights Sophie's emphasis on building children's social relationships and connections within their inquiry into place. Sophie's thoughtful consideration of children's varying perspectives and her attunement to the significant events in children's lives serves as a starting point for the classroom experiences she facilitates.

By asking questions and inviting others to join in the conversation, the dialogue continues in an inviting, open-ended way, moving the group's thinking forward and

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[45] There is a prominent board displayed in the hallway featuring "The Umbrella Project" put together by several Springhill parents and faculty.

developing a shared understanding. Without this type of email invitation to the parents, dialogue of this kind is unlikely to have happened. The following day, Evelyn's mom responds, and the discourse continues (October 19, 2009):

Sophie:

Other thoughts that come to mind on both photography and place:

-[M]y child is interested not so much in the camera, but the image of her that the camera makes. of course part of that is 3 yr old vanity. but she's actually intrigued with the fact that she appears in the screen separate from herself. and she tries to "catch" herself in the screen (both video and still), but can't because when she moves out of view, she disappears. thinking around that angle - not just what children look at, but how they feel/think about being looked at/being photographed - is perhaps valuable. // from the first time he saw the camera aimed at him, even my infant stops what he's doing to observe himself being observed. the camera captures them.

- [I] think you've discussed this some already, but mapping comes to mind when talking about a sense of place. on paper, but also in the field. how does a child map his/her way through a forest and remember how to return, etc. Naming also comes to mind with 'place.' my child gives specific names to places as a way to mark them on her internal map of our neighborhood, Richmond, Virginia, the country and the world. I think both mapping and naming are ways Evelyn makes sense of where she is (her place) in this world.

- [W]ith "place" i also think of songs and rituals and stories, as you have discussed. songs and rituals help create a 'place' for oneself, stories help to create

both the place and the history of the place. our child constantly asks of people places and things in our city, "tell me a story about that."

I hope these thoughts stir up some ideas.

Gretchen [Gardenia room parent]

Once again, Sophie responds and the community engagement in this discourse continues (October 24, 2009):

Gretchen,

Thank you for responding – you raise some really great points both about photography and the study of place.

It is so interesting that you bring up how children are intrigued by the image of self when using cameras. So far, two children have been photographers for Birthday Circle and both children have included photos of themselves in their series of photographs – when reviewing the images, Duke said, "I did a close-up of my face. I keep on doing pictures of me." Then Walter was practicing using the camera before the Birthday Circle and he took a picture of himself in the mirror. He also asked Jess to take a photo of him, which she did, and then she showed him how he could take a picture of himself by holding the camera out in front of him. I'm wondering if inserting oneself into photographs will be something we see more of in the Birthday Circle series.

I enjoyed your description of Evelyn "playing" with her image on the screen and I wonder if that is something that will develop at school as children start to explore photography as a medium. This may well be a part of their "messing about" with this particular medium.

You raise a really interesting point about how children respond to a camera and to being observed. This is something I think about a lot, particularly as we take so many photos of the children at school and the children are so used to being photographed. This generation of children is probably the most photographed in history and I wonder what impact that will have on how they interpret the world. There is increasing research in the field of visual literacy – I suspect that these children are in the process of developing a significant set of skills related to visual literacy.

Your observations about Evelyn's mapping and her sense of place are thought provoking. Every year we see children naming areas in the forest and creating landmarks – it is often one of the first things children do when they are exploring an area. An interest in mapping usually follows shortly thereafter.

I am also intrigued with the notion of songs, ritual and stories helping to create a sense of place. The other day I was talking about Africa and Evelyn immediately started singing *Nkosi Sikeleli Afrika*, the African national anthem – she sang the entire anthem! Music is clearly something Evelyn loves and it is interesting that she connects music to a place. As part of her summer memories, Evelyn created a detailed map of a walk she took in Colorado this summer – the fluid lines of her pen on the paper really captured the movement of that walk. We typically think of mapping as a graphic representation, but Evelyn's connecting place with music and movement raise the question of mapping in other languages – again, bringing us back to Howard Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences

and Loris Malaguzzi's 100 Languages. During our study of Place, will we see children mapping in other intelligences?

Gretchen – thanks for this great observations which help us to think further about how children see the world. Thanks for stirring up some ideas!

Would anyone else out there like to add to this conversation??? Sophie

When teachers take the time to share the thinking behind the design of their curriculum, parents and other teachers can participate in an authentic dialogue and together strive for a more nuanced understanding of children's work, including a consideration of further provocations to move the project forward.

Not only do parents engage in the dialogue but fellow teachers also lend their questions and thinking to the group. Here, Fran, a Springhill toddler teacher from the Forest Room, joins in the conversation (October 25, 2009):

> In her essay, "Knowing Our Place," Barbara Kingsolver says, "I have places where all my stories begin." I thought of that when I read Gretchen's comments on how Evelyn says, "Tell me a story about that," when she hears about a place. Ms. Kingsolver goes on to say, "Our greatest and smallest explanations for ourselves grow from place," and then continues about how important wild places are. "Wildness puts us in our place." Who knew there was so much richness in that one small word: "place?"
>
> Fran

As reflected in Fran's email, we see how Springhill's structure of including all faculty members on emails and blogs about classroom documentation helps support this type of democratic community of learners.

This type of dialogue between parents and faculty continues throughout the year. A reciprocal process emerges (Rinaldi, 1998) where discourse informs classroom practice and practice informs further documentation and discourse. As this reciprocal process continues, a web of overlapping connections and deepened/shared understandings emerge for all community members.

Small group discourse: Sophie, Larry, and Oscar explore the camera **(November 10, 2009).** In this next section, I will highlight how children's discourse during a planned small group experience continues the reciprocal learning process as it emerges during their ongoing photography investigations. As this lengthy exchange will show, there are powerful advantages to slowing down the learning experience so that children are able to pursue their interests and make discoveries and connections. As recent research suggests (Bonawitz et al., in press; Buchsbaum, Gopnik, Griffiths, & Shafto, in press; Gopnik, 2011) when teachers take children's ideas seriously, follow their lead, allow plenty of time for spontaneous explorations and discovery, and avoid short cuts (i.e., stand-alone direct instruction), children are able to make rich discoveries and connections that may not be possible otherwise. In order to provide a fully detailed account of this process, I have included most of the dialogue that occurred during an hour-long exchange between Sophie and two children:

Aware of children's growing interest in photography, Sophie and Jess plan several provocations and small group experiences to support this inquiry. As teachers they have observed that Larry and Oscar are particularly keen on using the camera. So on this particular day, Sophie facilitates a small group experience with Larry and Oscar to explore the camera's details. During this small group session the children create

representational drawings of the camera, while exploring, discussing, and developing

theories about how the camera works.

Shortly after 9:00am, Sophie, Larry, and Oscar head to the multi-purpose room,

each with a clipboard, paper and pen. Sophie also has brought her camera, a magnifying

glass, and a tape recorder (to record the conversation). For over an hour, Sophie works

with Oscar and Larry to draw pictures of the camera and explore the different buttons and

camera features.

Initial representations of a camera.

Larry, with excitement in his voice, says to me: "We're doing some work!"

Amy: "Oh good. I'm interested."

Larry points to a circular button on the camera: "I want to draw this too."

Sophie: "That button. Okay. So you've drawn this button already and now

you're doing this one?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Okay so that one is the round one?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: And that one is the, what shape is that one?

Larry: "Long…Long, long, long. These are all kinds of shapes."

Sophie: "They are all kinds of shapes."

Larry: "And look at this big L."

Sophie: "That's a big L."

Larry stops drawing and says: "Yeah…Now I'm ready to draw the millennium

fountain."

Sophie: "Well actually Larry, I'm going to ask you to hold off on the millennium fountain, because today what we're going to do in here is think about the camera. And when we get back to the classroom, you can draw the millennium fountain. And, I would love to see that millennium fountain because I don't actually know what the millennium fountain looks like."

Larry: "Well I don't know too."

Oscar finishes drawing the outline of the camera body and announces: "There's the square!"

Sophie: "Okay. So there's the front of the camera."

Oscar: "and I want to do a big circle" (to represent one of the buttons). He draws the circle and pauses to contemplate what to draw next.

Part of the camera strap is hidden underneath the camera. Sophie asks: "Oscar do you need me to move the strap back a little? Will that help you?"

Oscar: "Yeah. I can do a strap now." Sophie pulls the strap out so he can see it.

Larry: "I'm all done."

Sophie walks over to Larry: "So you're done? Where did you do this button?" Sophie points to a circular button on the camera. Larry points to it on his drawing.

Sophie: "Well, so have you done these parts of the camera?" Sophie points to the square LCD screen.

Larry: "Yea[h]…Well… I don't know what a square looks like." As he says this, Larry traces the square LCD screen with his finger.

Sophie: "You don't know what a square looks like?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "You don't know how to draw a square?" (Notice how Sophie listens for meaning behind words spoken and attempts to clarify that meaning.)[46]

Sophie: "Well I'll tell you what. Let's put another piece of paper here and see if you can. And maybe, maybe Oscar could help us draw a square." Sophie helps Larry takes another piece of paper off his clipboard. She continues: "What I notice about a square is that it has a long line, a straight line." She traces her finger across the top edge of the LCD screen.

Larry: "Okay. I can draw a straight line." Right away, he draws a long line on his paper.

Sophie continues to run her fingers over the outside edges of the camera screen: "A big one and a little one and another." Larry looks and then draws a second line, perpendicular to the first one.

Oscar: "Okay, now I need to color it pink." [The camera is pink.] "So can you give me a pink marker? I need to color it pink."

Sophie: "We just have black markers today."

At this point, Larry has drawn three sides of the square. Sophie asks: "And how many sides does a square have? Can you count them?"

Larry and Sophie in unison count the sides of the square on the camera, running their fingers over the edges: "One, two, three, *four*."

Sophie: Just like you! (meaning just like Larry's age, four-years-old)

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[46] Please note, in the remaining chapters of this dissertation, I have demarcated my interpretive comments by placing them in parentheses which are interspersed throughout the dialogues.

Larry then takes his finger and begins to count the lines on his drawing: "like…one, two, three." Larry stops counting and starts to draw the fourth line on his paper.

As he draws the fourth line, Oscar exclaims: "and four!"

While finishing the fourth line of his square, Larry' pen accidentally runs off the paper and onto the table. Larry looks at Sophie with concern: "I wrote on the table!"

Sophie smiles and says: "That's okay, it will wash off."

With satisfaction, Larry says: "There!"

Sophie points to different features on the camera and says to Larry: "So this is what you've done on this…How about these marks?"

Larry points to his first drawing: "I already did those [camera buttons] on this one."

Sophie: "Oh I see! So that's that button and that's the long one. And that's the long one. And then did you do these parts?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "And that one?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "What about these parts?"

Larry: "No. I want to draw those out and those ones on this one." (Meaning he wants to add the button shapes to his new drawing with the square.)

Sophie: "Okay."

In this part of the vignette, we see how, by pointing out camera details and using questions and prompts, Sophie extends and deepens Larry's work on drawing the camera, allowing him to achieve a level of detail that would not have been achieved

independently. Consider that this collaboration could have ended abruptly, perhaps when Larry says he's all finished and wants to draw a fountain. Notice also how Larry initially draws the shapes he is familiar and comfortable with (circles and an "L" shape) but then gets stuck (or is "done") when he doesn't know how to draw the square. At this point Sophie intervenes, scaffolding Larry's learning by asking questions and then pointing out the different lines that come together to make a square. By listening carefully to Larry's implied meaning during their exchange and not merely the words he utters, Sophie discovers that when Larry says he doesn't know what a square is he means that he doesn't know how to draw one. By hearing his meaning, she is able to engage him in a more meaningful way.

Camera explorations and discoveries. Several minutes later, when Larry has temporarily finished drawing his picture, Sophie points out some camera details. She says to Larry: "What I really wanted to look at [are] these. Larry, did you get a chance to look at these through the magnifying glass?"

Larry: "No, I need to look at arrows first." (Note how Larry feels safe to express his intent even when it diverges from that of his teachers.)

Sophie: "at the arrows?" (Sophie passes the camera to Larry so he can follow his pursuit in exploring the arrow buttons. Notice she doesn't push her agenda but allows him to make his own discoveries. As a result, Larry is able to undertake his explorations with confidence.)

As Oscar continues to draw, Larry holds the magnifying glass. (The magnifying glass is connected to wires that have several clips that attach to the item under examination.) Larry takes the camera from Sophie and starts to attach the camera straps

to the clips on the magnifying glass. He explains to Sophie: "I pinched this thing, to the [camera], so the camera doesn't go off [the table]." (Note how the children exhibit caution in their handling of the camera. For instance, as a safety measure, Larry is already accustomed to keeping the strap around his neck when he uses the camera.)

Sophie: "Mmm-hmm…Can you see it [the arrows]?"

Larry: "I need to put it over here. Whoops, I moved this a little bit far." He readjusts the camera underneath the magnifying glass. Larry continues to adjust the camera underneath the glass until he gets it to a position he's satisfied with and then studies the details of the camera.

Sophie: "Did you see these buttons?

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "They are very small."

Larry looks some more and observes: "These look really big when I look through the magnifying glass." (Larry explores scale and size.)

Sophie: "It makes them bigger?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Well, so Larry did you want to draw some of those and those buttons?" (Sophie connects the conversation back to drawing.)

Oscar looks up from his drawing and says: "Hey, I could do that for you!"

Larry to Oscar: "No I can do it all by myself."

Sophie: "You'd like to do it by yourself?"

Oscar: "I know how to do a really, a really good circle."

Sophie: "Would you like to do [a circle on] another page?" (i.e., so Oscar can draw the circle on another piece of paper and not alter his own drawing of the front of the camera.)

Oscar: "Yeah. I can do a circle."

Sophie: "You want to show Larry how to do it?"

Oscar: "This is how you do a circle."

Larry: "No, I already know how to draw a circle."

Sophie: "I want to see how Oscar does his circle. You must get a lot of practice drawing circles because your name starts with the letter O." (Notice how Sophie allows *both* children to demonstrate their mastery of this skill. She also prevents an unnecessary power struggle over who's going to draw the O.)

Oscar: "And a circle is a[n] O."

Sophie: "That's right."

Larry: "Like Orson!" (Orson is another child in the Gardenia room. Notice how letter-learning is connected to meaningful reference points in the lives of the children.)

Oscar: "Like Orson!"

Larry: "Yeah, but Matthew doesn't start with O."

Oscar finishes drawing his "O" and says "and there's a control thing."

Sophie: "There's a control thing?"

While pointing to the button on the camera, Oscar responds: "Mmm-hmmm. Wanna' see? See? See the control things?" He shows Sophie what he's referring to on the camera.

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Sophie asks: "So what do the control things do?" (Sophie prompts theory-building and more camera exploration.)

Oscar: "Um I don't know what they do…"

Larry, who has continued exploring the camera under the magnifying glass, notices a musical note that is printed on the camera and interjects: "What's the song thing for? What's that little song thing for?"

Sophie: "How do you know it's for a song?"

Larry: "Because that button [is] next to a song." [i.e., the button is next to a musical note symbol.]

At this point, Sophie brings Oscar, who is known in the Gardenia Room as being knowledgeable about music, back into the conversation. "Oscar, can you see? Do you think that is a song button?"

Larry holds the camera over for Oscar to see and says: "See that song?"

Oscar studies it for a moment and asks: "Is that a music note?"

Sophie: "Is it a music note, Larry? What do you think that's for?"

Larry: "I don't think so." He turns the camera on so that he can try out the "song" button. Larry then pushes the "song" button and music starts to play from the camera. Larry gasps in astonishment, "Uhh!!," and looks at Sophie with excitement and surprise.

Mirroring his excitement, Sophie asks: "What did it do? Oh!"

With a great big grin, Larry says again: "Uhh!" as Sophie and Oscar watch and listen.

Larry looks at the camera again and has noticed that it has started playing a slideshow of previously taken pictures: "It goes to the classroom!"

Sophie: "It does. It goes to the classroom."

Larry: "And then it sings songs."

Sophie: "You think it will sing songs?"

Larry: "Yeah, but it do's music from our classroom."

Oscar pointing to the buttons he drew on his paper: "There Larry."

Sophie, looking at Oscar's work, asks him: "So those are more controls?"

Oscar says: "Mmm-hmm."

There are several minutes of silence when Larry explores the camera and Oscar continues drawing.

Then Larry asks: "Hear that music?" They listen quietly for several seconds.

Sophie comments: "I do. Did you press the music button?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "You discovered something about the camera that I didn't know." (Sophie fosters an egalitarian learning community. Here Larry is the expert and she is a learner.)

Larry: "Yeah."

Larry demonstrates for Oscar, and Oscar laughs heartily at this discovery.

Larry tries out another button on the camera. Sophie asks: "So what is that little button for, that one that you just pressed? What is that one? This one here." (She points to the power on/off button.)

Larry: "It turns it on."

Sophie: "It turns it on."

Larry explores the camera features for several more minutes. Still excited about the music, he pushes the button again. He holds it over to Oscar again and says: "Hear that music?" With a brief pause while they listen together, he adds, "There's music from the classroom."

Sophie: "Is that music that was on in the classroom?"

Oscar: "Oh yeah. It might have been Abigail's music." (Although it's actually recorded music from the camera, Oscar's theory makes a lot of sense. On the previous day, Abigail brought in a CD recording of her mother's musical performance to which the class listened and danced.)

Sophie: "Abigail's music?" (Notice Sophie doesn't correct his theory. Instead she asks questions, confident that they will continue to refine and readjust their theories with more time, discourse, and exploration.)

After some more moments of exploration, Larry says: "I want to turn it off and take pictures." He pushes the off button.

Sophie: "Well before you take any pictures, I wanted to ask you about another button. Can you pass the camera to me?"

Larry shakes his head yes and says: "and I will take these off." (Meaning the clips connected to the camera strap.) Larry hands the camera to Sophie and starts working on removing the clips.

Sophie: "Okay."

Oscar: "and I want to take a picture too."

Sophie: "Well before you take a picture. I wanted to ask you because I know that Larry has been using this button. Do you remember what this button does Larry?"

[Sophie points to the zoom control.]

Larry: "Yeah."

Oscar: "they take farther and….farther and closer."

Sophie: "It gets it farther and closer?"

Oscar: "Yeah."

Sophie: "This one does? Well, let's see if Oscar can turn it on. Can you turn it on Oscar?"

Oscar pushes down and says, "really hard" as the camera turns on.

Sophie points to the "T" button and says: "and then Larry can you press this?"

Larry: "yeah."

Sophie: "One day Larry was calling this the 'T' button because there's a 'T' on it." She points to another button and says, "That's the one you use to take a picture with."

As Oscar zooms in and out looking through the lens, Sophie says: "Oh. So that makes Amy get closer. And then that makes Amy go farther." (I am sitting opposite from them at the table videotaping.)

Sophie: "Okay so let's take a picture of Amy."

Oscar studying the letters on the camera says: "Farther. That's the first letter for *farther* and that's why it has a 'w' and *closer* is for 't.'" (Oscar contemplates the meaning of each symbols and why certain letters represent particular concepts.)

Thinking again about his earlier discovery, Larry says: "I want to press the music button."

Oscar: "Where is the music button?"

Sophie: "Okay, so let's take one of Amy really far away. And now can you press the one that makes Amy get closer?" (Sophie makes the decision to proceed with the exploration of the zoom feature, despite the fact that Larry has brought up the subject of the music button.)

Larry: "Yeah."

Oscar pushes the zoom button and takes a picture of me with Sophie helping to hold the camera.

Sophie: "Okay."

Oscar: "I want to take it by myself."

Sophie: "Okay. Well we'll have to ask Larry to take it off the clips."

Larry starts to finish taking it off the clips and Oscar tries to help but Larry says, "no, no" and Oscar stops. Larry gives Oscar the camera and puts the strap around Oscar's neck.

Larry tells Oscar: "And if you push that music button it sings music to you."

Oscar: "This says 'music.'"

Larry: "Yeah." (Notice they continue to revisit their earlier discovery of the music button.)

Oscar then looks at a different button (the menu button) and says: "Or this could be music." He quickly corrects himself, "No that is not music. This is music and this is menu."

Sophie: "This is menu? What does menu do?"

Oscar says: "Let's see." He pushes the menu button and the menu comes up on the LCD screen: "Look at that…How do you make that go away?"

Sophie: "Try pressing it again and see what happens." Oscar presses it again and the menu disappears on the screen.

Sophie: "So do you want to take a close-up picture of Amy?"

Larry to Sophie: "I want him to push the music button."

Sophie: "Well, we're actually looking at the button that makes things get closer." (Sophie again decides to steer the conversation in the direction of the zoom feature. Perhaps it would have been appropriate for her to share her intent by saying, "*I would like us to look at the button that makes things get closer.*" At any rate, in facilitating children's conversations, it is inevitable that a teacher will need to make judgments like this, in order to take advantage of proximate conversation topics that, from the teacher's point of view, are too rich to pass up.)

Oscar takes my picture and then says: "Hey Amy, how about you take a picture and I take a picture."

Amy: "Okay." We both take a picture of each other.

Sophie (to Amy): "Does your camera make a noise when you take a picture?"

Amy: "Sometimes it makes a noise when it flashes."
Oscar plays back the picture he took of me.

Still interested in the music button, Larry says to Oscar: "Let's push the music button again and see what happens." Oscar pushes the music button.

As the music starts to play, Oscar smiles and starts to sway the camera gently back and forth to the beat of the music. He asks: "How do you turn it up?"

Sophie: "The volume?"

Oscar: "Yeah."

Sophie: "I don't know. What do you think Larry?" (Notice how Sophie continues to facilitate their conversation around the music button, even though she has indicated her interest in moving on to the zoom feature several times.)

Larry gesturing with his hands upwards says: "It goes up, up, up by itself."

Sophie: "You don't have to press a button to make it go up, to make the volume go up?"

Larry: "Yeah. Yeah. It does it by itself." (Although, there is a volume button, Larry's comment make sense because the recorded song that the camera plays starts out soft and gradually gets louder.)

Larry: "You hear that?"

Sophie: "I do. It's very quiet though." (Again, Sophie doesn't correct him but makes comments to spur his thinking.)

Refining and readjusting theories. After several more minutes of tinkering with the camera, Larry figures out how to adjust the volume and shows Oscar. Oscar pushes the music button and the slideshow and music begin playing again. All three of them look at the LCD screen.

Larry, referring to the volume control, says to Oscar: "Push the button again and you'll see." Oscar tries the button and the volume goes down. Larry instructs him to "push the button again." This time the volume goes back up.

Larry points to the LCD screen and says to Sophie: "That's a picture of you!"

Sophie: "Mmm-hmm."

Oscar: "I want to see a picture of today."

Looking at the screen, Sophie asks: "Was that today?"

Oscar: "Oh."

Oscar to himself whispers: "Stop the music." Then he asks, "How do you stop the pictures?" (meaning the slideshow playing on the LCD screen)

Sophie: "Um, I think if you press that one in the middle. Or, maybe that one." He tries one of the buttons and it works.

After looking at the slideshow, Oscar takes a picture of his drawing of the front of the Sony camera. He has Sophie hold it up for him. As he looks through the viewfinder and adjusts the camera's position, he comments: "Farther is better." (Oscar discovers that when he backs up with the camera, he's able to fit his whole drawing in the camera frame but can't when the camera is up-close.)

Sophie asks Oscar: "Farther is better? For this? For this paper?"

Oscar: "Yeah."

Bringing Larry into the conversation, Sophie says: "Oh. So Oscar is saying farther away is better for this one. You can see it better, so you can see this better when it's farther away. But with the magnifying glass you can see it better when it's…closer?" (Sophie holds the magnifying glass to the paper to demonstrate.) Perhaps, this is a pretty big jump from camera to magnifying glass, from "farther is better" (a compositional point) to "closer is better" (a magnification point). Not to mention that, as a matter of fact, closer is not always better with a magnifying glass—what you actually need is the optimal distance from the object you are viewing, neither too far, nor too close. In other words, "better" for Oscar means you can see the whole picture. "Better" for Sophie means you can see details more clearly. These are challenging concepts and will not

likely be fully understood in this one exploration. However, through many explorations, discourse, and reflections, such as this one, misconceptions and clarifications will be made and deeper understandings will begin to take shape.

Larry: "Mmm-hmmm and even close up."

Oscar: "Watch this! Watch this." He backs up to take a picture of Larry this time, zooming the camera lens in and out, testing his abilities to control the composition of his photos.

Oscar is still holding the camera and Sophie and Larry are examining it with him.

Larry touches the square flash on the camera and says: "Hey look! That's the flash!"

Sophie: "that's the flash?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Oscar: "Yeah."

Oscar to Sophie: "Can you take a picture of me? 'Cause I wanna see if that's the flash." Oscar hands the camera to Sophie.

Sophie: "Okay well how about we'll get Larry to do that. Larry will you take a picture of Oscar?" (As illustrated in chapter 4, Springhill teachers intentionally share control with children and encourage their active participation.)

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Will you do a close-up or will you do it of him far away?" (Sophie asks questions to help connect their hands-on experimentation with theory-building.)

Oscar: "Far away."

Sophie: "Far away?"

Oscar to Larry: "Do it far away."

As Larry adjusts the zoom, Oscar notices that the front lens moves inside and outside of the camera. Sophie: "Oh I see what you're saying. Are you saying when he presses the thing that makes it far away that this goes in? (pointing to the front lens). Can you do it again Larry? Can you press the 'w' and the 't'?"

Sophie: "Look can you see that?"

Oscar: "Yeah."

Sophie: "It went in a little bit."

Oscar: "Yeah!"

Sophie: "So Larry when you press this, I think it must be that one, this part goes in a little bit.

Larry tries to take Oscar's picture but his finger covers the flash.

Sophie: "Oh. You know what, your finger was over the flash. Your finger is over the flash."

He takes a picture.

Larry: [inaudible.]

Sophie: "So you can't see the flash?"

Larry smiles as he looks at the picture he took: "Uh-oh."

Oscar to Larry: "Let me see it. Let me see your picture."

Sophie: "Did it work?"

Larry: "It goes dark!"

Sophie clarifying: "It goes dark when you put your finger over the flash?"

Oscar tries to take the camera from Larry: "Let me see it. Let me see it." Larry hands it to Oscar but it's still attached to his neck. Oscar covers the lens.

Larry lets Oscar hold it. Oscar: "What's it on, this one or this one?" Oscar points to the two different flashes (one round and one rectangular) on the camera.

When Oscar pulls the camera, Larry reminds Oscar: "It's still on my neck."

Oscar gives it back to Larry. Oscar to Larry: "Is it the circle one or the square one?"

Sophie: "'Cause there are two flashes?"

Larry looks at the camera for a few more moments.

Oscar repeats: "Is it the circle one or a square one?"

Larry doesn't respond to Oscar's question right away, he's focused again on the music button again and asks: "Can you hear the music Oscar?"

Oscar laughs for several seconds, still delighted in Larry's discovery.

Larry: "No. It keeps playing."

Sophie: "Did you press the music button?"

Larry: "Yeah. I did."

Sophie: "And can you see pictures from the classroom?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie brings it back to Oscar's question: "So, Larry did you see there are two flashes here, there's a square one and a round one." (Notice Sophie didn't rush the boys as they temporarily revisit the music button. Instead she allows them some time for more music exploration before bringing it back to Oscar's questions about the flash. In this way, their learning spirals back and forth among various topics.)

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Why do you think there are there two [flashes]?"

Larry: "I don't know."

Oscar: "Can I put my finger on it?"

Larry: "No."

Oscar: "Why?"

Larry: "The song."

Oscar: "Let's do a different song."

Larry: "No, it just do's that song." (At this point, Larry has figured out that the music is not coming from the classroom but from the camera and that it only plays one song. Notice how each time they explore and revisit the music button and talk about it their understanding moves forward.   Sophie did not have to explain to them that it was not Abigail's CD but allowed time for them to try out their theories and readjust them as they make new discoveries. Sophie uses a hands-on and "minds-on" approach.)

Sophie suggests showing Alice their camera discoveries. Suddenly the fire alarm goes off for a drill. They return to the room to resume their work after the drill is complete.

Sharing discoveries. Alice the studio teacher comes in to see their discovery.

Larry tells her: "I'll put it on so you can hear the music. So I'll put it on."

Alice: "Okay. That's a good idea to put it around your neck."

Larry explains: "I turn it on and then push the music button." (Note how children are provided many opportunities to express their ideas and new discoveries, in this case sharing their knowledge with another teacher.)

They listen for several seconds and Alice walks over closer to him to hear the music.

Larry: "Hear that?"

Alice: "yeah."

Alice: "Is that a guitar?"

Oscar: "I think."

Larry: "Yeah."

Oscar: "Yeah it is a guitar."

Alice: "Maybe it's a keyboard."

Oscar: "Maybe it's a keyboard and a guitar."

Larry: "Yeah."

Oscar: "Yeah."

Alice: "Is somebody in there playing the music? a tiny musician?" (While this is a fun and whimsical notion, perhaps it would have been more appropriate for the children to develop their own imaginative theories rather than the teacher imparting her idea.)

Larry: "Yeah."

Oscar giggles and says: "Yeah. Like a violin."

Sophie: "like that little violin you want for Christmas?" (In a community built on relationships and communication, teachers know significant details of children's life.)

Oscar: "Yeah. Where we got Max's [his older brother] new violin, we went at that store to get it. Um in [Colorado Springs?] and I saw a little toy violin. It was SO tiny and it had a little tiny case and that violin might be as small as the violin in the camera. It might be as small as that. Maybe even, maybe even tinier than that."

Alice: "Wait. Does the music make the picture change?"

Larry: "Yeah. It's a music picture."

Oscar: "It keeps going."

Sophie: "They made a discovery." (Teachers cultivate children's desire to explore their world and understand how things work.)

Alice: "They sure did."

Larry points to the symbol and explains: "It's a music note." (Sharing new knowledge is an important part of their school culture.)

Sophie: "Well, now did you draw the music note on your picture of the camera?" (Sophie brings their thinking about this new detail back to their representational drawing.)

Oscar joins in: "I didn't draw a music note!"

Sophie: "Well you did the front of the camera and the musical note is on the back of the camera."

Oscar: "Anyway, want me to show you how to draw a music note?"

Sophie: "Mmm-hmm."

Oscar starts to draw a musical note on a new piece of paper.

At this point Larry and Oscar seem to be finished showing Alice their discoveries so she exits the room and heads back into the studio.

Larry still experimenting with the camera says: "I stopped the music."

Sophie to Larry: "Okay. Are you going to draw the music note?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Okay I'm going to give Larry this." She hands him a pen.

Oscar tries drawing a music note and then comments: "No. that's not it." He is not satisfied with his first attempt to draw the note.

Sophie: "That's not a music note?"

Oscar pointing to a blank space on his paper: "I have to do it right here."

Oscar to Larry: "No. I don't want to do that…Can I see the camera for one second? Larry can I see the camera for one tiny second?" Oscar wants to see the camera to use it as a reference for drawing his musical note.

Still preoccupied with more camera exploration, Larry doesn't hear Oscar's question. Sophie says to Larry: "Oscar was asking you if he could look at the button to see what the music note looks like."

Larry holds it up for Oscar to see. But Oscar doesn't notice because at that moment he's looking at his drawing of musical notes.

Sophie to Oscar: "He's holding it up for you."

Oscar pointing to his drawing: "See that's a music note."

Sophie: "Is that what it looks like on the camera?"

Oscar: "It *maybe* looks like that. I think it's more…let me see." He looks over at the camera and continues, "I have to hold it [the camera]. Because I need it right by my piece of paper." He continues to revise his music note until he's satisfied with the outcome.

In this exchange, it seems that Sophie realized that Oscar's work drawing the music note could be improved upon. When Oscar said, "See that's a music note." Sophie could have responded in several ways. She could have said, "Yes, a music note, good job." This comment most likely would have truncated his experience and prevented an

opportunity for Oscar to challenge himself and improve his work, which he was more than capable of doing. (In fact, this type of praise over time blocks a sense of mastery and ability to overcome challenges, the real building blocks for self-esteem.) Or she could have shamed him by telling him what he did wrong, "You didn't draw the stem." Instead, Sophie asks him, "Is that what it looks like on the camera?" allowing him the opportunity to self-correct. Sophie has confidence that Oscar will use the comparison constructively, and not be inclined toward excessive self-criticism. Not only does Sophie have intimate knowledge and strong faith in children's capabilities, but she also works within a school culture "where it's okay to make mistakes."

Once the drawing is complete, Larry and Oscar study his musical notation through the magnifying glass. Then, Oscar shows Larry how to draw a note so that Larry also can add one to his drawing.

Camera negotiations. A short while later, Oscar starts experimenting with the camera for several minutes.

Larry decides he would like a turn and says to Oscar: "Turn it off."

Oscar replies: "I don't want to turn it off… No. I want to turn the on/off button and turn it *on*." He turns it on and scrolls through the pictures.

Larry suggests: "Now push that music."

But Oscar is focused on scrolling through the pictures he took earlier to find the one he doesn't like. Once he finds it he says: "That's what I want to delete."

Turning to Sophie, Oscar asks: "Can I delete it?" She nods her head yes.

Oscar deletes the picture and then begins scrolling through the other pictures again. Suddenly he notices that the lens (which was extended out on full zoom) has

moved back inside the body of the camera. Surprised at this he says, "Oh wait. It's like that but it's still on!" He laughs loudly at his observation.

Oscar scrolls through more pictures. Larry, still wanting a turn, says: "I want to wear it on my neck." Oscar doesn't respond so Larry adds, "Oscar you're taking so long!" (Notice how each time Larry asks for the camera he does so in more expressive and elaborate ways.)

Sophie: "Did you want to take more pictures Larry?"

Larry points to a dial button on the camera: "No. I want to look at that."

Sophie: "Oh, that dial?"

Oscar: "What dial? This one?"

Larry to Oscar: "No. This."

They look for a few moments and then Larry tries again to get Oscar to give him the camera. He says: "Oscar take it [the strap] off your neck!"

Oscar: "I want to see something."

Sophie very softly: "Oscar, can you give Larry a turn?"

Oscar: "I want to push the music button." He pushes it and then puts his ear up close to it. (Perhaps, Oscar chooses the music button, knowing that it is Larry's primary interest with the camera on this particular morning. Pressing the music button does in fact temporarily distract/engage Larry and they listen to the music together for a moment.)

Having now shared together a lot of experience with the music button, Larry assures Oscar: "It [the volume] will come up."

Oscar pushes the wrong button to adjust the volume at first and Sophie comments: "Oh. It says, 'volume' there."

Sophie: "Hear it Larry?"

Larry smiles and says: "I hear it."

But after a moment, Larry tries again to negotiate the use of the camera. This time more explicitly: "I want to do it. Oscar. You need to take it off."

Oscar to Larry: "I need to take a funny picture."

Sophie gently says: "Do you hear what Larry is saying?" Notice how Sophie continues to ask questions and make suggestions, but never judges or *imposes* her solution (e.g., she doesn't say, "Oscar *give* Larry the camera you've had it for a long time. Or, Larry you need to be patient and wait your turn.") She allows them to negotiate and resolve the conflict with her support.

Oscar replies: "I need to take a funny picture right *now*."

Larry: "Oscar I need a turn. Oscar I need a turn. Turn it off. Oscar. Oscar! Let me have it and put it around my neck."

At this point Oscar acknowledges Larry's strong desire for a turn with the camera. He takes his picture quickly and hands the camera to Larry (without Sophie having to intervene). Through discourse, the boys were able to resolve the conflict.

Sophie points to clips on the magnifying glass and asks Oscar: "Did you take a funny picture of this?" (Notice how Sophie does not say, "Oscar that was SO NICE of you to give Larry the camera." The boys resolve the conflict themselves, not because they are required to or in order to get praise.)

Oscar: "Yeah."

Larry takes a picture of his camera drawing and then starts exploring more buttons on the camera.

More explorations and discoveries. Two pieces of the magnifying glass have come apart and Oscar is working diligently to fix it. Oscar fiddles with the mechanics of the clips and magnifying glass. Sophie watches but again doesn't intervene at this point. (Making mistakes and failed attempts are viewed as important parts of learning in the Springhill community.)

After several minutes, Oscar says: "I think I can't really do it." But then he suddenly seems to get an idea and says, "I know! I really do!" and begins working on it some more.

As Oscar continues to work on fixing the magnifying glass, Sophie checks in with Larry who has been exploring the camera some more: "What's happening with the camera Larry?"

Larry holds the camera towards Sophie and says: "I have it on *that* one so I can see what it can do."

Sophie reads off the camera's LCD screen: "It says 'shooting.'"

Larry: "Shooting?"

Oscar: "Shooting?"

They continue to work quietly. Oscar in a resigned tone, still unable to fix the magnifying glass, shrugs his shoulders and says to himself: "It doesn't matter." (Notice Sophie doesn't intervene until he is ready to stop, and is no longer able to work on it independently.)

Sophie picks up part of the magnifying glass apparatus and says: "Well here's those two bits there. So if we have those sandwiched there and…" She continues to point out some details of the disassembled magnifying glass. (Notice when she does support Oscar, she still doesn't solve the problem for him but instead scaffolds his work by pointing out some of the details and mechanics of the equipment.)

Oscar suggests maybe they could use tape to get the pieces to go back together. Sophie points out that the mechanism worked without requiring tape before it came apart. (Was this a missed opportunity for the children to discover for themselves the plusses and minuses of using tape? Again, as teachers we are often required to make challenging judgement calls about which ideas are worth pursuing.)

Having studied the pieces, Oscar suddenly shows renewed excitement and says: "Hey I can do it! I can do it! You hold this. You hold this!"

Sophie follows his lead and responds: "Okay I'm holding this bit." With Sophie's help he connects the other piece and begins to twist the screw that holds them together.

As he twists the screw, Oscar asks: "Which way?"

Sophie: "So it gets tight?"

Oscar: "Which way? This way?"

Sophie: "Is it tight? Or really loose?" Oscar tries both directions and figures out which way makes it more tight and twists it that way.

Once complete, Sophie says: "I think that's it!"

Oscar tries it out to make sure it is securely attached and, with a look of satisfaction on his face, examines the magnifying glass further.

Larry turns to Sophie and Oscar and says: "Look!" He shows them the picture he took.

Larry says: "I pushed moon!" (i.e., he pushed the camera button with the moon symbol on it and took a picture.)

Oscar looks over at the camera and says: "Moon?"

Sophie: "What happened when you pushed moon?"

Larry: "I don't know."

Larry: "I wanna push mountain." He pushes the button with the mountain symbol and takes another picture.

Oscar: "Mountain?"

Sophie: "What happened Larry when you pressed mountain?"

All three of them study the picture Larry has taken. Sophie says: "Okay, that was mountain."

Sophie then helps Larry playback the two pictures he's just taken: "Let's see. So that was mountain and that one is moon."

Larry: "Let me see the face" (the symbol visible on the LCD screen).

Sophie: "That's moon."

Larry, comparing the two images, says: "mountain" and scrolls back to the other picture and says "face." He shows Oscar too. (During this initial exploration of the "mountain" and "moon" buttons, they don't develop any theories about how it affects the picture images.)

Sophie: "If you want to see the picture that you've just taken, then you have to push this." (Notice how Sophie does not withhold technical advice when such advice helps maintain the momentum of a line of inquiry.)

Oscar looks at the side of the camera and asks: "What are those things?"

Sophie: "Are they buttons?"

Oscar to Larry: "Hey, can I play with it?"

Larry: "Yeah!" He hands him the camera.

Larry then looks over to me and says: "And, if you can let Oscar, if you can let Oscar see what's inside or outside your camera for a second." (Larry has figured out a way for them both to have a camera.)

Amy: "You want me to let Oscar see what's inside and outside of my camera?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Amy: "Okay."

I turn off my camera and hand it over to Larry. They study my camera together for several minutes and then return it to me so that I can continue to videotape them.

Small group work comes to a close. Oscar and Larry's exploration of Sophie's camera continues. Oscar tries pushing the LCD screen to see if that will make the camera do something. (Perhaps he is thinking it may work like a touch screen, which suggests prior experience with that technology.)

Sophie to Oscar: "So you're trying to push the screen to make that work. Are you thinking that will make it work?"

Oscar: "Do you know what 'move' is?"

Sophie: Does it work when you push the screen?

Larry looking over Oscar's shoulder says: "No."

Oscar is not completely convinced and continues to try and push the screen.

Then Larry suggests: "Push really hard."

Oscar: "Uh. Missed it."

Sophie repeats the question after a few moments: "Does it work when you push the screen?"

Larry: "No."

Oscar: "No."

Larry: "I want to go somewhere that has other cameras."

Sophie: "Has other cameras?"

Larry: "Yeah I want a place that has other cameras."

Oscar agrees: "I want to play with other cameras. Yeah."

Sophie: "Where?" Larry opens one of the cabinets in the multi-purpose room and Sophie explains that those items belong to the church, not to Springhill, so they can't actually play with things that are in there.

Larry finishes his explorations of the camera and his drawing and takes the magnifying glass back to the classroom.

Oscar decides to draw the back of the camera. (Note how Sophie's earlier comment, "Well you did the front of the camera and the musical note is on the back of the camera" seems to have triggered Oscar's decision—or planted a seed, to now draw the back.)

Oscar notices that the word SONY is on the back of the camera as well as the front. He says to Sophie: "That again. S, O, right? N, Y."

Oscar: "And then we have to do these little control things."

Larry comes back in and says: "Sophie I was in the classroom giving Jess back the [magnifying glass.]"

Sophie: "Did you want to go back to the classroom?"

Larry: "No, I want to write a note to go to the Magnolia room." Sophie helps Larry write a note to go to the Magnolia room and he heads out. Oscar finishes working on his drawing of the back of the camera. Oscar and Sophie discuss the details in his drawing. Oscar takes a picture of his drawing and reviews it on the camera. Oscar is not satisfied with the first photo he takes and decides to take another one. After over an hour of focused work exploring, drawing, and discussing the camera, Sophie and Oscar head back to the classroom.

Reflections. This lengthy exchange suggests many questions: What does it mean to support children's learning? Why is it legitimate to spend so much time on a camera? What are the advantages of using one camera for two students, as opposed to two cameras, one for each child? What are the connections between a prolonged discussion like this and democratic practice?

It should be noted that this small group exchange was possible, in part, because of Springhill's low teacher-student ratios. On this particular day, Nicole (the resource teacher) was able to spend her morning in the Gardenia room with Jess and the other children, while Sophie worked with these two boys. Certainly, the small group experiences would pose a challenge in many preschool environments without the same amount of adult support.

In the process of facilitating this investigation of the camera, Sophie helps the

children: 1) gain literacy and numeracy skill practice and reinforcement (squares, circles,

round, letters); 2) explore scale and size (bigger, smaller, closer, farther away); 3) use and

fix tools (magnifying glasses, camera); 4) collaborate with each other; 5) explore and

make discoveries[47]; 6) build and readjust their theories; 7) expand their working

vocabulary; 8) practice expressing their ideas and thoughts to others; 9) make

connections between symbols, signs, and their represented meaning (a prerequisite for

writing, reading, drawing, and attending to the details); 10) negotiate conflict (use of the

camera); 11) foster their imagination and creativity; and 12) slow down for a "hands-on,

minds-on" type of sustained engagement.

Through this small group work discourse, teachers are able to gain valuable

insight into children's thinking. This insight allows teachers to more appropriately

scaffold children's development, hypothesize possibilities about where their inquiries

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[47] This type of freedom to explore is supported by two recently published research studies on how children learn (Bonawitz et al., in press; Buchsbaum, Gopnik, Griffiths, & Shafto, in press), both of which suggest that direct instruction limits preschool children's spontaneous exploration and discovery. And in terms of democratic practice, the opportunity for free exploration and spontaneous discovery in childhood is a prerequisite for the development of adults who are creative problem solvers and critical thinkers. In addition, Peter Gray's biological/anthropological studies lend credence to these recent findings. As Gray (2009) explains: "*Children educate themselves*. Children are biologically built for self-education. Their instincts to explore; to observe; to eavesdrop on the conversations of their elders; to ask countless questions; and to play with the artifacts, ideas, and skills of the culture all serve the purpose of education." Further, when children are emotionally invested (i.e., intrinsically motivated) in a learning experience, they are more likely to exhibit sustained engagement and information retention (Siegel, 1999). During this exchange, we see Sophie supporting children's investigations in an area that is of interest to them. She does not set up the group experience in order to "teach" a skill, but rather to support the children's explorations.

may go next, and construct new provocations to sustain children's learning. But perhaps more importantly, this vignette serves as an example of how small group learning fosters both a non-hierarchical learning environment and democratic habit of mind. As described on Project Zero's website (2006):

> Learning in groups not only helps us learn about content, it helps us learn about learning in a way that fits with the kind of people we want to become and the world we want to create. Learning in groups develops critical human capacities for participating in a democratic society--the ability to share our views and listen to those of others, to entertain multiple perspectives, to seek connections, to change our ideas, and to negotiate conflict. ("Making Learning Visible," para. 3)

Small group work supports ongoing individual pursuits (November 13, 2009).

Several days later, Jess and Sophie put out clay in the classroom, a new art medium the children have been exploring. Oscar spends much of the morning working hard to make dogs and a television out of clay. Once complete, he tells me that he wants to take a photo of his clay creations with my camera, so I hand the camera over to him. He takes a picture after adjusting the zoom button very carefully to fit his clay objects into the viewfinder. In the process, he is practicing and reinforcing the same skills he learned earlier in the long exploration with Sophie and Larry. After Oscar takes the digital picture, he plays back the image and realizes that he didn't make a clay DVD player to go along with his television set. So he goes back to the table and makes a DVD player. When the clay work is done, Oscar deletes the first photo and takes a new photo with the television and DVD player both included. He then plays back his new picture and is satisfied with it. Finished with the camera, Oscar tells me he wants to get it ready for me

again. He very carefully puts the cap back on, closes the camera's LCD screen, and puts the camera strap securely around my neck. Through provocations (e.g., birthday photographer), individual practice, and small group work, the children's project work is sustained.

Documentation and curriculum design: Sustaining project work during mid-school year. Over the next several months, the children's inquiry into photography and their study of place moves forward. Sophie and Jess continue to observe the children's interests and pursuits, set out provocations in the environment to spark further inquiry, and provide many small and large group opportunities for continued dialogue and exchange. In addition to these pedagogical practices (which will be discussed further in the final section of this chapter), the teachers use documentation as a critical part of the learning process. Documentation has many purposes in ongoing project work and benefits all protagonists in a democratic learning community. As Reggio educator Rinaldi (1998, p. 122) puts it, "Sharing documentation is a true act of democratic participation."

In this section of the chapter, I will highlight five examples of the Gardenia room teachers' documentation connected to their study of photography. In the process, I will show how documentation both supports ongoing classroom inquiries as they unfold, and provides the essential *transparency* required of a democratic culture, where all protagonists in the community are able to participate in the learning process.

"Lights…Camera…Action..." Prior to winter break, the Gardenia Room teachers share the following documentation, with families and faculty through email and create a display on the hallway bulletin board outside of their classroom (December 2009):

> **Lights…Camera…Action…**
>
> Our classroom light table is a constant source of interest to the children. Last week the children traced their portraits on the light table- we observed many of the children paying close attention to details on their photographs.[48] We wondered how we could further this interest in looking closely and we wondered what would happen if we provided a slightly different light source. On several of the dreary days last week we set up the overhead projector-the children were intrigued with the light and enjoyed experimenting with the materials on the projector.
>
> Oscar noticed a piece of blue acetate on the projector- he picked it up, held it up to his eyes and said that it was a camera.
>
> A short while later Oscar went over to the art table and stated that he wanted to make a camera. He selected some materials and set to work.
>
> Before long, many other children wanted to make cameras.
>
> The overhead projector turned out to be the perfect provocation-the materials on the projector inspired Oscar to make a cardboard camera and then other children quickly picked up on this idea.

Here we see that Jess and Sophie have put out a provocation ("a tossing of the ball to children"). Now, with the ball in the children's hands, the teachers wait and observe to see how the children will respond. In this case, Oscar makes a camera, immediately sparking interest among the other children. The teachers display the children's cameras on a large bulletin board, and this allows teachers and children to revisit their camera representations, and the "tossing of the ball" continues. By contrast, if the teachers had sent home the cameras as "finished products," this sustained learning may not have continued.

"We're Photographers!" A short time later the children's interest in cardboard camera's reemerges with ever-growing complexity, as we see in this next piece of

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[48] In December 2009 much of children's photography work centered on exploring self-portraits and making 3-dimensional collages using recycled materials on top of their photographic images.

documentation, "We're Photographers!," (February, 2010), which was both placed on the display board and sent out to the parents and other teachers via email:

"We're photographers!" declared Orson when he was using his cardboard camera.

There was a resurgence of interest in the cardboard cameras this week. Evelyn initiated this interest when she made a new camera.

Duke suggested that if Evelyn placed the classroom camera behind her cardboard camera she could take a "real" photograph. So she did.

Here are the two photos of Jess that Evelyn took.

Duke then made another cardboard camera. His new camera had several innovative features – it's a "talking camera" that tells you what to take photos of!

A flurry of activity ensued as children made new cameras or requested their old cameras from the display in the hallway.
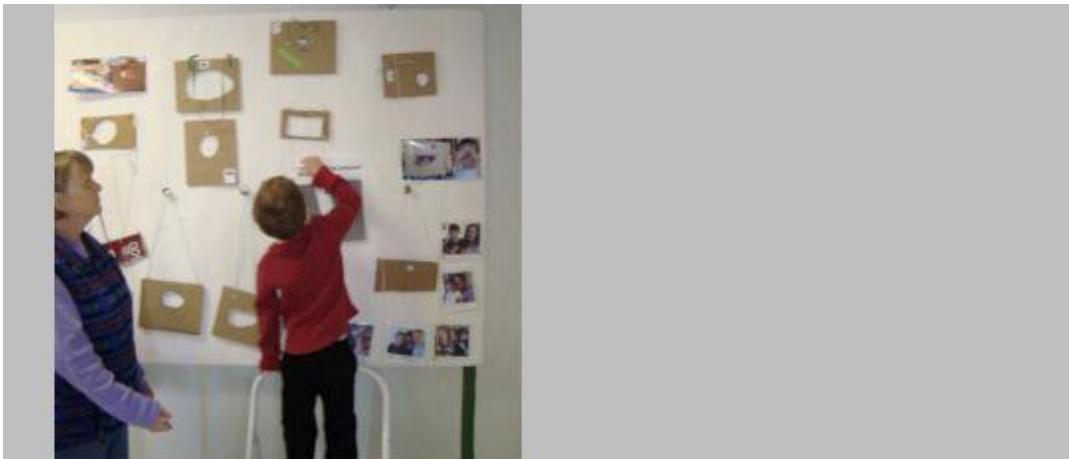
Oscar has now found a place in the classroom to hang his camera so that it will be easier to get when he needs it. We are wondering if other children will follow his lead.

The idea of other kinds of cameras took hold – talking cameras, cameras with CDs and movie cameras.
So a few days later a group of children worked in the studio with Alice drawing a movie. They worked on a large strip of paper and created several drawings in a sequence.

The following day Orson brought in a special treasure – an antique camera that belonged to his grandfather.

Actually, it turns out that this machine is a type of projector, possibly a Cameragraph, that was used to project silent movies. However, Orson believes it is a camera and theories are developing about why there is a large bulb inside the camera.

Everyone was very curious about this beautiful piece of equipment and we used it for an observational drawing session.
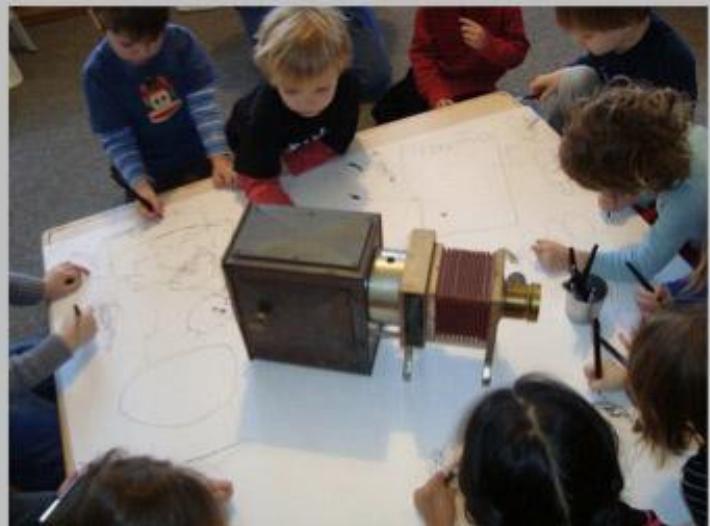
As the children think about moving images, movies and cameras, we teachers are wondering which direction to go with this investigation -- as we so often see with an investigation there are many possible avenues of exploration. Stay tuned to see where we go next!

There are many important things to notice about this documentation. For instance, note how children are in a back and forth process of representational work and camera exploration, each time adding layers of understanding to their inquiries. In addition, when ongoing documentation is made available to children, they gain

opportunities to reflect and revisit their previous experiences. In doing so, they're able to refine theories, build more nuanced understandings, and add depth to their work (e.g., Duke adds "innovative details" to his 2nd camera rendering). As described in "Projected Curriculum Constructed Through Documentation—Progettazione" (Rinaldi, 1998): "Documentation supports the children's memory, offering them the opportunity to retrace their own processes, to find confirmation or negation, and to self-correct" (p. 122).

Note also how Sophie and Jess are not expected to work in isolation with curriculum design. Rather they are provided multiple layers of support. This documentation highlights two such examples: Alice (the studio teacher) supports their inquiry by providing related small group work in the studio, and Orson's family provides the cameragraph that sparked more camera explorations and theory-building.

It should also be emphasized that, as shown in this documentation, the children decide where their cameras will be displayed in the classroom, underscoring the malleability and evolving nature of the displays. Certainly, these are indications of a democratic school culture that has been established where children are accustomed to be actively involved in decisions being made about their ongoing work.

"Photography, Theories & Negotiations." Creative energy and interest in photography continues as illustrated in this third piece of Gardenia room documentation, "Photography, Theories & Negotiations" (February 28, 2010):

PHOTOGRAPHY, THEORIES & NEGOTIATIONS

This week the children's interest in cardboard cameras continued and extended in several directions.

Children are still making cardboard cameras and refining ones they have already made:

Zach made a new camera

Stella added brads to make on/off buttons for her camera

Larry remembered Duke's suggestion of placing the classroom camera behind a cardboard camera to take a photograph and so he experimented with that idea.

Several children have really embraced the idea of taking photographs of completed work -- Oscar now often plans work which includes taking a photograph. The other day Oscar picked up a stencil and asked me if he could use the stencil and then take a picture. I agreed and he came over to get the camera once he had completed his stencil. When he returned the camera he showed me the picture that he had taken and said that there was a problem: he had used a pink pencil for the stencil and when he took the photograph the pencil marks were too light and did not really show up. Oscar said that he was going to fix the problem by tracing over the pink pencil with a darker pencil and then take another photograph. He did so and was much happier with the results.

When I was downloading the camera I noticed that Oscar's photo of the pink stencil was no longer there – it turns out that Oliver had deleted the photograph that he didn't want!

Oscar's photograph of the second version of his stencil

Duke and Oscar also decided that they needed to make "chargers" for their cardboard cameras – they cut out small pieces of cardboard and then used wire to attach the "chargers" to their cameras.
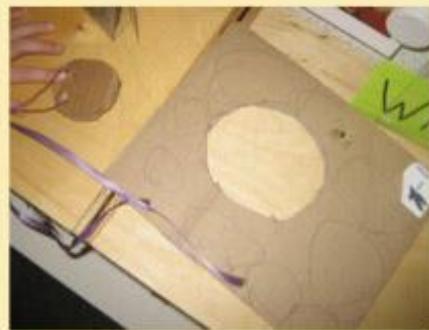
Duke then decided that he needed a table for his camera, so he and Oscar worked together on making a table out of cardboard. This was quite a challenging task which required figuring out the best materials to use, listening to each other's ideas, problem-solving and facing frustration when the table would not stand up

Both children had very definite ideas about how to approach the problem of getting the table to stand up and there were some pretty strong feelings around their negotiations.

However, they worked together and finally managed to get the table to stand up. It was very impressive to see these boys collaborate together.

Duke's camera, charger and completed table

We had a second drawing session with the Cameragraph that Orson brought to school. The children used flashlights to explore the interior and they were delighted to discover that the front of the Cameragraph extends like an accordion. Children continue to speculate about the light bulb inside and there are several theories that the bulb makes the camera work.

More theories about cameras emerged when Larry brought in an old camera from home.

Larry showed his camera at circle and we had a very rich discussion. We talked about whether this camera was as old as Orson's Cameragraph – most of the children said that it wasn't. Larry said that his camera needs film in order to work. As the discussion continued it became apparent that there are three theories about how cameras work – a light bulb (Cameragraph); film (Larry's camera) and batteries (the digital camera).

We love it when children come up with these kinds of theories as it gives us a glimpse into their thinking. We will be pursuing these theories a little more this upcoming week and we're looking forward to learning more about how children understand cameras.

This documentation highlights the rich experiences children gain by participating in this reciprocal learning process (e.g., observing, reflecting, representing, collaborating, discussing, documenting). Each time they represent their cameras through art media,

more details emerge and a deeper understanding begins to take shape. These pictorial

representations are a critical part of Springhill's inquiry-based approach. Teachers

provide children many opportunities to create symbolic representations of the objects or

ideas being explored using a diverse range of media. As explained on the Springhill at

Stonewood website ("Representation," 2010):

> When we represent an idea mentally, verbally, graphically (through drawing or
>
> painting, for example), musically, or through movement, we create an image of
>
> the idea for ourselves. In the process we clarify meaning and are able to build on
>
> the mental image. This is the process of learning. When we give children many
>
> media, or languages, through which to represent ideas (both their own and those
>
> of others), the opportunities for learning multiply and learning becomes a more
>
> efficient process.

When children collaborate to represent their ideas, such as Oscar and Duke do

with the camera table, they also gain valuable experience listening to others, expressing

their ideas, and negotiating different perspectives as a part of solving problems together.

The teachers also gain valuable insight into children's thinking processes during this type

of work and garner ideas and hypotheses about the direction their inquiry may take next.

There are three additional things worthy of note: First, with the support of

teachers, children at Springhill participate in the documentation process (e.g., Oscar

photographs his work). Second, previous documentation about the children's

photographic inquiry sparks more parent participation and sharing of materials (e.g.,

Larry's mom brings in an antique camera).

Finally, sharing this documentation spurs more discourse among the faculty and fosters their ongoing thinking, reflecting and learning together. For example, after sending out this "Photography, Theories, & Negotiations" documentation, Jane, a relatively new toddler teacher at Springhill, responds to Sophie's documentation with a question (March 3, 2010):

> The children are learning a great deal with the trial and error of their differing ideas. I can see how personalities and intelligences are influencing their approach to the projects. It's great that they are so interested in continuing the exploration, documenting their work, inventing new ideas. How hard has it been to bring them back to this idea? Does it seem self perpetuating, or are the teachers suggesting new threads? Jane

In Jane's willingness to share her questions, not only to Sophie, but with all of the adult community members, she contributes to Springhill's transparent and democratic learning environment.

"Small Group Work with Three and Four-Year-Olds." A short time later, Sophie responds to Jane's questions in the following piece of documentation, "Small Group Work with Three and Four Year Olds" (March 18, 2010):

Our last piece of documentation about photography generated some queries about the workings of projects that continue over a long period. Jane Fox, one of the Forest Room teachers, had some specific questions about how projects are sustained over time. So I thought it might be helpful to highlight some of the ways that teachers approach long-term investigations.

Projects vary enormously in how long they last. Some are very brief – lasting a day or two. Others endure for much longer – weeks, months and even an entire school year. Projects that last over a period of time take on a certain rhythm. During the life of a project the children's interest often ebbs and flows – sometimes they may be distracted by other things that are going on, or sometimes they are consolidating information about the topic before they move on to the next level of the investigation. In general we teachers have found that if a project is about a big idea, that is an idea which is truly significant or compelling, the children will continue to come back to that topic. This has been the case with photography in the Garden Room this year – the children continue to return to their interest in cameras and photography.

So what are some of the things that keep a project alive? One important part of sustaining projects is the use of provocations – sometimes a new question or an idea or new information will spark interest. Recently with the photography project we have seen how the Cameragraph and the 35mm camera have ignited a lot of interest.

Another very important part of investigations is how we use small groups. This documentation will look specifically at the role of small group work.

THEORIES & DISCOVERIES: SMALL GROUP WORK IN ACTION

The children have come up with three theories about how cameras work:
•light bulbs (inspired by Orson's Cameragraph)
•film (inspired by Larry's 35 mm camera)
•batteries (inspired by the classroom digital camera)

These theories provide the perfect opportunity to get a small group together to investigate the children's thinking a little more deeply. Working in a small group enables children to really slow down and listen to each other's ideas. Oscar, Larry, Abigail   and I set off to the Small Group Room with the Cameragraph, the 35 mm camera as well as the digital camera.

First we looked at the Cameragraph and the children talked about the light bulb. Much to the children's delight I switched on the bulb for a few seconds. Larry remarked that the light "shoots out" and he also remarked that the Cameragraph is "an old camera that makes you see through the air" – so he understands that this machine projects.

Next we examined the 35 mm camera and the children drew it.

We talked a little bit about film, and Oscar mentioned his theory about batteries. Oscar has been thinking a lot about batteries and a few days prior to this meeting he made a cardboard "charger" for his cardboard camera. We talked a little more about batteries and I asked Oscar to explain his theory about how batteries make a camera work. His first explanation was whimsical and magical:

Oscar: I think there are tiny guys who are in ...in the batteries and that's what makes ...that's what takes the picture. (laughs)

Teacher: So there are tiny guys inside?

Oscar: Yeah, in the batteries. And then that takes a picture.

Teacher: Then what happens?

Larry: The picture's done.

Oscar: Then you look back at it.

Teacher: Well, then how do I get the pictures onto my computer?

Oscar: There's a little plug and you plug it into the computer and that makes it do it.

Larry: If you have a plug, then the little guys in the camera will push it out and then you will have a camera website and they will show the picture out at your printing.

Tiny guy inside the battery

The battery

Tiny guy sitting at the computer receiving images
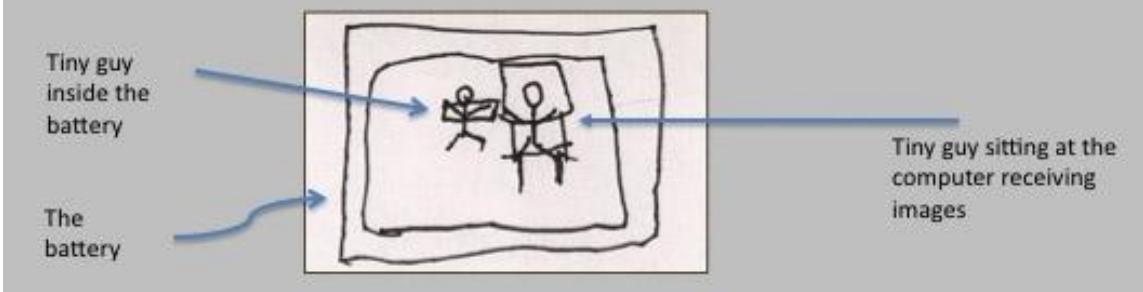
The plug starts to become more important in their theory:

Teacher: So, the little guys put it onto the computer????
Larry: NO! You PLUG IT IN
Teacher: OK, let's see.......(provides paper) can you draw a plug for me?
Teacher: So there's the plug...where's the camera? What's that part?
Larry: The plug. The computer is right here.....computers are shaped like rectangles.
Abigail: I think you plug the camera in and then it shows the pictures.
Larry: That's right

Then they start talking about a cable:

Oscar: It goes down onto the camera
Teacher: How do the pictures get up there?
Oscar: They're tiny and then they get big on the computer......that's the cable. It gets bigger, and Bigger and BIGGER

As photos move along the cable they get bigger

Photos are small in the camera
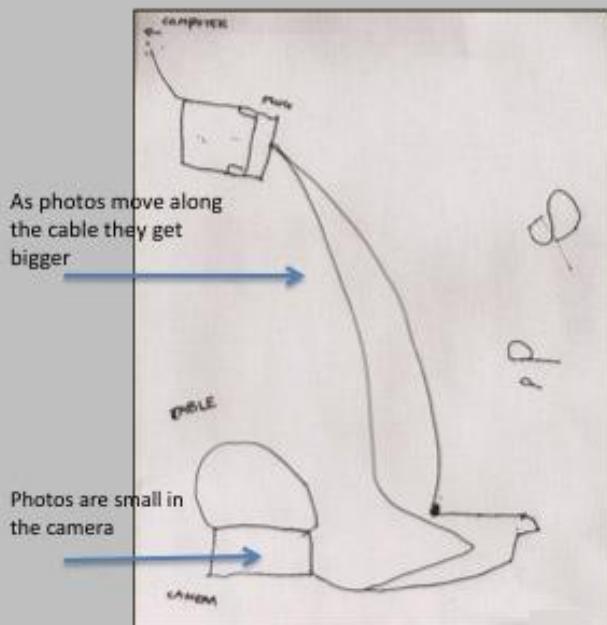
So, in Oscar's theory the images are small in the camera, but as they travel along the cable they get increasingly larger, until they arrive on the computer screen.

Oscar reveals that he has been thinking a lot about how an image is small on the screen of the digital camera viewfinder, but then the image is larger when it is on the computer screen. He has been thinking about scale – something that is often of great interest to children this age.

MORE NEW DISCOVERIES

Alice then came in and showed the children how to do a couple of things with the 35 mm camera

The children were very excited to discover more about the mechanics of this camera. They were particularly excited about the shutter, which they describe as "a little door" and the aperture, which they call "a star."

The "star"

There is some great video footage at the end of this documentation that shows the children sharing their new knowledge.

During our time as a small group, these three children furthered their theories about cameras and they made some exciting discoveries about the mechanics of the 35 mm camera. One of the functions of a small group is to share findings with the larger group. So at circle we demonstrated the "little door" and the "star" of the 35 mm camera– all of the children were very excited about these new discoveries.

Projects that continue over time have a certain rhythm and pattern. As this photography project evolves we are beginning to see certain patterns emerge. While all of the children are interested in the topic of photography, there are a few children who are really motivated to find out more about cameras and photography – their interest and curiosity is a driving force in this investigation as their ideas motivate and intrigue other children. By creating small groups we are able to explore ideas and theories in depth. This is where small group work becomes a crucial part of the project because the individual children who want to find out more are also usually really keen to share what they have learned with the larger group. When they report back to the larger group, perhaps another child will take the next step in the investigation with some new theory or discovery, which we will then take back to a small group and so the cycle will continue. The learning of the individual contributes to the learning of the whole group. This continuous cycle of inquiry is what keeps investigations moving forward as we build on each other's knowledge. This is one of the cornerstones of our group work.

It is particularly powerful to see even very young children work in this way.

As illustrated through Jane's questions and Sophie's response, we see a process similar to that described by Rinaldi (1998, pp. 121-122):

Documentation offers the teacher a unique opportunity to listen again, see, again, and therefore revisit individually and with others the events and processes in which he or she was co-protagonist, directly or indirectly. This revisiting with colleagues helps create common meanings and values.

This documentation also highlights the spiraling and reciprocal nature of the children's ongoing project work.

"Looking Closer." As the photography explorations continue throughout the year, many other connecting threads and areas of study emerge. For example, when the children begin showing lots of interest in making images look smaller and bigger, the teachers decide to put out a provocation related to scale, as described in the Gardenia room documentation titled, "Looking Closer" (March 28, 2010):

Looking closer

Recently during a small group work session the idea of scale came up – **Oscar's** theory about images getting larger made us wonder about ways to invite all of the children to explore the idea of scale and size.

So we set out a provocation - binoculars. Everyone has been enjoying using the binoculars and it didn't take the children long to make some interesting discoveries. They noticed that they could see things that are "far away" and they also observed that looking through binoculars made things larger, or smaller.

They also noticed that binoculars have different sizes of lenses and that looking through the end with smaller lenses makes things larger, yet looking through the end with larger lenses makes things smaller – the children really enjoyed this curious contradiction.

More small group work……..

A small group continued to explore the idea of making images larger and smaller. Recently **Lila** and I had been looking at some photos on the computer and she asked me to make the picture larger. This seemed like a good opportunity to think of ways to alter the size of images.

In addition, given **Oscar's** theory, I wondered if he would have any ideas about how a large object then becomes small on the screen of the camera when you take a photograph. So a small group got together to investigate taking photos of each other.
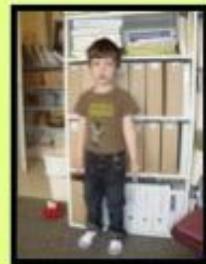
(Note: photos taken by children are framed in black)

When **Oscar** took a photo of **Lila** he noticed that not all of her head was in the picture. So he stepped backwards to get all of **Lila's** body into the picture.

Interestingly, both **Oscar** and **Larry** know how to use the zoom feature on the classroom camera, but on this occasion **Oscar** did not use the zoom – he figured out a different way to alter the size of the image. I then invited **Oscar** to take a picture of me so that we could see if he would have to move back further to get all of my body into the photo.

Once everyone had a turn to take photographs we decided to download the camera and see **Oscar's** theory in action.

Another discovery......

When the children were looking at the downloaded photos they made a new discovery – when they accidently double clicked on an image it opened software for manipulating images and much to their surprise (and mine!) they could alter the size of the images by sliding the cursor along a line on the screen. Around this time the children's interest began to lag – it was close to snack time, but we also know that children need time to think about a new discovery and so we ended our small group time with a plan to return to this investigation another day.

The larger group continues to think about....

The 35 mm camera. The mechanism of this camera is so satisfying to the children – they delight in twisting and turning the controls.

A few days ago **Orson** and **Grace** were taking turns with this camera. **Grace** said," we NEED to get film for Lukas" When asked where we might get film, **Grace** replied, "at the store!"

It looks like **Grace** has provided our next provocation for this investigation......

Exploring perspective, size, and scale is a thread that continues to engage children for the remainder of the year (and will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter). "Looking Closer" also sparks more discourse among Springhill adults, providing insight

into how documentation supports a democratic learning community. For example, a Springhill parent and teacher in the middle school program named Susan responds on March 28, 2010:

> This is fascinating. I'm reminded of a video shown at the other campus...The video focused on learning science in [a] way that was both hands on *and* minds on. One of the experiments consisted of asking people who looked in mirrors every day (including a hair dresser who looked into a mirror eight hours a day), whether they would see more or less of their reflection as they moved away from a mirror on the wall. Their guesses - based on all that hands-on experience - were generally wrong, thus lending support to the idea that one cannot learn simply from experience; minds need to be engaged as well. I don't know if you'd want to complicate this investigation by adding a mirror, but my guess is that the Gardenia Room children -- whose minds are definitely ON - might be able to anticipate the correct answer…"[49]

As Rinaldi (1998, p. 122) explains, in democratic learning communities:

> Documentation provides an extraordinary opportunity for parents, as it gives them the possibility to know not only what their child is doing, but also how and why, to see not only the products but also the processes. Therefore, parents become aware of the meaning that the child gives to what he or she does, and the shared meanings that children have with other children…Furthermore, documentation

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[49] Another Gardenia room parent sends a response with an idea to further provoke the children's interest in perspective-taking (March 28, 2010): **"**Re: What about adding magnifying glasses to the mix? Or even (eye) glasses...would be interesting to see what theories develop. Lovely work. Thanks, Melissa"

offers the possibility for parents to share their awareness, to value discussion and exchanges with the teachers and among their group, helping them to become aware of their role and identity as parents.

Mapping: Another Thread in Springhill's "Inquiry into Place." Another connected thread to Springhill's school-wide project on children's sense of place is centered on their continued interest in mapping (see chapter 7, **"**A Constructivist Perspective of Learning: Situating Springhill's Learning Community within a Constructivist Framework" section for further detail). Throughout the year, children draw maps of their body parts, maps of significant memories, people and places in their lives, maps as a study of identity and self, whimsical and imaginative maps, and maps of natural elements (thunder, sea, and water). Creating maps of the "forest" has also been a significant area of focus in the Rainbow room and has sparked cross-aged collaborations among children (see Appendix J for further detail).

Responsive planning and curriculum design: Adding to the web of connections as the school year comes to a close. As the children's growing investigations of scale and size, photography, and mapping continue to unfold, another layer of complexity develops with the children's growing interest in bones and x-rays. In this final section of the chapter, I discuss how Springhill's responsive planning, in conjunction with ongoing discourse and documentation, serves as yet another critical component of Springhill's democratic approach to curriculum design. There are several mutually informing elements and processes within responsive planning, including:

observation, reflection, documentation; provocations and environment[50] design;

opportunities for creating symbolic and theoretical representations; and individual, small

group, and large group work. By highlighting some of these elements of responsive

planning within the Gardenia room class study of photography, bones, and x-rays, I will

show how teachers help children construct a web of meaningful connections between the

different discoveries they make in their ongoing project work, and show how responsive

planning functions to support a democratic community of learners.

   Initial explorations of bones and continued project work, May 10, 2010. After

taking note of several snack-time conversations on the subject of broken bones, Sophie

and Jess use this observation to inform their planning. They decide to put out some

related "provocations" to see if they can spark further interest among the children. As

described on the school website ("Vital Elements of Our Approach," 2010), Springhill's

"environment is thoughtfully prepared with materials and experiences likely to 'provoke'

or spark interest and inquiry. These preparations are referred to as 'provocations.'"

   On May 10, 2010, as I observe children's conversations and play throughout the

classroom, it is quite evident that the children are highly engaged in this new area of

study. Several children are at the light table examining a set of x-rays (borrowed from

Orson's family) of different parts of the body.

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[50] "[T]he environment is considered a third teacher. The learning environment includes the physical site (the classroom, outdoor space, the school as a whole) and the materials and "provocations"… available, as well as the social "site" (the nature of adult-student interaction, the expectations of students, and the culture of the class). These components of an "amiable environment" jointly create a context for efficient and joyful learning." (Retrieved from Springhill at Stony Point website, "Vital Elements of Our Approach," 2010, in the "Environments" section)

In addition to this provocation, the Gardenia room teachers have borrowed "Mr. Bones," a large-scale model of a skeleton, from the Magnolia room. Stella is at the art table looking at "Mr. Bones." She has just made Mr. Bones and herself a "heart" out of pink construction paper. She attaches a heart to Mr. Bone's body and attaches the other heart to her own shirt. Ethan is also studying Mr. Bones at the large art table, drawing a picture of Mr. Bones using white pastels on black construction paper. Sophie scaffolds Ethan's work by pointing out some of the details of Mr. Bones.

I also observe many spontaneous conversations about Mr. Bones. A few examples of the children's comments:

Lila: "Mr. Bones was in my dream."

Evelyn asks: "Where's Mrs. Bones?"

Orson: "Maybe Mrs. Bone is in the Magnolia Room."

Another child: "I've got bones in me."

Abigail: "I can feel my chi bones."

I notice the topic of bones has also been incorporated into some of the children's play scenarios too. For example, outside Zach pretends to be the "doggie Arfie" at a café. He is serving "bones and spaghetti."

At the snack table children begin to discuss the size of people's brains. Sophie reminds the children about what it said in their brain book, that if you put your fists together it makes the approximate size of your brain. She demonstrates and the children follow suit. The children shift into a conversation about children's ages and start to make correlations between age and height. Lila explains that she and Kate *must* be the same height because they are the same age (both 4-years-old). Abigail rejects this theory and

insists that she is taller. Lila explains to Abigail, "you can't be taller than me because I'm four-years-old" and Kate supports Lila's position saying: "I already know that Abigail, Lila and me are the same size." Sophie listens to them discuss their hypotheses and debate for several minutes without intervening or giving the "correct" answer. However, once snack is complete, Sophie invites them to test out their theories. She gets out a yardstick and helps them measure each child's height for comparison. In this way children have the opportunity to revisit and revise their initial hypotheses. (Note too, how the children's growing understandings of size and scale become interconnected with their new inquiries into the human body.)

In closing circle, Sophie shares "Mr. Bones" and some of the details from Ethan's drawing. They count his finger and toe bones. Sophie also takes apart "Mr. Bones" skull for closer examination.

Sophie shows the children the progress they have made on the large collaborative map they are creating to represent the Gardenia Room. Sophie reads and points out the different parts of the classroom that have been added to the map so far and then invites the children to think about other important parts of the classroom that may be missing or still need to be added to their map. (Note how their work on mapping continues to develop. Unlike many traditional programs that study one theme or unit at a time, Springhill classrooms pursue many areas of project work simultaneously. Akin to real-life, Springhill children don't live or assimilate new knowledge in discrete parts but as connected wholes. Note too, how the children are mapping the classroom--a space that they know intimately and that has significance in their lives. They have also taken and displayed photographs of significant parts of the classroom for reference.)

Matthew asks: "What about the straws?" (Children have access to straws for snack. They sometimes use them to "drink" applesauce and yogurt.)

Sophie: "I knew someone would remember something we forgot, the straws."

Orson: "The paper that has animals on it." (Orson is referring to the animal collages that the children made and displayed on one of the classroom walls.)

Abigail: "Bilibos."[51]

Sophie writes down each part of the room the children mentioned, and they make a plan to add those elements to their Gardenia room map the next day in the studio.

Further explorations and representing theories on paper, May 11, 2010. The following morning, Oscar borrows my camera to video Ethan. (The children's photography interest has extended into an interest in making videos.[52]) Meanwhile, "Mr. Bones" is still out on the large white art table, and Stella and Oscar are studying his various parts and comparing them with images in an anatomy encyclopedia also at the table. At some point, Mr. Bone's head accidentally gets knocked off. After a good laugh, Jess helps the children put him back together.

Evelyn and Larry are sitting at the large round table with Sophie. Larry tells Sophie about his experience with an x-ray machine at a doctor's office, and draws the details of this memory on some paper attached to a clipboard. Evelyn, on the other side of Sophie, is also drawing a past experience at a hospital. She is explaining to Sophie that her little brother Harry fell down and had to get an x-ray of his head. Sophie listens

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[51] A "bilibo" is a plastic, sturdy, open-ended toy, that comes in a variety of rainbow color choices and two sizes. They are designed in the shape of a turtle shell. Because of their open-ended nature, children use them in a variety of imaginative scenarios (e.g., bowl, boat, car, baby cradle, telephone).

[52] See Appendix L, "Videos" to see how Sophie connects their video work to other classroom collaborative projects.

intently and writes down their experiences for future reference. (When Sophie listens to and documents children's stories and ideas, she provides a record of their experiences that can be revisited later both individually and with the group.) After Evelyn finishes her drawing, she tells Sophie she would like to take a photograph of her work. So Sophie gives Evelyn the camera.

Orson, who decides to spend part of this particular morning in a different classroom, comes in with a note requesting to borrow several pairs of the Gardenia room binoculars. (Note how Springhill's faculty encourages the migration of projects, interests, and areas of study across classroom boundaries.) Sophie gets binoculars for Orson and he returns to the other classroom.

"How can we make an x-ray?": Question as provocation, closing circle, May 11, 2010. After the "Hello" song and greetings to "guests," several children share some of the projects they worked on today. Evelyn shares a birthday hat she made, Oscar shows a soccer field he has drawn and the book he used as a reference, and Duke demonstrates how to use a telephone he made out of paper.

After the children finish sharing their work, Sophie pulls out a camera from behind her back and says: "And Kate made a discovery today! You know this old camera that Nanette [the Magnolia room teacher] gave us?"

Several children: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Well Kate was looking at it, saying she discovered something. Kate can you show us what you discovered?" Kate shakes her head yes and Sophie passes her the camera.

Kate looks through the camera viewfinder and explains to the class: "When you look through this half it looks bigger." She then turns the camera around and continues: "And when you look through this side it looks smaller."

Duke: "I know that also."

Ethan: "Like the binoculars!"

Sophie: "Like the binoculars, Ethan. Yes. When you look through one end it makes everything big, and when you look through the other side it makes everything look small. So that was a discovery!"

Oscar: "Can we see? Can we see?"

Sophie: "Well you know what Oscar? We don't have time for everybody to look through it, but tomorrow, this camera will be above your message board so if you want to try it. And if you want we could get the binoculars out as well."

Sophie: "Jess, are there other people that want to share?"

Jess: "Lila has something to share."

Sophie: "Lila what did you have to show us?"

Lila takes out a black piece of construction paper where she has drawn using a white pastel: "This is a…um…" Lila studies her picture for a moment to recall what she drew.

Larry says to her: "Show it to everyone!" Lila holds her paper out to show the group.

Lila: "A girl Mr. Bones…alien."

Larry: "A girl Mr. Bones?"

Jess reads from the attached post-it note where the teacher has dictated Lila's words: "She says, 'Alien girl from planet earth. Mrs. Bones.'"

Several children confused: "*Mrs.* Bones!?!"

Evelyn thinking she has misspoken shouts: "*Mr.* Bones!"

Grace finds this idea humorous, smiles and says back to Evelyn: "Mrs. Bones!"

Sophie: "People are really enjoying, they're really enjoying using the white pastels on the black paper. Thanks Lila." (Perhaps, this conversation could have been used as an opportunity to explore gender issues with the children. It may have been interesting to explore the question of why there is a "Mr. Bones" but not a "Mrs. Bones." See chapter 10 for more on this topic.)

Sophie: "One thing that we were talking about earlier...Kate would you go over to the light table and get one of the x-rays?" As Kate goes to get an x-ray, the children and teachers count together to see how many seconds it takes for Kate to get back. They count to 14 until she returns.

Sophie: "Thank you Kate! Today, some of us were looking at the x-rays."

Larry: "A leg!"

Sophie: "You think this is the leg?"

Larry: "Yeah."

Evelyn: "No. arm."

Several children shout out both arm and leg.

Sophie: "Okay, well Orson told me something about these x-rays. Because these x-rays belong to him." (Note: In egalitarian classrooms, teachers find every opportunity to recognize the knowledge and expertise of children.)

Larry: "Hey it's a part of his leg!"

Sophie holds up the x-ray, pointing to a small skeleton featured on the top corner: "Well, Orson told me something, on every piece of the x-ray. Can you see it, there's a little skeleton in one of the corners. Did you see that?"

Several children in unison: "Yeah. Mmm-hmm."

Sophie: "Well, on each x-ray there's a little skeleton and then it has either a square or a rectangle around the body part that this is the x-ray of. So I can see a rectangle around this part of the skeleton which is kind of here. [Sophie holds the x-ray up at shoulder level so the children can see the connection between the x-ray and her body] So what part of the x-ray would it be?"

Oscar: "It's a shoulder!"

Sophie: "It's a shoulder. That's your shoulder. And so we were thinking about, *how could we make x-rays*?" (Notice how this question serves as a provocation for the children to consider a new line of inquiry.)

Larry: "You light them up on the light table."

Sophie clarifies: "To look at them you light them up?"

Larry: "Yeah. And also next you need to plug them in and turn them on."

Lila: "If you put [th]em on your skin, you might…If you put them on your skin, what will we figure out? If you put 'em on your skin, you might see your bones." Lila shrugs her shoulders after sharing her theory.

Sophie: "You might see your bones, but if you put them on your skin you might see your bones?"

Abigail says something: Inaudible

Sophie: "So, if I put this [x-ray] on my arm do you see my bone?" Sophie matches up the x-ray with her shoulder and arm on top of her sweater.

Several children say: "Yeah." And at the same time several children say: "No."

Sophie: "Does it show my bones?"

Pointing to Sophie's exposed hand, Kate says: "No. You have to put it right here." Sophie moves the x-ray down over her hand. (Perhaps because her hand was exposed, thinking literally they see her bones.)

Larry then offers another theory: "No you need to put it…it's upside down." (Larry may be thinking that the reason you can't see her shoulder bone yet is because the x-ray is upside down.)

Sophie: "OH. Should I turn it over?" Sophie tries out this idea and flips the x-ray around with it still over her hand.

Abigail: "No you have to do it like up." She indicates that the x-ray should be moved up back towards her shoulder.

Sophie helping to test their theories asks: "Can you see my bone now?"

Several children respond: "Yeah."

Larry: "No." (Larry seems determined that the x-ray should be on top of her shoulder.)

Several children: "Yeah."

Children continue to disagree.

Larry: "It's upside down."

Sophie adjusts it: "I'll try again. Like this? Can you see it now?" Sophie moves the x-ray up over part of her arm but not all the way to her shoulder.

Larry says: "Yes."

Larry: "No. There's a bone, not like that, up, up…I see a bone that's your shoulder." Larry moves over to Sophie and matches the x-ray shoulder bone and arm up to Sophie's actual shoulder and arm.

Sophie: "You see a bone?"

(Many of the children seem to be considering the x-ray as the tool to make things bigger, smaller, or visible, rather than understanding at this point that the x-ray is the actual picture of bones.)

Matthew: "the really big ones it looks smaller."

Sophie: "the what Matthew, what are you thinking about?

Matthew: Um, um, um, um, um, if you look at the, if you look into the skeleton and you look through a little one or a big one and the big one makes it smaller, the big ones are little ones, it gets smaller and the big one makes it…the big, the little ones make it bigger and the bigger ones make it smaller." (Matthew seems to be thinking about their earlier exploration with the binoculars where they discovered that looking through the small lens makes images look bigger but looking through the opposite end of the binoculars with the large end it makes images look small.)

Sophie seems to understand this connection that Matthew is making and asks him: "Is that kind of like the binoculars. Is that what you're talking about? Oh so you think if we had the binoculars we could look at this and we could make it [bigger or smaller]?"

Matthew shakes his head yes.

Grace: "because with binoculars we can see really far away."

Larry: "But we need to, we need to see close-up."

Grace: "Yeah. but, 'cause, it helps if it's very far away."

Sophie: "Yeah so if we wanted to see, like, one day Evelyn was talking about a nest that was up in the trees and it was so high up that we could hardly see it and we thought it was a good idea if we had the binoculars."

Larry: "well my eyes can see really far away."

Sophie: "Your eyes can see very far away?"

Grace: "My eyes can too."

Several other children shout in agreement: "My eyes can too!"

Sophie: "Ethan did you have your hand up?"

Ethan: "um, last week you said it can turn bigger."

Sophie: "What could turn bigger here?"

Ethan: "The skeleton."

Sophie: "If you had a giant..?

Ethan: "magnifying glass"

Sophie: "so if you had a giant magnifying glass it could make this turn..."

Ethan: "Giant."

Sophie: "Like how big?"

Ethan stretches his arms out as wide as he can reach.

Sophie: "yeah that would be really big. So if we had a giant magnifying glass it could make this (pointing to the x-ray) look giant too."

Several children start talking over each other with excitement.

Kate: "and if you look through the small, this magnifying glasses (she demonstrates with her hand), the, the, that would look a little bit tinier but if you do the small one it would be HUGE."

Sophie: "So if you look through a big magnifying glass it would be small. And if you look through a big…"

Kate: "Big magnifying glass it would look a little bit huge."

Sophie: "It would look huge."

Kate: "And if you look through a little magnifying glass it would look a little bit small."

Grace: "if you look through binoculars it can help you look really, really, REALLY far away."

Sophie: "Yep. Binoculars help you look really, really, really far away. What if you wanted to look up at stars at night, would you use binoculars for that?"

Several children shout "Yeah!"

Larry: "No! You can use telescopes."

Duke: "My dad has one of those."

Several other children: "And my dad!"

Zach: "If you had binoculars you could see the airplane. [It] would probably look really, really huge."

Sophie: "Ahh! If you had binoculars and you looked through the binoculars it would probably make the airplane look really, really huge."

Larry adds: "instead of small."

Sophie repeats what Stella says so everyone can hear: "Stella says 'when something is small it is bigger with binoculars."

It is past 12:00 p.m. now and several children get picked up to go home, but some of the children continue the conversation. There is a lot of energy around thinking about this topic.

Sophie: "Does anyone else have anything they wanted to say about magnifying glasses, or binoculars or telescopes?"

Matthew gesturing with his hands: "If you look through the little end of a telescope it would look this little and if you look in the other end it would look this big."

Sophie: "Oh it makes it much, much bigger yes."

Larry: If you look through a microphone, no a micro…a micro…A microglass!"

Sophie: "Oh the one that you look through in the water? Larry is saying it's a 'microglass.' The one that was in that book we were reading."

Another child (Matthew?) corrects him, "No a microSCOPE!"

Larry concurs, "a microscope."

Sophie: "Oh a microscope."

Grace: "Maybe we could borrow it."

Sophie: "Well we were talking about that. But we'd need to write a note. So maybe tomorrow that could be our plan, we could write a note to Helen."

Sophie: "I really like hearing your ideas about making things look big, making things look small."

Ethan: "And making things look giant!"

Sophie agrees: "And making things look giant."

Further explorations, more representations, and sustained work, May 12, 2010.

The following day, the teachers have put out black construction paper and white paint on the art table, along with Mr. Bones. Ethan works on a Mr. Bones painting that he is making for Jess.

There are pieces of undeveloped camera film and magnifying glasses set up on the light table as a provocation. (Perhaps, this provocation is set up as an opportunity for children to discover the connection between x-rays and camera film.)

A small group (Orson, Matthew, and Oscar) goes outside with Sophie. They are "animal detectives" and have brought along their binoculars and clipboards with pen and paper to draw their observations.

After they leave the playground, Orson, Matthew and Oscar go in the studio to work on the large collaborative classroom map to follow-up on their plan from circle. Alice works with Matthew on the applesauce straws that he observed missing from the Gardenia room map in yesterday's closing circle. Orson works on adding the animal documentation to the Gardenia room map.

Larry uses my camera to take pictures and video. After finishing a large puzzle, Larry takes a picture of his work, both up close and then far away. He reviews his work with the playback button. He also takes pictures of the large bilibos, my shoes, my face, and he tries to take a picture of himself and his shirt. He videos Grace, Kate and Lila who are reading together on the couch. He remembers how to turn off my camera and demonstrates that for me.

Duke then makes a camera out of play-dough that is on the two-person table. He points out the details: "This is the button to turn it on. This is the button to take a picture and this is the picture taking thing."

When Sophie walks nearby Duke, he starts to tell Sophie about an animal x-ray machine that takes pictures. (Duke makes the connection between cameras taking photos and x-rays taking pictures which seems to be a leap from yesterday's circle discussion about x-rays). She asks him if he could draw it for her and he says yes. She asks what type of paper he'd like and he requests a large piece of paper, which she brings over. He draws a picture of a mouse for several minutes. Once complete he says to Sophie, "Well that's a big x-ray of a mouse." He puts the cap back on his black pen.

Sophie encourages a more detailed representation of his thinking about animal x-rays by asking: "Okay. But how does the machine work? How does it take a picture?"

Duke removes the cap off the lid and then adds to his drawing, "Lay the animal on it." Pointing to his work he explains: "That's the animal laying on it. That's the machine. It's a mouse x-ray."

Sophie: "You lay the animal on the machine…"

Duke: "Yes and then take a picture and then it lights up." He draws what appears to be the streams of light coming down on the mouse and says again, "It lights up."

Sophie: "Okay. This is the table here."

Duke: "Yes. Table."

Sophie asks, "and that's the light."

Duke responds: "Yes" and then pointing to the mouse on his picture adds: "Say mouse." Sophie writes down the word mouse. He points to the x-ray machine on his

drawing and says "the big machine." Sophie starts to write the words and Duke corrects himself: "The big *x-ray* machine."

After labeling all the details in Duke's drawing, Sophie asks, "So, Duke when it takes the pictures, the x-ray of the mouse, will the picture look like the mouse? Or will it look like the mouse's bones? (Perhaps, a more open-ended question would have allowed for more theory-building. In this case, if Duke theorized that there were more than just bones in the x-ray picture, they could have explored the x-rays on the light table to confirm and/or disconfirm his hypothesis.)

Duke: "Yeah. It looks like the mouse's bones."

Sophie: "So it *just* takes a picture of bones?"

Duke: "Yes."

Sophie: "I'm wondering how it does that, how a machine just takes a picture of bones."

Duke starts drawing again while saying: "You, you push, push a special butt[on]… Look what I'm doing. I'm putting a special film in it." (Here, Duke makes another connection, the fact that you need special film to be able to take an x-ray picture.)

Sophie: "Oh. You need a special film?"

Duke: "Yeah." As Sophie writes his words, Duke adds: "You push it with a stick or with your finger, or a..." Sophie repeats his words as she writes them on the paper.

Duke: "That's the stick and that's the…don't you see the vet's hand holding the stick?

Sophie: "So that's the vet's hand?"

Duke: "But you can see the vet's arm but the vet is off the map." (Notice Duke's sophisticated understanding of perspective, perhaps from their various explorations into maps.)

Sophie: "Yeah, but he's off the map. If I turn this picture over, could you draw a picture of just the mouse bones?"

Duke: "Yeah…It's actually the tail bone."

Sophie: "You're doing the tail bone?"

Duke: "Yeah."

Sophie: "What other bones does a mouse have?"

Duke: "I'm doing the tail bone right now. But first I start with the tail bone because I know dogs with that shape." After successfully drawing the tail bone he draws other mouse bones (e.g., "head bones") and some more x-ray machine.

Sophie writes down what Duke says about the rest of his drawing and asks him if he'd be willing to share it during circle. He says yes. She then asks him if he'd like to work on the drawing some more. Duke says yes but first he wants to share at circle. (Oftentimes, drawings and other forms symbolic representations are used as referents to help children communicate their ideas and support discourse.)

Refining and sharing x-ray machine theories: Closing circle, May 12, 2010.
Stella tells the group she drew a skeleton "that was in my body" playing soccer.

Sophie: "Well, a lot of people did skeleton paintings today. And then Duke worked on a really big drawing. This is it. [Sophie holds up a picture on a large piece of paper drawn by Duke.] Duke has been thinking about how we make x-rays. It's kind of

like a photograph, but it's a photograph of your bones, of your body. So this is, can you guess what kind of animal this is?"

Several children shout out "Scat the cat." (The children are aware of Duke's interest in "Scat" the cat.)

Duke: "No, no, it's a mouse."

Sophie: "Oh it's a mouse! Well, you do like mice as well."

Duke: "It's Minnie mouse."

Sophie: "Okay. Oh, I see. It says a mouse. So here's the mouse and he's lying on the table. And is this at the vet's office?"

Duke: "Yeah."

Sophie: "So he's lying on the table.[53] This is the light here. And then this is the vet's hand. And he's got the special film, 'cause Duke says 'you need special film to make an x-ray.' So he's got special film and has 'a big machine and you push it with a stick or with your finger' and you need the special film and then it takes a picture of the mouse body. So that's the mouse body. So that's the picture of the mouse having an x-ray picture taken and then [Sophie turns the picture over to his drawing of the x-ray] that's the x-ray." Sophie reads his dictated words off the picture. (Notice how Duke has made the connection between x-rays and film, potentially moving the group's thinking forward, a leap from yesterday's circle.)

Nicole, the resource teacher makes visible her interest in his work: "Oh! So that's the x-ray?"

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[53] Note, how Sophie unconsciously refers to the mouse as a "he", even after Duke has said it is "Minnie Mouse" (see chapter 10, "Stereotypes, Status Quo and Gender Differentiation" for more discussion on this topic).

Lila: "Well in the night I keep sucking my thumb and when I keep sucking my thumb, I need to go to the doctor, so the nurse can see my thumb. So I can get an x-ray on it, so I won't get to suck my thumb anymore."

Sophie: "The nurse is going to take an x-ray of your thumb? Hmmm. That's interesting."

Lila shakes her head yes.

Sophie: "So, let's see, does anybody else have any other ideas about how to make an x-ray? Evelyn?"

Evelyn: "Harry [her younger brother] fell down and my brother had an x-ray at the doctor…at the Emergency room, I mean."

Sophie: "so your Harry had an x-ray at the emergency room?"

Evelyn: "Yeah, for his head."

Sophie: "So how did the doctor take the x-ray? Did he have a camera?"

Evelyn: "Yeah the camera had a little stick and it poked Harry's head and that made it …and then, then, some liquid went in and then the liquid and then the doctor took it outside and then the sun took a picture of the x-ray and then he went back inside and showed it to my mamma."

Sophie: "So the sun took the picture? Was it kind of like the sun pictures that you did with Alice?"

Evelyn: "and Jess?" (Jess, the other Gardenia room teacher also took part in the sun pictures.)

Sophie: "Grace what's your idea about the x-rays?"

Grace: "My idea is, my brother has an x-ray some place special in his room that I can't find it. It's a secret place, so nobody can get into it. 'Cause, 'cause if they get into it, they will get in it."

Sophie: "So your brother Alex has a special, he can make x-rays?"

Grace: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Ethan, did you have something to say about x-rays?"

Ethan: "I'm just raising my hand."

Sophie: "Oh, you're just raising your hand. I'm looking for someone who has something to say about x-rays. Matthew, do you have something to say about x-rays?"

Matthew: "Yeah. You have to use special ointment that makes them alive again."

Sophie: "To make who alive?"

Matthew: "The animals."

Sophie: "The animals? Oh if it's a skeleton."

Matthew: "and you need special spray."

Sophie: "So where do you put the ointment and the spray?"

Matthew: "On your neck but you don't put it on your nose. And on your forehead."

Sophie: "and that makes them come alive again?"

Matthew: "…and the leg. And the little spray that covered it up. And the spray takes special blood out."

Sophie: "It makes special blood come out?"

Matthew: "Un-huh. And then the blood seeps into you [here?], goes down your knees and then goes into your body!"

Sophie: "Well that's an interesting theory. Kate, do you have something to say about x-rays?"

Kate: "One day my baby sister was getting an x-ray at the doctors when my mommy had an x-ray. And then my baby sister popped out of her tummy."

Sophie: "Oh was it when Alana was inside your mommy's tummy? And your mommy had a special x-ray so that you could see Alana. And then Alana came out?" Kate shakes her head yes.

Sophie: "Lila did you have something to say about x-rays?"

Lila: "When I, I, um, when…Nurses have x-rays and there's a story about Madeline who had to go to the nurse and then she had her appendix out."

Evelyn: "Yeah. I know that story."

Another child: "Me too."

Another child: "I know that story."

Lila: "She had her appendix out and then they gave her a star."

Sophie: "That's right! Maybe we could look and see if we have that Madeline book. There is an x-ray but I've forgotten about it. Grace did you have something else to say about x-rays?"

Grace: "No, no, I had something to say about the beach 'cause I like…"

Sophie: "Well, actually you know what Grace, I'm going to ask you to hold that thought 'cause we're thinking about x-rays right now. So hold your thought about the beach. And I want to see if anybody else has something to say about x-rays. Maybe somebody who hasn't had a chance…?"

Larry: "X-rays, x-rays and hospitals, uh, I've been at a hospital with my mom when I was a little baby, but I didn't need an x-ray. But, and Curious George got in to the dinosaur bones, he go to a museum that had some pictures of dinosaur bones, and he and then he got on a bone stick to get a closer look and he fell and bended his bones and he needed to take an x-ray picture of…of…The doctors and nurses took x-ray pictures of his bones."

Sophie: "Do you have that Curious George book at your house?"

Orson: "I have Curious George books!"

Sophie: "The one that there's an x-ray in?"

Orson: "No."

Larry: "I do!"

Sophie: "And is it the one that has the bended bone?"

Larry: "No. It's the one with the paper problem."

After finishing their conversation about x-rays, they transition into a discussion about the Springhill Dragon.

This circle conversation highlights children's growing interest, understanding, and thinking about x-rays and bones. Sometimes children's interest grows around particular topics and sometimes it wanes. In this case, the topic seems to catch children's thinking and many ideas and theories begin to develop. In this vignette, we see how Sophie brings children's individual work (Evelyn, Duke, and Larry) to the whole group to reflect together and move their thinking forward as a group.

On May 16, 2010, Sophie creates and sends out documentation to the larger community about this ongoing interest in bones and x-rays:

BONES & X-RAYS

Lately we have been thinking a lot about bones. It started during a conversation at snack about broken bones – several children knew someone who had broken a bone and there was much talk about casts. So we brought Mr. Bones to the classroom and this immediately prompted a session of observational drawing. Children looked carefully at the skeleton, identifying body parts and counting the skeleton's fingers and toes.

We also borrowed a set of X-rays from **Orson** and **Terra** and the children really enjoyed these – they compared the X-rays to their own bodies and tried to create a whole skeleton on the light table.

Stella made a paper heart for Mr. Bones and attached it to his rib cage. She also made a paper heart for herself and taped it onto her shirt.

We wondered if there is a Mrs. Bones and children suggested making a Bones family.

Lila had a dream about Bones:

A little girl with paper skin took off all her paper skin and found she had bones underneath the paper.

The girl was like a real little girl but she did not have skin. The girl took off her paper skin, she carried the skin to school and went to school as bones.

Lila's drawing of her dream

The children's interest in X-rays brought us back to photography and wondering about how X-rays are made. **Oscar** thinks that you need a special kind of camera to make X-rays. **Orson** wondered if his Cameragraph might make X-rays.

Doctor

X-ray machine

Plug for machine
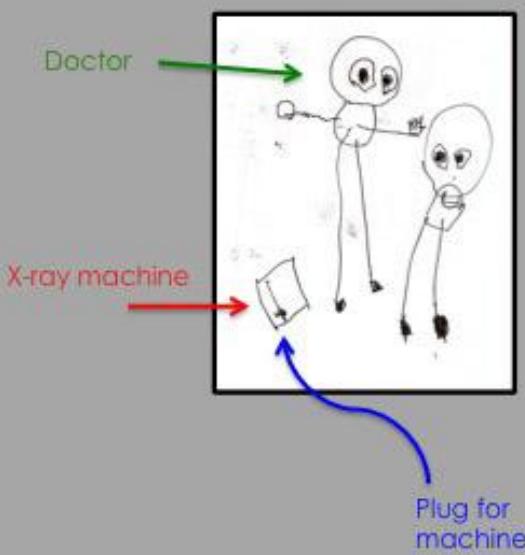
Larry's theory involves "a place where X-rays live."

The doctor plugs in the machine and turns it on.

Evelyn told us that her little brother Harry had an X-ray when he hurt his head. Evelyn said that Harry had to go into a "calculator which kind of pinched." Evelyn drew Harry inside the Calculator and she included his tears and his brain, "'cos he's got a lot of brains."

The Calculator

Controls

Harry's brain

Pincher things

Harry's tears

Harry inside the Calculator.

Evelyn
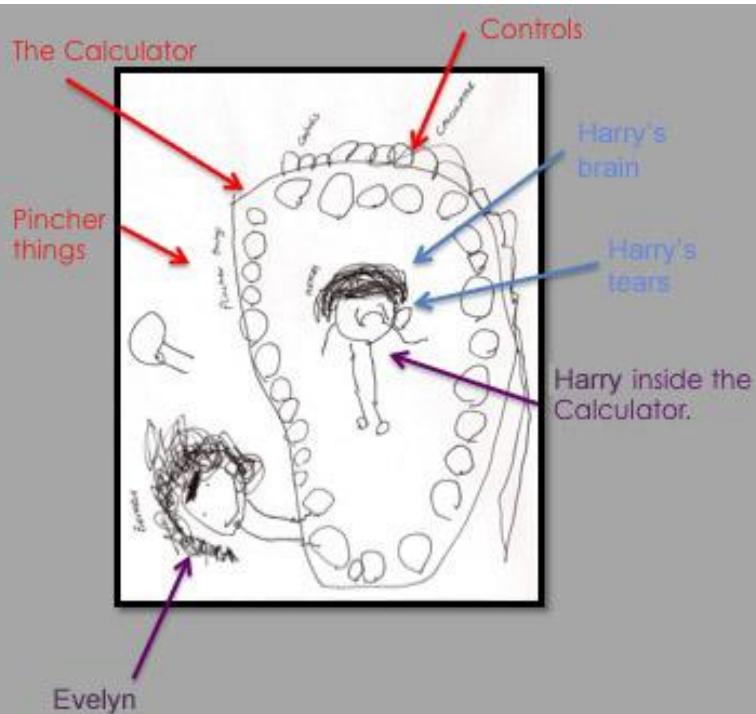
The vet's arm – the rest of him is off the picture

The table at the vet's office

Light from the X-ray

The special film
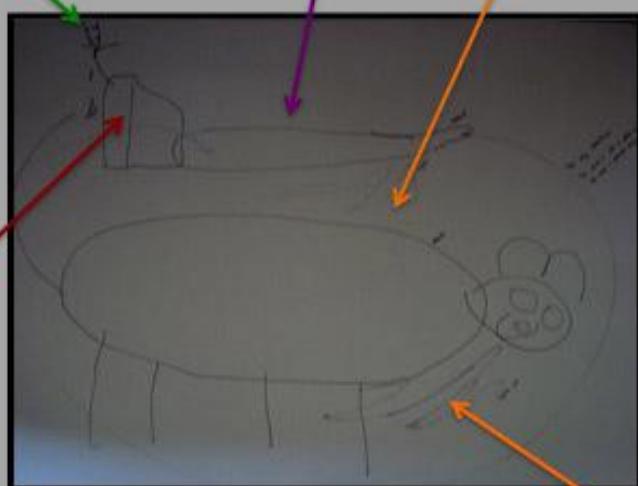
Larry drew a large picture of a mouse getting X-rayed at the vet's office. His theory involves a big machine and a stick, which you push with your finger.

Light from the X-ray

When **Duke** showed his picture at circle and explained his theory **Evelyn** modified her theory about X-rays. She decided that the camera has a little stick and that you have to take the picture outside in the sun. A few weeks previously **Evelyn** had been part of a group that made sun prints with **Alice** so perhaps **Evelyn** was remembering that process and applying it to her X-ray theory.

It just so happened that **Alice** was planning to do some more sun prints with the children. The previous day some of the children had helped her to prepare paper for the cyanotype prints. It was a really sunny day so **Alice** and some children ran outside, placed Mr. Bones and the wooden model on the paper for a few minutes and then they ran back inside to wash the paper (speed is essential in this process).

When preparing the paper for the cyanotype Larry said that he wanted to paint Mr. Bones.

This is how his painting turned out.

The prints turned out really well.

Many thanks to **Alice** for helping us to further our thinking about photography.
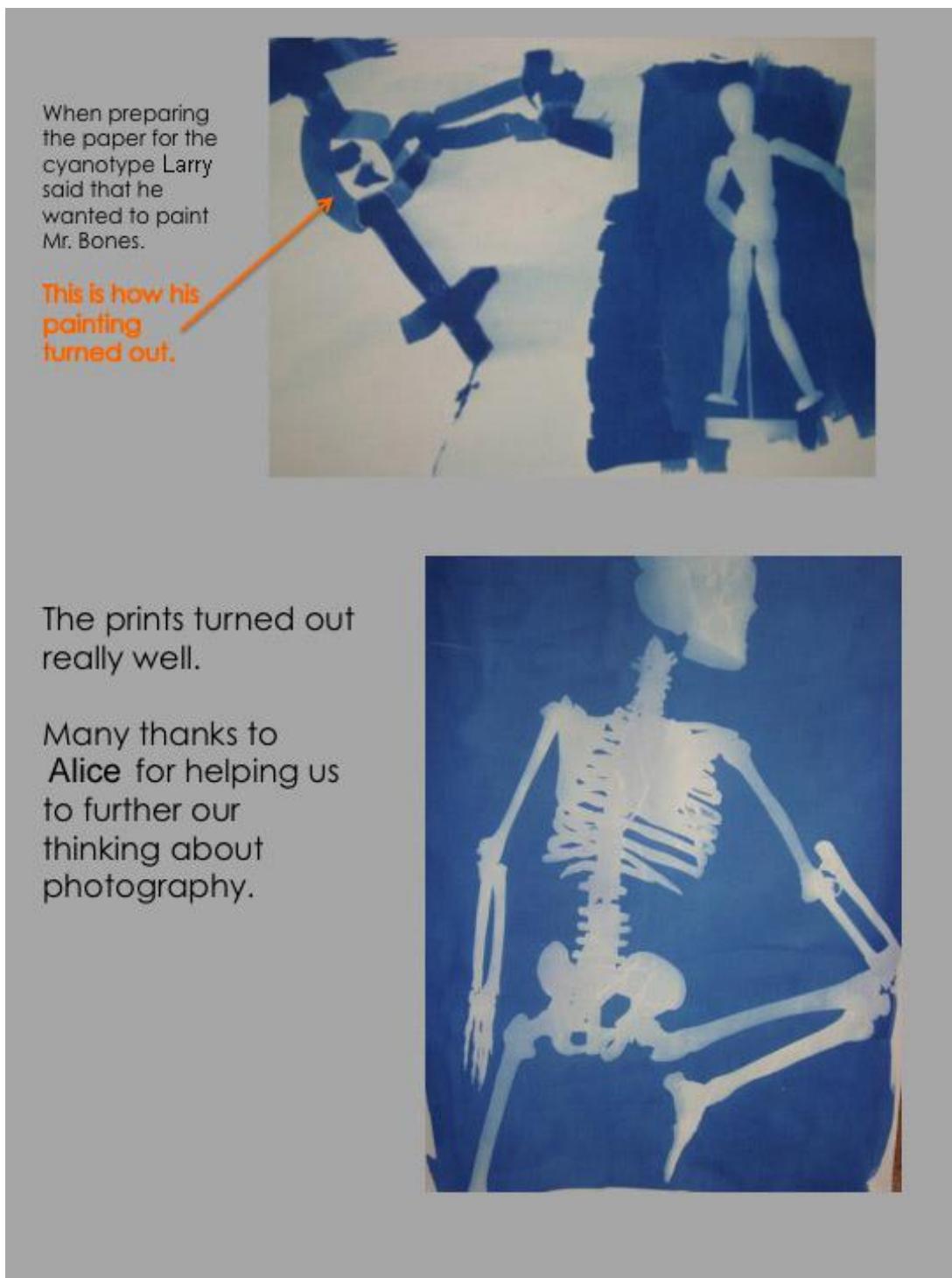
This documentation highlights how projects evolve as teachers listen to and reflect on children's conversations and interests to help them decide possible areas to pursue. Once a decision is made, teachers put out provocations to spark further thinking

around this interest. Paying close attention to children's individual and small group work, Sophie and Jess realize that many of the children have had experiences with x-rays, that there is a growing interest in the subject, and that it is a topic worthy of further investigation. As Sophie brings the topic of bones and x-rays and individual children's work to circle, their theories develop and their knowledge grows through group discussion, further experimentation, drawing and thinking about the topic. We also see how the children are making connections between x-rays and their photography work.

Teachers continue to put out provocations in the environment to sustain project work over the next several weeks. There are large plastic skeleton bones that can be connected together on the large wooden table. Animal x-rays are on the light table. There are multiple books throughout the classroom related to the topic (photography, mapping, perspectives, bones, x-rays). There is white play-dough on the two-person table, with small wooden dowels, perhaps, as a provocation to inspire modeling bones.

The children's interest in exploring a microscope is followed up with a letter inviting Helen (Orson's sister) to bring her microscope to share with the class, which she does on May 25, 2010:

The teachers set up a small table in the hallway for Helen, who has brought in her microscope and several different slides to share with the Gardenia room children. Two children at a time take turns coming to look at the slides. Helen is patient and gentle with the younger children. She offers them choices (e.g., "which slides would you like to see?"), instructs them on how to look through the microscope (e.g., covering one eye or closing an eye), tells them about the images they see, and respectfully checks in with them as they look at the slides (e.g., "Is that okay, Stella?").

Microscope discussion: Closing circle, May 25, 2010. In circle Sophie thanks Helen again for coming and sharing her microscope with everybody. The class discusses the microscope experience. Sophie asks if Stella's mom (a doctor) uses microscopes at work. They talk about how Helen pricked her finger and put it on slide to show children how it moved (before "dying"). A child points out how the "microscope makes everything really big." Some of the children make the connection with binoculars and telescopes which also make things look bigger. (Note how in this inquiry-based approach, concepts are continuously experienced, discussed, and reflected upon, especially hard concepts and theories that challenge children's thinking.)

The children discuss what different slides look like underneath the microscope, including human blood, muscles and a variety of other things. They make connections between the microscope making things bigger and their previous experiences with magnifying glasses and binoculars and telescopes. They continue to develop theories and make connections.

Earlier in the day a group of boys made up a story and one of the teachers types it up. In circle, Sophie reads the story, which is about a photographer who falls in a volcano and robots that come to the rescue by giving the photographer medicine (see chapter 6, in the "Story dictations" section for complete story). The group discusses the story. At one point, a child asks what the words "shut down" mean and Sophie asks Oscar to explain what he meant by that. Matthew suggests that the children make the story into a play tomorrow. They discuss this idea and brainstorm about how they might make the volcano prop. Over the next several days, children create robot costumes, paint

a giant volcano, and put on the play outside for children from several classrooms. (Note how this collaborative story connects two classroom projects, photography and robots.)

Along with many other classroom activities, children's project work continues up until the last days of the school year. As mentioned earlier, throughout the year, the children's inquiry takes place not only in the classroom but in the studio. Alice has provided several opportunities for children to make sun prints (see Appendix K for two pieces of documentation from Alice's blog related this sun print work).

Deconstructing the camera: Studio support of photography inquiry, June 1, 2010. On June 1, 2010, Alice invites Oscar and Larry to join her in the studio to take apart an old camera that she has. They like this idea and join her in the studio several minutes later.

Alice hands Oscar the camera and a screw driver. He begins to unscrew one of the screws as Larry watches.

After a few moments, Larry says: "Can I help you? I'm very good at screwing."

Oscar replies: "This is not screwing, this is unscrewing."

Larry: "This is unscrewing?"

Oscar: "Yes."

Larry: "and the other way is to tighten it." (Note how the collaborative culture at Springhill makes it easy for children to learn from each other.)

Alice: "That's right. Lefty loosey, tighty righty." The boys repeat this phrase.

Larry, with palpable excitement, repeats several times: "This is so cool! This is so cool!"

Alice: "I've never seen the inside of this kind of camera."

Alice brings over an old cell phone for Larry to take apart, along with several different- sized screwdrivers for him to use. He starts unscrewing while saying: "Lefty loosey, righty tighty."

Alice: "Do you know which way is left?"

Larry: "No."

Oscar says: "This way is left."

Alice shows by saying towards Amy, towards Oscar, etc. and shows him how. Oscar helps too. They also try a different sized screwdriver.

Oscar asks Alice to hold the camera while he unscrews. With Alice's help, Oscar gets the first screw out of the camera. Alice offers Larry a turn. Larry gets better at unscrewing and gets some screws out. He starts noticing when the screw is going up or down and points that out. Larry and Oscar start discovering what is inside the camera and cell phone. Larry discovers a word on the battery and passes it to Oscar to read.

Oscar watches Larry work. Alice comes over and helps take off the front piece of the camera. She brings over magnifying glasses for them to look at it.

Larry wants to try and get the back of the camera open. Larry: "Oscar put it right in that little crack and then move." Oscar tries. Larry: "I see it!"

They have trouble opening the back and Oscar gets the magnifying glass to see if there is another small screw somewhere still holding the camera together.

They get more pieces of the camera off and discover a mirror inside. Alice reminds them how they found mirror in the other camera they took apart.

Oscar asks Alice: "Are you not going to use the camera anymore?"

Alice explains that the camera is broken.

Oscar pretends to take pictures with part of the camera.

Larry discovers another screw inside the camera while using the magnifying glass.

Alice gets a tray to put all the pieces on.

Oscar: "Look what I did! Look what I did!" as he shows Alice more pieces he removes from the camera.

Alice says it may be coming time for them to have snack.

Oscar realizes the yellow lid they are using was what he was using for part of his robot costume.

Oscar asks Alice again if she is not ever going to use the camera again. Alice says she's not going to use it anymore. Oscar says: "Because you have a different camera?"

They remove the battery and look at the flash.

Oscar: "Let's try to take the lens off."

Alice tells Larry to give Oscar the camera for a little bit.

Oscar: "I'm very good at taking apart cameras."

As Oscar continues to work on the camera, he says: "It's a little sharp for me. You do some," and then hands it to Alice.

Alice takes it and tries to get some of the camera apart. She tells the boys there may not be too much more that comes off.

Larry pretends part of the camera is a shooter.

Oscar tells Alice she needs to do it because it's sharp. She said she already tried. Oscar tells her to get a knife. Alice says, "Okay."

Larry adds: "I'm very careful of knifes."

Oscar: "No, very sharp knife doesn't hurt."

Alice: "So what is inside of a camera now that you've taken it apart?"

They continue to work on taking a few more pieces apart.

Alice says: "Let's take a break and show everybody in your room what's inside a camera." They return to the room to show the rest of the class the camera parts.

Later at the snack table, Oscar shows Sophie the various pieces of the camera, including the mirror inside.

Sophie asks the children sitting at the table: "I wonder why there's a mirror inside the camera?"

Sophie looks at another piece: "This looks like a spaceship."

Oscar replies: "It's a button."

Sophie: "OH, is it a button like this one?" Comparing it to the button on her camera, she adds, "Oh it is."

She picks up another piece with the lens on it. Ethan or Orson says: "It looks like a little camera."

She compares it to her camera: "I notice that this part opens and closes," referring to the lens protector.

Ethan: "Remember the old camera that doesn't work? It opens." He explains that it goes up and down. Sophie goes to get the camera that he's referring to. (Notice how Sophie encourages the children to revisit past experiences, in order to both connect different experiences and refine developing theories.)

Sophie brings children's ideas and observations together. She shows Larry how Ethan noticed that the old camera opens and closes like the camera Larry and Oscar took apart in the studio. Sophie asks if Larry thinks his mom's old camera does the same thing? Larry says "no" that it is old, and it makes a star. Sophie asks the other children if they remember the star (bringing the other children into the conversation).

Larry goes to get his mom's camera which is hanging in the hallway with the photo documentation. In the hallway, Sophie watches as Larry works to get the camera down by himself. First he tries one of the stools from the snack table. When he still can't reach the hook, Sophie brings him a larger stool for him to climb. (Notice that, while Sophie could have retrieved the camera herself, instead she slows down enough to give Larry the opportunity to figure out how to get the camera.)

During closing circle, Larry and Oscar share the different camera parts with the class in circle, and then ask if anyone has questions. They put the sharp pieces of the camera on the stop sign to show which ones are dangerous. The children, not the teachers, determine which camera pieces are sharp. (When children are allowed freedom and are trusted, they are able to establish appropriate limits for safety.)

Conclusion

As this chapter offers only glimpses into the rich experiences children are afforded during this sustained project work, I will review a few recurring themes that happen throughout the process.

One, throughout my field observations, I noticed teachers listening to children carefully so that they could understand the intent beyond the words the children were speaking. As described by Forman and Fyfe (1998, p. 249): "To foster negotiated

learning it is essential for teachers to listen with the third ear, to hear the implied meanings of children's words." In a well-functioning democracy, people must be able to listen to one another and work to express themselves in ways that enable shared understandings. Through classroom inquiries, Springhill teachers model and support this type of listening on a daily basis.

Two, observation, documentation, and reflection are critical tools for sustaining ongoing project work. As described on Springhill's website:

Teachers carefully observe and document the children's work, then revisit it with the children to support a process of reflection. Together, teachers and children use their reflections on the ongoing work as a way to return to problems and to identify points at which learning can deepen. Children gradually take over many of the efforts of documentation and reflection and learn to support themselves and the group. ("Observation, Documentation, Reflection," 2010)

In addition, teachers use documentation in order to revisit past experiences, an important tool for deepened learning. Forman and Fyfe (pp. 247-248) explain:

Teachers can serve as a memory, a record of an experience that can be revisited. This function can be served by writing down what the children say and then reading these words back to the child on a later day when the children are trying to extend their understanding of something. Or the teacher can show the children photographs of the experience and ask them to use the photographs to help them remember what they were doing and thinking during that experience…The past is reconstructed from the new perspectives of the present. You look for patterns to create meaning and for connections that were not obvious while you were resident

in the experience…It is the intent of revisiting to take children further and not simply list the places they have been. The photograph should be treated as a door to enter a world of possible events not as a window that pictures a single time and place (Forman, 1995).

Three, teachers provide many opportunities for children to represent their ideas using a variety of tools and media, to help them express and communicate their ideas.

Four, in-depth and sustained project work occurs in a reciprocal process in the Springhill community. Similar to a process in the schools of Reggio Emilia preschools, ongoing project work is guided by the *principle of reciprocity*. Rankin (1998, p. 217) describes this reciprocity as "mutual guidance of the educational process by teacher and learner and responsiveness in circular paths of communication, caring, and control." This intentionality and responsiveness are critical components for sustaining a democratic community. As outlined above, Springhill faculty's decisions seem to be intentional at all levels, and are based on their commitment to school's democratic mission of respect, reciprocity, trust, care, and collaboration.

The following quote from Springhill's website, "Vital Elements to Our Approach" (2010, para. 3) perhaps best sums up Springhill's approach to inquiry:

When children engage in inquiry, they pursue answers to a question that intrigues them. In the process, they generate hypotheses, theorize, choose effective tools for addressing problems and devise solutions in increasingly logical ways. They advance their understanding through collaborative exploration, by articulating and representing their ideas and theories.

As teachers follow children's interests and allow them to develop and refine their own theories, they cultivate a culture of wonder and curiosity. In this way children develop a habit of mind where asking questions and striving to figure out how things work in their world is the norm. In order for a democracy to prosper, citizens must be predisposed to question, analyze and think critically for themselves, and not shrink from the responsibility to participate in the free exchange of ideas in their community. As illustrated in this chapter, Springhill preschool cultivates these attributes in the children (and adults) at their school and serves as a powerful example of the possibilities and challenges of creating a democratic educational community.

CHAPTER 6

CULTURALLY SHARED ROUTINES, RITUALS, AND TRADITIONS IN THE SPRINGHILL COMMUNITY

All schools develop their own unique routines, rituals, and traditions to help shape their school culture. As described by Kantor and Whaley (1998, pp. 314-315),

> a group of people (including the children and adult members of a classroom) in prolonged interaction within a particular setting will construct a patterned way of conducting life together…A classroom's group life becomes patterned over time as routines and rituals develop, events recur, norms become established, and a common set of expectations and a common language develop for 'doing' life."

From a democratic perspective, it is necessary to establish routines, rituals and traditions that: 1) guarantee all stakeholders a voice in the daily life and operations of the school; 2) put a primary emphasis around forming relationships and making connections; 3) organize school life *not* around rigid schedules of time, but instead, around explorations, inquiry, engagement, and play; 4) respect all members of the group as fellow human beings; 5) support community members as active agents and constructors of their individual and community development, rather than passive followers of a prescribed narrative; 6) allow for diversity and conflict as healthy components of daily life in the school; 7) connect learning to meaningful, real-life events and interests within the community; and 8) provide opportunities for community members to have substantial freedom to pursue their own questions, hypotheses, and inquiries.

Routines, rituals, and traditions offer much insight into the school culture and are important areas of study. Goodman (1992, p. 46) explains:

As points of drama, rituals are keys to our understanding of what it means to participate in the group life of a given community or institution. The complexity of rituals allows participants to create meanings from them, and their repetition establishes them as focal points for group identity and values. As such, rituals provide valuable opportunities to observe school life as a dynamic event.

What do Springhill's routines, rituals, and traditions tell us implicitly and explicitly about their school culture? In particular, what do these practices tell us about the possibilities and challenges of creating a democratic preschool culture? In this chapter I will share several examples of different routines, rituals, and traditions within the Springhill community and discuss how they contribute to the creation of a democratic culture.

Rituals and Routines: Supporting Relationships and Shared Responsibility

"Phase in" period. There are several routines and rituals in place that support Springhill's fundamental belief that learning is grounded in social relationships. For example, prior to the start of the school-year, teachers write and send out postcards to each incoming student entering their classroom.[54] Then, when the school year begins, children visit their new classrooms in small groups on different days, as opposed to everyone starting on the same day for large blocks of time. The Springhill faculty refers to this as the "phase-in" period, which is designed to create a culture of relationships right from the start. This phase in process: 1) puts an emphasis on making connections, 2)

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[54] The Parent "Communications Committee" supports this ritual by helping prepare the postcards with labels and stamps.

establishes a sense of trust and care, 3) allows considerable time for children, parents, and teachers to get to know each other, and 4) fosters smooth transitions to new classrooms.

The following documentation, titled "First Days; Making Connections," from the Gardenia Room provides insight into some of the rich experiences and connections created during this annual ritual:[55]

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[55] A brief description of the "symbols" referred to in this piece of documentation: As children join the Springhill preschool, they each select a picture symbol (e.g., truck, butterfly) to represent themselves. A container holding a stack of each child's symbols (with their name typed below the picture) is used by children for various purposes throughout the year including the labeling of their work and belongings [Springhill's use of symbols will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, see, "Symbols"].

Here's one little story about how children have been making connections.

Larry noticed that many of the children had symbols on their journals, but since he is new to the school, he did not have a symbol on his journal. A teacher asked Larry if he would like to stick his symbol onto his journal, and he did. He needed a little help with the tape as he had pulled a large piece off and then it got all stuck together. With a little support Larry used a smaller piece of tape and he pulled the tape off, over the little jagged part of the dispenser. He attached his symbol to his journal.

A short time later Walter arrived with his journal. Larry and Walter sat down together to look at their journals. Larry noticed that Walter did not have a symbol on his journal, so he invited him over to the art table to stick his symbol on the front cover of his journal. Larry helped Walter find the tape dispenser and then they worked together, carefully pulling off a piece of tape for Walter's symbol – Larry made sure to point out the jaggy teeth of the dispenser. Once they had completed their task they returned to looking at their journals together.

> This story was just one little moment in a busy classroom, and yet it offers us quite a bit of insight into the power of young children. During these interactions we see how:
>
> • Young children are capable of working together collaboratively.
> • Children pick up very quickly on the culture of the classroom – in this case the symbols and journals.
> • Children are very adept at absorbing and synthesizing information – in this instance Larry was eager to share new information about symbols and tape.
> •Three and four year old children are highly motivated to make social connections.
>
> We look forward to sharing many stories with you about our classroom this year – each child's story helps us to learn a little more about all of the children.

As evidenced in this documentation, the "Phase-in" period helps establish a collaborative classroom culture based on a strong image of children as capable problem solvers with strong desires to make social connections.[56] This "Phase-in" ritual stands in sharp contrast to programs where children start the year with very little transition time and the teachers' primary focus is on establishing their authority and teaching children "the rules."[57] These latter approaches start with a low image of the child and aim for

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[56] Note how Sophie chooses to document children's natural desire to connect with fellow class members. In so doing, she follows the Springhill practice of intentionally using documentation to underscore the values of the community, in this case, making visible relationship-building as a central focus of the school program.

[57] For example, on several occasions over the years I have been told by mentor teachers and co-workers that if you don't establish your authority right from the start, children will be unruly for the rest of the year. In fact, my mentor teacher assigned during my first year teaching in a public school told me that I should try not to smile at all for the first couple of days insinuating that I need to establish a certain level of fear in the children. This approach suggests a sort of "folk pedagogy" (Bruner 1996) or a pedagogy based on teacher's implicit cultural beliefs and theories about children and how they should be

social control of children. Clearly, this type of approach would be antithetical to Springhill's democratic, non-hierarchical environment where children are co-constructors of their classroom community.

"Checking-in" ritual. "Checking-in" with fellow class members when they are upset is another important school-wide ritual that is practiced daily during times of social conflict or distress. If a child's action (e.g., pushing) makes another child upset, then the child whose action hurt the other child is expected to "check-in" with the upset child asking questions such as, "Are you okay? What can I do to make you feel better?" Thus, this process helps children consider each other's feelings and perspectives and holds them accountable to resolve issues in appropriate ways. Gina, a Rainbow room teacher, explains some of the benefits of this ritual (Interview transcription, lines 181-199):

> I think…something that definitely attracted me…to Springhill is the respect the teachers have for the children and the respect that they expect children to have for each other…So, the idea of them needing to *check-in* with each other if something happens, even if it's an accident, it just teaches them on so many different levels to take care of their friends, to be aware when you do something that you *didn't* mean to do…to acknowledge it, and when you do something you *did* mean to do, to work through it and find out what better way that there might be…to handle the situation. And so slowing them down and having them talk through it so that eventually as they get older they'll able to do this on their own…My son went to…a public school for kindergarten [where] the teachers don't have the time. So if [children] haven't learned how to do it by then, they're not going to…Teachers

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taught, as opposed to teaching practices based on methods learned in teacher training programs or through research on best practices.

are just like, "Stop that. You do this. You do that, and that's that." There's just, "No." They just don't have the time, there [are] too many kids and there's only one of them, so I think that's really important. And, I've seen that in my son because he's 10 and he's still able to have that kind of communication with his friends…when they are disagreeing about something. They are able to talk it through and work it through in a very respectful way.

Therefore, "checking in" with one another helps create a genuine sense of responsibility and care for fellow community members. In the process, children learn how their actions affect others and how to communicate, even when there is conflict. In addition, as Gina suggests in the above interview excerpt, when children develop these important communication skills and respectful interactions at an early age, they will be able to use them well into the future. (For an example of the "checking in" process see chapter 9, "Helping Children Verbalize Their Feelings and Take Appropriate Action.")

Child-created rituals. Both adults *and* children at Springhill create classroom rituals, as illustrated in the following excerpt from the Gardenia Room teacher's documentation (October, 2009):

Chamomile Tea: Rituals & Relationships

"Would you like some chamomile tea? I made some for you."

Every day Evelyn extends this invitation to me. She offered me tea on the first day of school and now, each day, she continues to entice me to stop for a moment in our busy classroom to take some time to savor her special tea. And who could resist such a delightful invitation?

Evelyn's invitation is just one example of the children' strong desire to build

relationships in our classroom. Small rituals, such as making a cup of tea, play an

important part in creating a community.

This excerpt highlights children taking the initiative in becoming active producers

of classroom rituals and culture within the Springhill community. In fact, during my field

observations, there were many occasions where children invited me to have some "tea"

with them as I arrived in the morning.

Notice too how, once again, Sophie intentionally highlights children's innate

desire to connect with others and features the child (*not* the teacher) as the protagonist of

this Gardenia room community ritual (see, Appendix H, **"Chamomile Tea: Rituals &**

Relationships," for entire piece of documentation and another example of a child-created

ritual).

Parent collaborations. Parents are included in several rituals and daily routines

in the Springhill community right from the start of the school year. In the following

section, I will describe several ways in which these parent rituals support the democratic

culture of the school.

Launch meetings. The Springhill faculty arranges several rituals involving

parents that support the school's democratic mission. For example, at the beginning of

each school year, Mary and Lisa set up "Launch Meetings" with the parents from each

classroom to communicate how and why Springhill has certain conventions in place. As

Mary explains:

Well, one of the things we like to say to parents is that this environment is

deceptively relaxed-looking…because the layers of planning and structure are not

immediately evident when you look at it…but that it takes a great deal of planning. Many, many conventions, many elements of structure…are in place and so we ask you to join us in following through with all of these…curricular elements…We do what we call "launch meetings" so that [parents] come and spend an evening, two or three hours, really, just hearing from Lisa and myself…and this is by class. So, we do a series of launch meetings for every class to start the year…We ask that [parents] get in a carpool in a certain way and let [their] child get out on this particular side so that they can just get out on their own. We don't have to…lift them and carry them…And, we ask that they come and be a "star parent" and that they come and be greeters, and that's so children can have *freedom of movement* on their way into the building, on their way into the classrooms. We ask that they wear shoes so that children will be *free to climb* and that they bring boots so that they can go into the creek. That they bring these extra clothes and use this system that we have for getting the clothes back so that we can know that children can get as dirty as they'd like. So there are all these elements and there are so many of them that the teachers have in place that, as I say, it's a deceptively simple looking environment…[Yet] it's a very carefully planned environment. (Interview transcription, November 17, 2009, lines 350-392)

As explained in this interview, Mary emphasizes Springhill routines that provide children the freedom to explore and develop a sense of agency, both necessary qualities for a democratic citizenry. In addition, right from the beginning, Mary and Lisa are transparent with parents about certain routines and conventions they have in place and the

philosophical reasons behind them. By sharing information about the layers of Springhill

culture, these face-to-face launch meetings encourage transparency, foster dialogue,

develop shared meaning, and build a sense of trust and connectedness between parents

and faculty. That way, when hard issues do inevitably arise, there is a foundation of trust

that allows a safe space for community members to have conflict and debate.[58] By

contrast, if Springhill were *not* to have these launch meetings, parents might misconstrue

the school environment as (among other things) unintentional and unstructured. (See,

chapter 7, "Parent Teacher Conflict as Catalyst for Learning Together: Prohibition of

Gun Play for discussion of conflict negotiations between parents and faculty.)

   Parent coffees and dialogue (aka "parent circles"). For a preschool environment

to be democratic, all community members must have a voice. At Springhill, there are

many avenues and routines set up to ensure that parents are able to contribute their voice

to important decisions that take place in the school community. For example, many

changes occurred during the multi-year merger between the Springhill Preschool and

Stonewood Elementary/Middle School's separate campuses.[59] Among other challenges,

the move required Lisa and Mary to split their time between the two campuses, resulting

in less daily face-to-face time with parents. Aware of this problem, Lisa and Mary

created monthly parent coffees to assure strong communications during the transition.

During my interview with Lisa, she explains how these Parent Coffees started and how

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[58] Face-to-face encounters and meetings would probably not be possible and much too cumbersome in large schools. Several researchers suggest the importance of keeping school sizes small enough to foster trusting relationships (Gladwell, 2000; Starnes, 2007; West Ed Policy Brief, 2001).
[59] See chapter 3, "Historical Context" for more on the merger between Springhill and Stony Point schools.

they support a well-functioning democratic community (Interview transcription,

December 12, 2009, lines 922-945):

> [T]he parent coffees that Mary and I have been having with parents, that came
>
> about because particularly…the first year after we moved the kindergarten over
>
> here [to the Stonewood campus] and…I started to spend more of my time over
>
> here. There was a lot of discombobulation in the preschool about, "We feel
>
> disconnected. We don't feel like we know what's going on." And so we've really
>
> looked very carefully as a school at what communications need to be in place and
>
> in what format and with what frequency. So we decided last year that it would be
>
> important for parents to be able to hear from administration on a regular basis.
>
> But what we've done is to frame those as—"At every coffee, we're gonna tell you
>
> about some of the things that we're thinking about and beginning to plan and then
>
> we're going to ask you to help us think about it." So…the first conversation I
>
> think was more open-ended and then…we told parents, "when we come back
>
> together, we'll talk about the schedule of the day and the calendar of the year,
>
> because we might want to introduce some pretty significant changes in that over
>
> the next couple of years. So come prepared with your thoughts." So then, people
>
> came and then people said, "Well, what about families that have kids in two
>
> different schools if you're gonna be a year-round school or you're gonna have a
>
> shorter summer break?" Or, "What about swim team?" or "What about…" You
>
> know, so hearing from parents on the front end of that. Then this past month, we
>
> brought people over here and said, "OK. We're moving the preschool. We're
>
> gonna need some temporary classrooms. These are some options about where

they could go. These are some options about who could go into them. Let's

talk." And then we're able to hear from the group of people that were there,

about, "Well, I don't think I could be really very enthusiastic about that," or, "we

have to be careful in thinking about this."

In terms of a supporting a democratic community, Lisa goes on to explain, from the

Springhill perspective:

> [You must start from an assumption] that decisions are going to be better
>
> decisions if you're hearing from *all* the stakeholders throughout the decision-
>
> making process. And it also makes my life a whole lot easier because I'm not
>
> trying to second-guess what's gonna fly or what buttons are we gonna push. I
>
> mean there's still always gonna be debate. I know at the end of it. So I think
>
> that's the value of every voice. It's the value of the democratic process and the
>
> sort of having a real framework and a structure for it that can…make it real and
>
> not just lip service. Not just an exercise. (Interview transcription, lines 945-952)

In other words, in a democratic community, all participants have a voice, are

authentically listened to, and are engaged in the decision making process. Differences of

opinion and perspective are expected and valued. It seems to be understood that by

listening to and thinking about various perspectives, the community as a whole will

benefit and come to a deeper level of shared understanding.

Several times each year, teachers, parents, and administrators come together for

an evening gathering called "Parent Dialogues" (sometimes referred to as "Parent

Circles") to discuss various topics or issues of interest. Some examples of topics covered

in the past include "The Happiness Trap" and "Superhero Legends: Channeling Conflict

into a Creative Force in the Classroom." In October 2009, the Springhill faculty set up a

parent dialogue centered on "conflict and aggression." This emotionally intense topic

was selected because of its relevance to the Springhill community. It was an issue that

came up the previous year, particularly around weapon play, and brought about many

questions, concerns and conflicting views among community members about how to best

handle these types of situations. The evening began with Lisa giving an overview of the

night, discussing Springhill faculty's approach to conflict, and sharing several references

of books pertinent to the topic that the faculty uses to guide their practice.[60] Lisa then

turned the discussion over to the group for questions and comments. Mary also prepared

copies of several related articles for parents to take with them if so desired. Virtually all

the teachers attended the meeting and shared their input as well.

In general, such parent dialogues vary on topic and organization (e.g., sometimes

teachers begin the dialogue with a presentation on a topic they've been studying) but the

"parent circles" always end with discussion among all stakeholders where they're able to

share ideas, think together, ask questions, and work through challenging issues (see

chapter 7 for more on parent involvement involving children's aggression and behavior

management).

"Star Parents." Another important part of the daily routines and functioning of

the Springhill preschool is the use of parent volunteers. Each morning, as children are

dropped off, there are different "Morning Greeters" on the playground and in the hallway

to greet children and make sure they get to their rooms safely. For the remainder of the

day, another parent volunteer, referred to as the "Star Parent," is stationed in the hallway

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[60] Two of the books Lisa references include: "We're Friends Right?: Inside Kids' Culture" by William Corsaro and "Negotiation Generation" by Lynne Reeves Griffin

ready to help teachers and children in a variety of ways. These volunteers are regularly

seen reading books to children, assisting them with projects, helping them gather certain

materials, or sharing in conversation and/or cuddles. For example, recall how one such

Star Parent helped Oscar find a picture of a piano keyboard in the studio (as discussed in

chapter 4). Star parents also help with some daily tasks such as refilling paper towels and

toilet paper. Usually at the end of the day, the Star Parent joins his or her child in closing

circle, much to the delight of that particular child.

Alice (the studio teacher) explains the role of the "Star Parent" on her studio blog

(February 25, 2010) and gives an example of some of the contributions they give to this

democratic community:

Star Parents at Springhill

February 25, 2010

We have always felt that school is a partnership between children, parents and
teachers at Springhill School.
What started as a parent run co-op 30 years ago is still a place that wants and needs the
whole community to be involved.
Because children are free to move from room to room at the pre-school, we need a
parent volunteer to watch the hall to make sure children are safe and going to places
that are available (Stop signs on doors mean the space is closed, and children are

careful to follow this rule, but sometimes...) This 'Star Parent' is so important to our program, letting us allow free movement of children, as a friendly parent presence every day, and in support of children's ideas as well.

Today Mary was our Star Parent in the hall. When Ryan made a second car for his model Springhill School parking lot, Mary noticed he was having trouble fitting it onto the "blacktop." Together, Ryan and Mary added on to the parking lot, figuring out how a paper clip could change into a handy connector for the black foam. Mary was so respectful in listening to what Ryan wanted to do, and Ryan was open to her help. It was a real pleasure for me to see (and overhear). Thanks, Mary and Ryan!

Alice's blog entry highlights just one example of how parent involvement directly impacts children's daily experiences. Clearly, parent volunteers are not merely assigned menial tasks such as cutting out shapes for a bulletin board or making copies (often the more traditional roles of parent volunteers.) Instead, parents are able to collaborate and support the community goals.

In addition, when parents are able to spend a day engaged in the life of the school, they are able to gain a better understanding of the rich and intentional experiences that happen each day and see the deep respect teachers have for children in action. As mentioned by a Springhill parent during one of my interviews, having this opportunity to be a "Star Parent" helps build trust among parents and faculty and creates a deeper sense of school community.

After-school gatherings. One final ritual involving parents is the unofficial daily gathering of parents and children that occurs after school. Oftentimes, parents and children join together to have lunch outside and share in the camaraderie of the fellow families. As the parents continue to have conversation, the children meander to the playground, pavilion, and forest area for more play. This daily ritual seems to reinforce a deep sense of community among Springhill families. There are many stay-at-home dads and moms who are able to have this leisurely lunchtime engagement. Unfortunately this

type of after-school gathering, as well as the above mentioned "star parenting," is not always possible at preschools serving full-time working families or single parents and may create a structural challenge in building a similarly deep sense of community between families that is critical for a well-functioning democracy. It seems finding creative and flexible ways to build a democratic community, even with challenging parent schedules, is worthy of further study. (These types of structural challenges in creating a democratic preschool community are discussed in more detail in chapter 11.)

Individual and classroom intentions. Another yearly ritual in the Springhill community is the faculty's formation of "intentions" at the start of the year. As this topic was previously discussed in chapter 5 (see "Individual, Classroom, and School-Wide Intentions"), I will only briefly discuss individual and classroom intentions, with an emphasis on how these intentions support a democratic community of learners.

As described by Alice (excerpted from, "Intentions and the Umbrella Project," October 26, 2009, Atelierista Blog),

> Each year at the preschool teachers choose some things they want to concentrate
> on. We call these intentions, and they are a way of narrowing our focus and
> learning something about a concept that interests us or seems to pertain to a
> particular group of children. If you have tried to work as a teacher/researcher,
> you know that documentation can quickly become overwhelming. Inspired by the
> 'Declaration of Intent' we saw in Reggio Emilia, intentions help teachers choose a
> path for the year. Teachers no longer have to document everything, but can
> concentrate on certain topics or threads.

Teachers meet with Lisa and Mary (the administrators) to discuss their "classroom intentions" and receive support both at the beginning of the year and then again at the end of the year to share the progress they have made on their self-chosen intentions. The teachers (and administrators) also have an opportunity to share and discuss their classroom intentions during a faculty meeting for further reflections at the culmination of the year. These democratic exchanges are not about judging teacher's progress; rather, they are intended to be egalitarian processes that support growth and learning for both the individual and the group.

As these intentions unfold, contributions and discussion from all members of the community are encouraged. For example, one of Sophie and Jess's intentions for the Gardenia room was to "green" the classroom and reduce the amount of waste they have at snack. The parents and children in the classroom were collaborators in this project right from the start, helping to create systems to make "greening" the classroom possible.

As Sophie explains in her documentation titled, "Getting the Ball Rolling on 'Greening' the Classroom," parents' input and collaboration was an integral part of the process:

> One of the main topics of our recent parent meeting was reducing the amount of trash created at snack time. Last year we obtained a container of composting worms (aka Worm World) and we quickly realized that we had more leftover banana peels than the worms could handle. It seemed like the logical next step to start composting on a larger scale. We purchased an Eco-Composter ball which should take care of all the organic matter generated at snack time…" [See, Appendix M, for entire piece of documentation.]

As a result several parents and grandparents helped put together the composting ball, provided information about healthy snacks and reducing waste, and spearheaded a recycling program where the school receives money for recycling certain brands of wrappers and yogurt containers. One parent even made for each child a reusable lunch box as an end-of-the-year gift.

The children were also involved in the daily routines of caring for their environment. Some examples of children's support in "greening" the environment include: pouring their extra drinking water into the classroom plants instead of down the drain; saving their wrappers and containers for recycling; collecting organic matter for later composting; emptying the organic matter in the large composting ball and pushing it around the playground to help the decomposition process; and feeding the composting worms. Children developed important values (e.g., sustainability, social responsibility, mutuality, and interdependence) throughout the process of taking care of their environment.

Daily routines and rituals. In the following section, I will describe several daily routines and rituals that help create a responsive, collaborative, and democratic culture at Springhill.

Snack time. The daily morning snack, like the other Springhill rituals, reflects the values of a democratic preschool community. Snack time is flexible and children are allowed the freedom to decide if, and when, they want to have snack. The table is usually open for snack sometime after 10 a.m. until around 11:00 a.m. (A "Go sign" placed on the table indicates that it is open for snack.) Along with the "Go sign" there is a special snack tray filled with an assortment of snack tools (e.g., scissors to open granola bars,

straws to "drink" applesauce, a spray bottle to clean the table, paper towels, cups and child-sized pitchers of water) put out each day for the children's use. This snack routine both respects the right of each child to self-regulate their eating schedule, and provides the tools for children to take responsibility for preparing their own snack. Moreover, the teachers are intentional about eating with children at snack time and engaging them in lively conversations, usually following the children's lead on the choice of topics. In summary, both the democratic rights of individual children *and* the democratic values of social responsibility and solidarity are promoted during snack time.

A new snack tradition, in keeping with the Gardenia room's "greening" initiative, has been the addition of "Fruit Fridays." Every Friday a different parent or grandparent brings in various fresh fruits for children's snack that day. Prior to serving the fruit, small groups of children help the adult wash, cut, slice, and prepare the fruit.

One-on-one, small group, and large group inquiries. Teacher-facilitated routines-include many one-on-one, small group, and large group inquiries, all of which mutually inform one another. As I've discussed individual, small group, and large group work in detail in the previous two chapters, in this section I will only discuss these routines as they pertain to democratic practice.

During my field visits, I observed significant amounts of time each day spent working in *teacher-child dyads*. The following story provides some insight into the opportunities afforded to children, teachers, and the larger classroom community as a result of these one-on-one experiences. As Mary explains,

> [T]he Godzilla punching bag, which was a just, a really lovely piece of work and taught me a lot about working with children in this way. And…I think one of the

things it taught me is that sometimes, you need to have an opportunity to work

one-on-one with children to really understand what the capability is, so that you

can work with larger groups of children. But this child-- there was this Godzilla

energy driving a group of boys and they went on to make a movie about Godzilla

with their own music...But another piece of it was this little boy wanted to make a

Godzilla punching bag. So he drew what he wanted to make and it became-- not

entirely clear to me, but I realized that what he was trying to do was draw a

cylinder, or I thought he was trying to draw a cylinder. But he didn't have the

wherewithal to do that and so I invited him to choose a shape out of the classroom

or out of the blocks that would look like the kind of shape that he was wanting,

and he chose the cylinder. So then, that particular issue of how you make a

cylinder out of fabric came forward. And so, we invited him to ask other friends

to help him and it was tricky. But he finally got the idea of creating a tube and

then putting ends on the tube and then the Godzilla was a piece he had made

pretty early. He had done a drawing of Godzilla and then he cut that out and

attached it. But it was a beautiful piece of work that took a fair amount of time.

But [it] involved a number of the children in the classroom, so, [it] was a step

forward for all of us. (Interview transcription, lines 328-347)

Here we see some of possibilities that arise during one-on-one work. First, one-on-one

facilitation helps teachers understand children's capabilities. As Gandini (as cited in

Graves, 2011) explains:

Democratic education is where people listen to one another and where children

are the source of learning for teachers. What I have experienced in my decades of

teaching is that there is a way to help children learn and at the same time listen to

them. Teachers do not feel diminished, and they construct with the children and

respect them, which is something important to learn. (p. 14)

Second, teacher-child dyads provide the necessary support for a child to actualize his/her

plans. It is one thing for a child to have the freedom to come up with his/her own ideas.

But in terms of the democratic goal of self-efficacy, it is an even greater thing to provide

the necessary support for those ideas to be realized in the world. When teachers work

one-on-one with a child, they not only value a child's "voice," but also support that child

as a productive agent in his/her own learning, thereby fostering the skill-based

confidence required for true democratic citizenship.

Third, one-on-one work serves as a platform for collaborative projects with larger

groups of children, as teachers help children to see the relevance of their individual

discoveries to the learning of the larger community. For example, when (in chapter 5)

Duke makes the connection between x-rays and photography, Sophie is there to make

sure that he shares that learning with the other children. From a democratic perspective,

Giroux (as cited in Arthur & Sawyer, 2009) reminds us that citizens, as active agents,

must uphold principles of "sociality and community." In this way, democracy relates not

only to "specific processes of governance, but also with producing a certain kind of

public-spirited citizen" (p.163).

Small group work is also an integrated part of Springhill's daily routines and is

one of the foundations of Springhill's culture of engagement and inquiry. Recall several

examples of small groups in action discussed previously in chapter 4: 1) the Rainbow

room's Forest Group exploring the question, "Where is the creek water coming from and

where is it going?"; 2) the Sewing Group's small group work creating leaf representations out of embroidery thread; and 3) the Gardenia room's small group organized around a search for the cave. During my stay at Springhill, one entire faculty meeting was devoted to questions concerning small group work (e.g., how to organize and structure small group work, how to handle the situation if children do not want to participate, ideal space and sizes of groups, how to support engaged inquiry and co-construction of knowledge, how to support conversations in small group work). (See, "Small Group Discourse: Sophie, Larry, and Oliver Explore the Camera," in chapter 5, for a detailed example of small group work in action.)

Large group gatherings in the Springhill community are primarily referred to as "circles" or "meetings" (e.g., closing circle, talking circle, morning meetings). These large group contexts provide space for meaningful conversations and discussions to take place, where children and adults can reflect on their work, ask questions, share ideas, develop hypotheses, explore tough issues, and challenge assumptions within a safe and caring environment. Through this process, both individual and group thinking moves forward, allowing new types of knowledge and shared understandings to be co-constructed. It should be noted that I never observed large group times being used for direct instruction or rote memorization. (See, "How Can We Make an X-ray?: Question as Provocation," in chapter 5, for an example of a dynamic large-group conversation.)

Another shared ritual in the Springhill community is their weekly "big circle" held each Friday at the end of the day where all of the preschool classrooms join together.

As described by Mary, the weekly big circle is a time for everyone to gather, share classroom highlights from the week, sing together, and say goodbye for the week.[61]

Literacy components. There are a number of different routines and rituals in place at Springhill that support children's literacy development within engaging and meaningful contexts. These routines help children discover the many ways that their emerging literacy skills can be used to help communicate and express feelings, thoughts, and ideas.

"Notes." Writing "notes" is an important daily ritual in the Springhill community and is used for various purposes. As illustrated in the composite narrative, children at Springhill use "notes" in many ways, and for many reasons. Recall how Lila writes a note to play with Lizzy in the Magnolia room, Duke takes a note around the school to inquire about his missing coat, Matthew writes a note to his mommy and daddy asking for popcorn, and Oscar writes a note to see if there is a picture of a piano in the studio. In addition to these examples, each child and teacher has a mailbox in order to write and receive letters from their classmates.[62]

In the context of the democratic community at Springhill, writing is not a begrudged, drill-focused activity, but rather a powerful communication tool in helping children actively follow their pursuits. In the process, children develop their literacy skills not in isolated activities, but in meaningful contexts that are significant to them.[63]

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[61] There are a variety of other circle traditions (e.g., Winter Circle, End of Year Circle, Birthday circles) which will be discussed below in the "Seasonal Traditions" section of this chapter.

[62] In fact, they created a mailbox for me and delivered several letters to it.

[63] Children are responsible along with the adults in taking care of the writing centers. For example, when the stack of paper used for writing notes became low, Abigail added a

It should also be noted that children use notes as a way to communicate hard feelings. For example, one day when Zach leans into Grace at circle, she decides to write a note to him that says, "Please don't bump into me Zach." (See chapter 9, "Conflicts as Opportunities," for more details.)

Displayed in the Springhill preschool hallway, hanging alongside several attached examples of children's written notes, is documentation describing the note-writing process and how it is integrated into Springhill's daily routines:

> Teachers ask children to write notes when they want to visit another room before 10:30 when they want to ask an adult if they can borrow a material or toy, or when they want to invite someone to their room.
>
> Children progress from dictating notes to teachers, to writing a few letters, to writing whole sentences. They start with their names, one letter at a time, until they can write the whole thing. Children use many symbol systems at Springhill pre-school, like words and gestures, drawing and their individual symbols.
>
> Writing notes is one way that we encourage our young children to begin to learn to write, it is a way of making letters and words a meaningful, intrinsic part of the life of our school. (Springhill Faculty, "Notes," 2009-2010)

Incidentally, this documentation is yet another example of how Springhill faculty members are intentionally *transparent* about their approaches to literacy and how writing notes fits into the daily life of the school community. And again, this transparency is a critical component of democracy.

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new stack of paper to the writing table that she carefully cut in ½ to make the appropriate size.

Beyond benefiting the children who participate in writing these notes, the Springhill teachers gain valuable insight about children through this ritual, as Alice explains on her Atelierista blog entry titled, "Plans and Notes" (January 16, 2011):

> The notes…serve as a reminder to children of the reasons we read and write, but they also help grownups in the school understand the children's intentions. The classroom teacher needs to ask questions to understand where the student wants to go and why, and then help the child communicate that in the note. Then, the child may show the note to a parent volunteer in the hall to get help in finding their way to the studio. When a child comes to the studio, they may have been talking or playing about an idea in their classroom for a long time, but I don't hear that (unless a teacher keeps in touch). These notes, then, are a way that I begin to listen to the child, to know what it is they need my help with, and to begin to build a shared understanding of what they want to do in the studio.

Teachers keep copies of the children's notes for their records and place several in each child's portfolio to show the natural progression of their writing throughout the year.

With many preschools now pushing traditional "skill-building" literacy drills on children, using "letter's of the week," worksheets, pre-packaged, and scripted curricula (e.g., "Open Court"), Springhill offers a powerful alternative to the traditional "teaching" of these skills. In this way, Springhill's engaging and holistic approach to literacy connects children with the many values and purposes of reading and writing, and in the process, supports their intrinsic motivation to continue the work of developing literacy skills.

Signing in. Every morning, on the large round table next to the classroom door, teachers put out a "sign-in" sheet which lists each child's name with his/her corresponding symbol. Children are asked to circle, trace or mark their name and/or symbol each morning to indicate their attendance. The teachers vary the writing utensils (e.g., crayons, markers, pastel, and colored pencils) on a regular basis, to give children a variety of experiences with different media. As Sophie explains in some Gardenia room documentation, "Signing In" (April 25, 2010), sent out to the parents:

> Signing in each morning is one our classroom rituals. We make a point of providing different writing implements so that the children can experience writing with a range of tools, ranging from crayons to markers. Each implement is different--for example crayons require considerably more pressure than markers and therefore demand that the writer use more force to make a mark, this in turn builds muscles tone in the fingers which is important for developing writing skills.
>
> Recently we set out calligraphy pens and ink for signing in. The children really enjoyed the novelty of these pens, which was quite a different experience from markers and pencils. Some children enjoyed using the ink so much that they requested taking the ink over to the art table after signing in. They really enjoyed experimenting with the ink.
>
> Following on this interest in ink Jess made some quills out of our classroom collection of feathers. The children were delighted with the quills and the mundane task of signing in was elevated to an important occasion—children took great care in dipping the quill in the ink and then carefully writing their name.

In the Springhill community, signing-in helps children transition into their day while offering opportunities to practice writing their name and to try out various writing tools.

Symbols.

Symbols are more abstract than physical objects, less so than written words. An important step for a prereader is to make the connection between something real, like an object or action, and something abstract, like a symbol or word….Children learn that symbols represent a person, object, action, or idea. Because symbols are a step toward understanding the significance of writing, they are important on the journey to literacy. (Lewin-Benham, 2005, p. 107)

Another important tradition within the Springhill community, inspired by the schools of Reggio Emilia, is the use of picture "symbols" to represent each child. There are a variety of ways children's symbols are used in the Springhill community. For example, symbols are placed next to each child's written name on sign-in sheets, cubbies, coat hooks in the hallway, mailboxes, journals, and portfolios. There are several pill box containers on the art table with stacks of symbols for each child to access when they are needed. For example, when children are working on a project or piece of art work, often they will put their symbol on the art work to indicate that it is theirs. Also, children can use their symbol on a waiting list if a certain material (e.g., camera, binoculars) is already being used by another child.[64] There are also child-created symbols representing different classrooms and the studio, all of which are displayed above the writing center,

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[64] Children have access to a portable waiting list on which they can place their symbol as a way to show the order in which their turn will come (1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th). Free access to this visual representation allows children to take initiative, regulate the process themselves, and minimize unnecessary conflict.

along with other meaningful words in their community that they may need to know how to spell. Children know each other's symbols very well.

As mentioned above, children select their symbol when they join the Springhill community. Sophie explains how children end up with their particular symbols:

[W]e have a selection they can choose from and…we usually have a variety of animals and a variety of vehicles and you know just those things that we think people will like. But then oftentimes children will, and it's fascinating to see, I mean, sometimes, some children are very thoughtful about the symbol that they're choosing, and others are just like "Oh, that one." And oftentimes it's those children that just choose one,…two or three years later, they're over being [represented by a certain symbol]. So, they draw their own or maybe it's something that they're really passionate about, so they draw their own. (Interview transcription, November 3, 2009, lines 548-554)

For example, at the end of the previous school year, Oscar decided that he would like to change his prefabricated violin symbol to one that he created himself. This was a culminating activity after a year-long project centered around his interest in the instrument, during which he spent much time studying and drawing his violin and bow. Sophie explains:

[Oscar] did a big thing drawing his violin last year…He wanted to make a violin, and Nicole was his teacher last year, and so the two of them worked together making this violin and he's incredibly musical. But you know, I think for Nicole part of that story is you know that he wasn't really interacting with any of the other children, that was, he could get very, very focused and he wasn't really

interested in [interacting with others], and so she was trying to figure out a way to get him to be sort of more involved with other children and at the end of that whole story, he did. At the end of the year, he brought in his real violin from home and he played it for everybody and let other children hold it, which he was not willing to do earlier in the year…And then he wanted to change his symbol. [It] was a violin but it was one that he had just chosen from...[our] selection of symbols. And then he wanted to replace his symbol and draw his own symbol…Last year in this room, there were three children that changed their symbol. [But] they have to have a reason. (Interview transcription, November 3, 2009, lines 534-546)

The following images represent Oscar's two violin symbols (Figure 1 & 2):

Figure 1 Oscar's initially selected, pre-made violin symbol
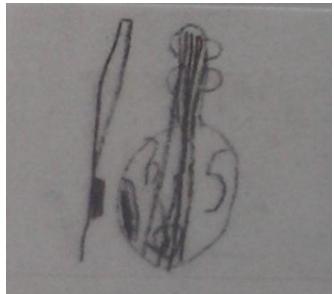
Figure 2 Oscar's self-created violin symbol

Oscar's decision to create his own violin symbol came from him not the teachers. It is interesting to note, however, that children at Springhill are not permitted to change their symbol willy-nilly, but instead must be able to explain why the change is important to them, and follow through on their ideas. In this case, Oscar was able to do just that.[65]

Although Springhill teachers provide children the freedom to follow their interests, teachers do have a voice in shaping curricular decisions. In the following example, we see Nicole (the teacher) observe Oscar's need for developing more social relationships. So she uses his interest in the violin as a catalyst for his building connections with other children. In relation to democratic education, this means:

> People have a say in their own learning process…It's not an overly individualized, my-way-or-the-highway kind of learning. Rather, it's that I am able to dictate some of the path of my own learning, based on my interests, my questions, curiosities', and natural instincts, and that this happens in a community of people and is related to the context I live in. (Shilpa Jain, as cited in Graves, 2011, p. 3)

In contemporary U.S. society, we are bombarded with corporate logos at home, school and the greater community. By a young age, children are able to recognize dozens of corporate logos, setting the stage for people to unwittingly and uncritically develop brand loyalty as passive consumers. In contrast, Springhill preschool offers children many opportunities to actively produce their own symbols that have personal significance and meaning, help aid communication and support a connected community of learners (for

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[65] It is interesting to note, that when Oscar borrowed my camera to take pictures, he specifically requested taking a picture of his violin symbol. In fact, he had Jess increase the symbol's image size on her computer and print it out for him to photograph. Clearly, this suggests the significance his violin symbol holds for him.

more on this contrast, see **"**Reconstruction of Powerful Consumer and Popular Culture Icons and Images" in chapter 10).

Stop signs. Within the Springhill preschool, the use of the "Stop sign" is a community-shared symbol that is universally understood to mean "stop." As discussed in chapter four's "Composite Narrative," there are examples of children creating stop signs: 1) Ethan, Orson, and Matthew make stops signs to protect the mushrooms on the playground; and 2) Kate and Grace create stop signs for the classroom doors. Stop signs are also used as a sign indicating that a child is going to continue working on a project on another day and to please not disassemble his/her work. Again, recall two examples from chapter four's "Composite Narrative": One, Walter puts a stop sign on his Golden Gate Bridge. Two, Oscar puts it on his piano keys. While observing at Springhill, I never saw children not respect the use of them. Clearly children feel a sense of shared responsibility in this classroom practice.

Story Dictations. Storytelling is another important ritual at Springhill. Research (Siegel, 1999) suggests that the practice of constructing narratives is an important determinant of our ability to make meaning out of our experiences and to form significant, identity-shaping memories. In today's culture, we see the ever-growing influence of scripted narratives on children's lives, creating the need for powerful counter-narratives that are constructed from the actual lived experiences of children.

The following story, created by three Gardenia room children, reflects the powerful learning culture created when children are able to pursue self-chosen areas of interest, particularly in collaboration with others.

The Robots and the Photographer

May 24, 2010

By Larry, Cooper and Oscar

Once there were 3 Robots and one Photographer. They danced along a parade.

The Robot parade got too close to a volcano!

The Photographer got too close to the volcano and fell in.

"Help Me!!" he said. The Robots would try to save him. They yelled

"Photographer, climb out of the volcano! Climb up the side! We'll try to catch

you! We'll try to save you!" But he did not get out. Later, when the volcano blew

up, the Photographer blasted out. He went thump, thump, thump, back into the

volcano, dead. Then, he blasts out again, dead.

Larry the robot pushes his medicine button. Out pops a bottle of medicine. The

other robot, R2D2O can open the bottles! He opens the bottle, and they give the

photographer the medicine. He woke up and said, "Larry the robot's medicine

bottle was really good!" Larry the robot shut down.

THE END

The prominent roles played by the "robots" and a "photographer" emerge directly from

the Gardenia room's ongoing study of robots (see chapter 4) and their project work

involving photography (see chapter 5). The appearance of these motifs in the story

reflects the deep, *holistic* impact that children's inquiries can have when those topics are

self-chosen *and* supported appropriately by teachers. The boys made costumes and props

(e.g., a large volcano) for their story, and put on several informal performances of the

story for other children and adults on the Springhill playground. The boys' collaborative

story offers just one example of stories as prominent features in the daily life of the Springhill community. As another example, recall the children's "Dance of the Pants" project discussed in chapter 4 and their related individual and collaborative story creations.

Journals and portfolios. Another important ritual in each Springhill classroom is the use of portfolios and journals. Each child has his/her own journal filled with an assortment of special pictures, drawings, photos, and notes from home; and children have the freedom to add to their journals throughout the year. Both the journals and portfolios are important catalysts for children's conversations. In the process of sharing journals, relationships are fostered and home-school connections are deepened. Throughout my time at Springhill, I observed many occasions when children took out their journals and looked at them with fellow classmates. The following excerpt of Grace and Stella's conversation is one such example (May 28, 2010):

Grace takes out her journal to look at her family photos with Stella. As she points to the various pictures, a conversation begins.

Grace shows Stella a photo of her family on vacations: "I hate New York City and Alex [Grace's older brother] likes New York City. And I *hate* New York City. I wanted to see Michelle, Peyton [two girls from the Rainbow room]. But they…[66]"

Stella pointing to another photo: "Is that when you were a baby?"

Grace: "Yes."

Stella looking at her pictures: "and that's your grandmother?"

Grace: "Yeah. And that's when I was dressed up in a SPIDER."

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[66] Grace's close friend Walter moved to New York City earlier in the year. Perhaps this is why she has such strong feelings against New York City.

Stella: "A SPIDER?"

Grace: "Hmmm-hmmm."

Stella: "And was it Halloween?"

Grace: "Mmm-Hmmm."

Stella: "Is Alex dressed up as a Batman?!?!"

Grace: "Yeah! And he's rescuing me! And Brody hates that costume. Brody hates that costume." ["Brody" appears to be Grace's age in the photo, but does not attend Springhill.]

Stella pointing to Brody's photo: "Is he your baby brother?"

Grace: "No."

Grace turns the page and points to a new photo of her and Brody, when they were toddlers, sitting in two child-sized cars: "And that's Brody hating this pink one [referring to the car he was sitting in]. And that's me liking the red one [the car she was sitting]."

Within this short exchange, we see the rich possibilities that arise when children's journals are accessible--The girls are able to express strong feelings, revisit past memories, share stories, build their identity in a social context, and make stronger connections with one another.

Each child has her/his own portfolio as well. The following message, written by the faculty and placed inside each child's portfolio, describes the significance of these portfolios within the Springhill community:

From the very first day of school every child at the Springhill at Stonewood preschool has a portfolio and there is a place in the classroom for that portfolio. It will follow them from classroom to classroom and be a gift to them when they

leave the school. The portfolio provides a glimpse into the child's experience of being part of the school community- it is their story within the group. This unique collection of documented work will include the child's art, photos, and transcripts of conversations as well as teacher observations and reflections on the work. It is our intention that the portfolio makes the child's experience of Springhill at Stonewood visible not only to the child and their parents, but also to the wider community of children, teachers and parents.

We invite you to come into the classroom and look at this portfolio from time to time throughout your child's years at Springhill at Stonewood. And we invite you to enjoy watching it grow slowly as a reflection of your child's development and learning as they become more adept at representing their thinking and more comfortable as a member of this vital community of learners.

As quoted in *Perspectives of a Reggio Emilia Diary: The Diary of Laura,* "There is no life if it is not told" (Bruner, as cited in Edwards & Rinaldi, 2009, p. 9). Building upon this idea, Rinaldi explains, "The narrative gives meaning but also visibility to life, bringing synthesis, underscoring the salient features, the choices that give meaning to the past, a daily flow that would otherwise get lost in anonymity" (2009, p. 10).

While portfolios provide insight into children's development over time, as a tool of child assessment they lie in sharp contrast to the assessments most commonly used in traditional preschools (e.g., developmental checklists; and/or "domains of development;" comparison checklists to state standards). These standard types of assessments isolate skills in ways that do not fully represent the ways in which authentic learning develops. While these tools are certainly appropriate for identifying developmental delays or

significant deficits in a child's growth, they clearly don't provide an adequate representation of a child's capacity as a learner. What's more, what type of "life" is narrated when it is reduced to checklists or domains of development? What does it mean when the primary record of a child's preschool experience is a quantified and standardized assessment that has value only in comparison to the "performance" of other preschoolers? Clearly, such an approach to preschool assessment has little to say either about the unique capabilities of each child, or the identity of each child in the larger context of a community of learners.

The journals and portfolios are always freely accessible to the children throughout the day, and are featured prominently on the classroom shelves. As highlighted in the chapter 4 (see "Portfolios and Journals" section) the children often take great pleasure in looking through their portfolios and journals and sharing them with friends, parents, and teachers. A few examples of the many rich experiences the children have with their journals and portfolios are: 1) Grace and Walter revisiting memories of their train project from the previous year, and deciding to continue their train building in even more elaborate ways; 2) Duke discovering with delight the photo and portrait of his "mommy" that he finds in his portfolio; and 3) Matthew sharing pictures of sharks from his journal with friends, demonstrating his fascination for and knowledge of the subject. The portfolios and journals spark new projects and extend/deepen previous ones, serve as a catalyst for children to revisit past memories, build a meaningful narrative, help shape children's identity, and spur stimulating conversations.

Decoration and documentation. In the Springhill community, teachers share control and responsibility of the classroom space with children, and provide them

significant amounts of freedom to design the classroom space in their own creative ways.

In most traditional preschool classrooms, teachers have full power in deciding what is

displayed on the walls and how the room is arranged without giving much consideration

to children's participation in the process (e.g., rigidly defined areas without much room

for flexibility, "blocks must remain in the block center").[67] In the following piece of

documentation, Sophie shares the ways in which children are involved in both the

documentation and decorating of the Gardenia classroom (November 2009):

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[67] Arguably, some of the quality measures found in ITERS/ECERS, NAEYC's
Developmentally Appropriate Practices, and (especially) state standards reinforce these
rigidly defined areas and lack of child (and parent) input.

Something curious is happening on the walls and doors of our classroom.

As you know documentation is a big part of the work at our school. This year teachers are experimenting with 'raw documentation', which is basically documentation in its rawest, unedited form– this documentation is very much work in progress: it is made up of the children's work – notes, drawings, records of conversations, photos, etc. Raw documentation reveals the process of the children's work, which in turn helps the children and teachers think more deeply about the work that is evolving. In the Gardenia Room we are trying to figure out ways to make documentation more visible, accessible and meaningful to the children.

The limited amount of actual usable wall space in our classroom is a challenge, but we have identified some areas in the room and we intend to work on creating spaces for documentation throughout the year. We have been using the bulletin boards in the classroom for raw documentation, even though these boards are not at an ideal height for the children. At first teachers helped the children attach their work, but now many of the children are taking responsibility for their work and they are becoming very adept at using pushpins! So far, the bulletin board with the Dance of the Pants documentation has been the most used –it's a popular topic and the bulletin board is close to where we hold circle so we have been referring to the board during circle time, which probably increases the children's awareness of this documentation. The children are now very comfortable taking down their work and later returning it to the board.

As the documentation in the classroom has evolved we have noticed something rather interesting and curious – the children have started to pay a lot of attention to the walls and doors of the classroom.

We first noticed this when **Ethan** and **Kate** announced they were decorating the classroom "for **Walter's** birthday circle" – they used folding rulers and blocks, which they attached to the bulletin board and the cork strip above the mirrors. (They were very proficient with the pushpins!) Since then the children have continued to decorate for each birthday circle as well as on other days – the decorating process usually involves several children and has become a delightful way for the children to connect with each other.

Then **Kate** made a stop sign for the dividing doors in the classroom. We often close these doors when the playground is open and there is only one teacher in the classroom. **Kate** decided that we needed a stop sign for that door and so she headed off to the studio to create a sign. The following day she decided to make another Stop sign as well as a Go sign. More children joined in and helped to attach signs to the door.

Once again, this has become a group activity filled with rich interactions– children have supported each other with spelling and writing; there have been negotiations over sharing materials; the children have investigated tape and its sticking properties; there have been many discussions about rules pertaining to stop and go; and children from other classrooms have recently joined in this activity.

So, what should we make of the children's decorations?

> ❖Is this yet another example of the children creating a classroom ritual for themselves? Have they invented another way to come into connection with each other?
>
> ❖Could the children be creating their own version of documentation? How do children perceive the documentation they see around the school? Teachers are constantly sticking things up on the walls – perhaps they are mirroring our behavior?
>
> ❖Or, are the children's decorations an indication that they are making this space their own? Do these decorations give the children a sense of belonging? Is this another example of children creating a sense of place?

It will be interesting to see how this decoration/ documentation progresses. When we teachers first started thinking about raw documentation, I had no idea that we would be documenting the documentation!

After sending out this documentation, Nanette (a co-teacher in the five-year-old

Magnolia room) responds (November 3, 2009) with reflections from her classroom:

We saw so much of this type of decorating last year in the Magnolia Room.

Although ours wasn't based around documentation, it was an invitation to

transform the room. It was a huge part of our year. [Children] even decorated the

structures that they made with blocks and cardboard. It became an automatic step two; once the structure was finished they would say "we need decorations" and off to the art table. We wondered if it was a primal urge to make our spaces also a form of self-expression-making them our own. Pride? Ownership? I wonder if children just need that invitation before they start putting things on the walls. The one new child in our class this year started the year by making things and taping them to our door by the stop sign. She did it every day for a while, maybe until she was comfortable. Is it a coincidence that she chose the door?

Nanette

Sophie's documentation and Nanette's response shed light on the Springhill teachers' deep thinking and reflections on the conscious use of documentation and decorations as a support for children's inventiveness, self-expression, relationship-building, shared ownership, sense of belonging, and "sense of place."[68] This documentation also provides good examples of the freedom children have to shape ongoing documentation that is displayed throughout the classroom,[69] create their own wall hangings and displays,[70]

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[68] According to Read (2007) children's "sense of place is often described as a place that has meaning, a place that provides emotional stability, and a place where an individual acquires knowledge through experiences of the senses (e.g., seeing color and form, feeling texture and light)" (p. 387). Children's sense of place is fundamental to children's identity and "can provide children with feelings of belonging and stability" (p. 388). Children also learn about place relations and cultural values" as they make sense of place.

[69] As described in chapter 4, children had access to ongoing documentation and work (e.g., "Robots" and "Dance of the Pants"). They would often take down their work to play with, create and retell stories, revisit and refine their work, and/or share with others. And recall in chapter 5, the malleability of the Gardenia room's photography documentation and displays: Oscar finds an easily accessible low shelf to hang his cardboard camera instead of keeping it on the bulletin board in the hallway, which was harder to reach; Larry takes the real camera off the display to explore the shutter on the front of the camera; and several children add details to their initial cardboard cameras.

manipulate materials in their own creative ways, and move equipment and toys in different areas of the classroom and school as needed.[71]

Yet, with freedom comes responsibility, and creating a democratic preschool environment does not mean that children have unilateral freedom to "do as they please" in the shared space of the classroom. There must be consideration for others in the community as well. For example, in the Magnolia room several boys wanted to create a story about bloody vampires in the classroom. The teachers understood the importance of letting the children create this story (to express and process scary feelings), but they also wanted to be respectful of the children who were not comfortable with such a story. Nanette explains how they negotiated a solution in the following excerpt from her documentation titled, "Imaginings" (October 22, 2009):

> The less-comfortable side of pretend play and imaginings: Jamie and Adam made a haunted house from the hollow blocks. They wanted the room so dark that you couldn't see, but that wasn't okay with some of the other children. Sally (a Magnolia room teacher) invited them to go into the hall and build a haunted house from the small blocks and use play mobile people as the characters. They ended up writing a story about a vampire, a spider-ghost and a pirate. They thought of it at first as a movie, but then decided on a LIVE audience. They invited all of the children warning them of the blood and shooting involved in the story. Some children chose not to come, but several said it would be okay. The audience liked

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[70] For example, one day, Kate decides to hang a drawing of a pony picture she created in the Gardenia room window; Lizzy hangs her "creepy circus" picture above a small table in the Magnolia room; several children create play props to add to the classroom materials.

[71] For a detailed example of children transforming their classroom space, see entire piece of documentation, "Imaginings" (see Appendix N).

it so much they wanted to make it into a play to perform in the meadow. Why do

we allow such imaginings? Sometimes children use pretend play to process

scary, stressful or anxiety producing issues. As adults we feel compelled to stop

them from exploring what feels violent and uncomfortable to us. But what are

they supposed to do with those thoughts if we won't let them process them with

us? Will it stop them from having them? [For the entire piece of documentation,

see Appendix N, "Imaginings."]

It should also be noted that the "Imaginings" documentation was, in part, a follow-up to

the parent dialogue earlier in the month, centered on conflict and aggression (as discussed

above, see "Parent Coffees and Dialogue" section). As Mary points out in an email

response (October 22, 2009),

This is such a powerful follow-up to the Parent Circle; it certainly nuances the

discussion about the role of dramatic play in helping children sort out feelings of

aggression and conflict. We know that five year olds take on this big issue of the

scary, aggressive, powerful violent parts of our world; we see them do this every

year. Thank you both for responding so thoughtfully to their interests to explore

this aspect of our world, and thank you to the Magnolia Room children who are

helping us learn so much more about all children.

And Lisa responds (October 22, 2009):

Nanette and Sally -

In the course of our 15 year study of the schools and culture of Reggio Emilia, we

have often wondered how we could achieve the dialectic we witnessed there -

parents and teachers thinking together about children. I agree with Mary that your

observations and questions about the pretend play in your class dovetail beautifully with the conversation at the heart of this week's Parents' Circle. You also raise very compelling questions about the choices we make as the adults in this process....e.g. what would happen if this were not allowed? Thank you for this thoughtful, well-informed and provocative piece.

Lisa

Clearly, Springhill teachers do not shy away from hard and uncomfortable issues, both in the classroom and through documentation. Instead, they address them through honest, authentic discourse and study with fellow community members.

Again, we see the Springhill faculty making their thinking processes and questions visible to the larger community, not just as a finished product but as ongoing reflections about their work.[72] In terms of content, Nanette's documentation highlights the benefits, challenges and complexities of dramatic play when it involves violent or scary scenarios, while Sophie's documentation highlights the importance of children's growing relationships and sense of belonging within the group. As Meyer (2009, para.1) puts it:

Documentation is a philosophical decision. It is a process for supporting and constructing value, and requires the cooperation of the community. This process requires dialogue among teachers and parents on the true nature of the learning. When we present documentation, our thoughts on learning, to the community we receive feedback, which drives more research and documentation. In this idea of

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[72] Notice again, that the observations and questions that both Nanette and Sophie choose to share through their documentation provides a strong message about the values they perceive as worthy of communication in the Springhill community.

documentation, we can essentially define education as participation – it is a

shared process in the community that is not based on objective observations, but

rather, interpretations of what we see and what we place value on.

Documentation is a social construction of knowledge and culture, and through it

we get to define and redefine our values together as a community. Thus,

documentation is democracy in action.

Seasonal Traditions: Creating Shared Memories

Winter traditions (winter circle, Paperwhite calendar, and candle gift).

There are several traditions that are unique to the Springhill preschool. During my

interview with Mary, the director of early childhood education, I ask her to tell me about

some of the traditions at Springhill:

Well, let me tell you first, coming from the Springhill perspective…there's been

a long tradition of *not* celebrating the conventional traditions of the year. And so

there's even a piece in our parent launching and it's written somewhere about the

way that we approach that. We feel that children get plenty of the winter holiday

stuff at home and even Valentines and Halloween. And so we really ask that

those traditions-- I mean any elements of those, that if they emerge that they come

from the children...There is-- and there always has been something that marked

the beginning of the winter holidays. It used to be a big party for everybody in

the preschool. But it was pretty overwhelming for the children so we let go of

that. There used to be a…children's performance. We let go of that and really

that has taken-- we've taken on a closing circle tradition, which is a recognition

that this is a time of darkness and light and the celebration of light in the midst of

darkness.   And so we read-- or we tell the story of Raven [by Gerald McDermott]

bringing light to the people, which is a Native American tradition from the

[Pacific] Northwest Indians…and we have a circle in which light figures

prominently. We light candles. And children decorate candles for their families

as a gift for the winter for their families. We sing songs about light, you know,

that come from many traditions. (Interview transcription, November 17, 2009,

lines 922-940)

After children decorate their candle gifts, teachers attach the following note to the parents

describing this special tradition:

On this night

Let us light

One little candle fire.

'Tis a sight

Burning bright

One little candle fire.

For many years children at Springhill School have sung this song as we move toward the longest night of the year and have a greater experience of darkness. Also at this time of the year the children decorate a candle as a small holiday gift for their families. They love the idea of surprising their families with this present.

Some families tell us they save the candles from year to year as a remembrance of the child's time at Springhill. Others enjoy lighting the candle as a part of their holiday celebrations. However you and your family derive joy from it, we think you will find your child's gift a symbol of the light and hope all children bring to Earth.

On the last day of school before winter break each child takes their candle gift home

along with a gift they receive from their teachers. The gift is a Paperwhite (Narcissus

bulb) that children are invited to plant and watch grow as a "living calendar" of sorts.

This tradition is described in the following note to parents:

The Paperwhite Calendar

The teachers' gift of paperwhites to the children is a Springhill tradition. The flowers are a natural calendar marking the time we will be away from one another during the winter holidays. Just about the time we are ready to return to Springhill, the paperwhites will bloom. Enjoy with your child the gradual growth and gentle unfolding of this flower as a message of the beauty of this season.

As we plant the bulbs and say goodbye in our closing circle we sing this song:

Bulbs are planted in the cup

While we're gone they will reach up

Light and water help to grow

Stems of green with leaves below

When the sweet white flowers bloom

We'll be back at Springhill soon.

When you get home, add water until the container is half-full. Keep the paperwhites in a cool place until roots form and then place them in a sunny window. Strong light and cool temperatures create sturdy flower stems and longer-lasting blooms. The flowers will take two to three weeks to bloom.

We look forward to seeing you on January 5th!

Using the Paperwhite as a living calendar points to the social rhythms associated with the passage of time, and is certainly far more meaningful to the children than rote memorization of the days of the week and months of the year.

Connecting this special tradition to their study of photography, Sophie and Jess invite the children to take photos of their Paperwhites. When children arrive back at school from winter break, they are eager to share their photos with the class. The

following Gardenia room documentation highlights the fruitful discussions and thinking around this experience:

Children have been sharing their photographs of paperwhites during circle time. The other day Abigail showed her photographs and when I asked her who had taken the photographs, she replied that she had. This response raised a very interesting conundrum -- Oscar pointed out that Abigail could not have taken the photograph showing her standing beside her paperwhite because she was **IN** the photograph.

Abigail looked at that photo and agreed – she said that her father took that photograph, and she took the close-up photograph of the flower.

The following day children worked on dismantling the wire display of Summer Memories. While Orson was removing objects from the wire frame he looked at one of Larry's photographs – it was a photo of Larry riding on a carousel. Orson looked carefully at the photo and then said, "I wonder if his dad took this picture. Yes, I think him did."

That same morning Lila   arrived and noticed her
paperwhite photographs on the display board. She asked
if she could show her photos at circle time. I told her that
since it was Friday we would be having Big Circle and we
would have to wait until Monday to show her photos.
Lila   thought for a moment and then she said, "well, I
could make the photos really, really BIG (she extended
her arms to demonstrate) and I could show them".

These stories reveal that the children are thinking in very
deep ways about photography -- they are wondering
about who is behind the camera and contemplating ways
to make photographs large so that a bigger group will be
able to see them.

 It is quite fascinating to see how the children are
developing an understanding of photography.

Through this documentation we see children make connections between a

community tradition and their ongoing photography work, and in the process gain deeper

understandings of how photography can contribute to meaningful, shared memories.

The Springhill Dragon. Perhaps the tradition that came up the most in children's conversations and drawings was the Springhill Dragon. The story of the Springhill dragon evolved over time and each year a variety of projects have emerged in relation to the Springhill dragon's "visit." Every Spring (typically at the end of May) the Springhill dragon appears, with a different teacher dressing up each year in a dragon costume for the event. For several days the dragon visits the forest and the periphery of the school, peeking from behind the shed or the trees in the meadow, barely and tantalizingly visible to the children as they gather looking out the classroom window or outside the perimeter of the school. By tradition, the Springhill dragon is very shy and hides when it gets too loud or when the children come too close, and there is much anticipation and excitement about the Springhill dragon's arrival. Children delight in spotting the Springhill dragon from their classroom windows and/or the playground and trying to entice it to visit. In the days leading up to the Springhill dragon's official appearance, children make guesses about the identity of the dragon by trying to pick up clues about who it may be underneath the costume.[73] On the final day, the Springhill dragon comes to the playground with a large basket of strawberries to share with the children and teachers and to reveal its hidden identity. After finishing the strawberries, many of the children take pleasure in trying on the costume, wearing the dragon's headdress, and parading about the playground.

During my interview with Mary, she explains how this tradition came about (personal communication, November 17, 2009):

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[73] For example, during my observations in May 2010, there were many passionate conversations at the snack table on the topic and many children suspected it was Nicole (the resource teacher).

[T]he Springhill dragon just came about sort of incidentally from-- we have had a winter session in which one of the parents had brought in some celebration for the Chinese New Year and the children had created a box dragon. And then, the same year, several of the teachers, myself included…[and] my husband came and played the fiddle and we just danced on May Day. It was kind of a provocative experience for the children and bringing music and dance to them. And then somebody got out the dragon for that. And so, subsequent to that, every year at that time we've brought out the dragon and the dragon has become a kind of very shy dragon that needs to be lured in. So the children remember now from year to year, and you can see their representations of the dragon, and so it's-- it has a life of its own. But children try to trap the dragon and they try to entice the dragon to food, but ultimately, they try to create a song and they sing the song and then the dragon…eventually comes onto the playground with a basket of strawberries for the children. And so, that's been a very sweet tradition over the course of the years.

At Springhill, traditions and practices continue to evolve as community members strive to create and improve upon optimal experiences for children.

The following piece of documentation captures the shared excitement and energy around the Springhill Dragon's yearly visit, as experienced by a group of children in the 2008-2009 Forest room (written by co-teachers Jane and Nicole):

Our Springhill Dragon Story, Spring 2009

One day, Grace looked out the window and cried, "There's a dinosaur outside!" "That's not a dinosaur, that's the Springhill Dragon," said Oscar. The children gathered and looked eagerly out of the window. Then we decided to get a closer look. As we covered the grounds, quietly looking for the dragon, Michelle

found a purple ribbon. "Why don't we make something and give it to the dragon for a present," she exclaimed!

The next day there were sewing materials available for the children to make a present for the dragon. Michelle, "I picked this piece because I wanted pink for the dragon." Orson, "A bridge for the dragon." Peyton, "Purple bead matches my ribbon, the yellow doesn't." Stella, "I like to make this for Springhill Dragon."

The next day we noticed the Magnolia room class out in the forest. Nanette [a Magnolia room teacher] said, "We saw something red in the forest, and we came out to see what it was." While we were outside the children started noticing "treasures" on the playground. Then we glanced at the labyrinth and saw the Magnolia room children dancing underneath the dragon's cape and we decided to join them. When these children went back inside, the Forest Room children naturally picked up the cape and mimicked them.

At circle time, the teachers brought the present that the children had made for the dragon. They had sewn tiny pieces of beautiful beads, ribbon, and tassels to the purple ribbon. There were little name tags tied onto each individual's work. When the ribbon was found, and Michelle suggested we make a present, Grace added, "We should wrap it!" The next morning, the children took on the wrapping of the gift. As Grace and Peyton finished wrapping the present, Oscar noticed that the ends were open. "I have an idea," he said. He carefully folded paper around the ends of the package, and with Grace's help, secured them with tape.

The next task was to figure out how to get the present to the dragon. Michelle said, "Let's put it in the mailbox." After going inside, the children saw the dragon in the playground! The dragon slipped out the gate and went up the hill toward the mailbox. Everyone spilled out the back door, and watched breathlessly as the dragon opened the mailbox and found the present! She carefully opened the box, took out the present, held it high, gleefully dancing around. The children were ecstatic!

Later, the teacher encouraged the children to represent their experience by asking them if they would like to draw the dragon. They wondered how to draw the dragon, and the teacher suggested that they look in our Almost Everything book. They found a picture of a dinosaur, but that didn't seem right. Then they came upon costumes of the world, and there on the page, was a picture that looked like the dragon costume! The cape in the picture drew them to the basket filled with scarves which they turned into capes. "Hey, baby dragons, you look like friendly dragons," sang the teacher. This provocation opened their imaginations to become sleepy and hungry baby dragons.

> Finally, the dragon became comfortable enough to come and visit the children. How exciting it was to see the dragon in the meadow! They gathered at the fence and quietly sang, "Hey Springhill dragon, you look like a…" As the dragon entered the playground, she gently placed the special ribbon in Peyton's lap.
>
> The children gathered in a circle all around the dragon. There was a sense of hushed anticipation. Then slowly the dragon revealed her identity! The children responded with surprise and pleasure. Sophie [the Gardenia room teacher] smiled and began offering one strawberry at a time to the children. They were especially delicious strawberries!
>
> There was an air of festivity as the children ate their strawberries and played with the dragon costume. They paraded around the playground, going under the cape, holding onto the tail, and taking turns trying on the dragon's headdress.
>
> After the dragon's visit the teacher's borrowed the cape to extend the children's experience. After taking turns sewing the cherished ribbon onto the dragon's cape, the children spent the rest of the play time with this familiar and well loved symbol of the Springhill Dragon.

This story highlights the ways in which teachers both encourage children to actively participate in this tradition in their own creative ways, and support children as they actualize their plans. In the process, this shared experience brings the community together in creating shared memories and builds anticipation for future visits.

In fact, throughout my time spent at Springhill, many conversations about the Springhill Dragon took place. The following exchange is one such example:

In mid-November 2009, Terra (a Rainbow Room teacher), Alice (the atelierista) and a group of Rainbow room children are in the studio sewing when a conversation about the Springhill dragon emerges.

Alice: "Wow. I did not know that Robert, Franklin, and Dave already knew how to sew."

Michelle: "Yeah but my mom teach me that but I don't remember that."

Dave: "I did it in the Forest room" (Dave was in the Forest room last year)

Terra: "You did it in the Forest room, Dave?"

Michelle: "I did it in the Gardenia room."

Robert smiles: "I did it in the Gardenia room too."

Terra: "You did it in the Forest room last year too? You guys sewed a fair amount."

Terra: "Do you remember what you sewed last year?"

Michelle: "Mmm-hmm."

Terra: "What did you sew in the Forest room?"

Michelle: "Ummm. A sweater."

Terra: "You sewed a sweater?"

Alice: "I remember a present for the dragon."

Franklin: "The Springhill Dragon? When is it Springhill Dragon day?"
Alice responds, "Usually spring."

Michelle: "OH."

Terra: "Sure doesn't feel like spring out there now."

Michelle: "But he *might* come, but when does he come?" (Michelle seems to enjoy the anticipation and possibility of not knowing when the Springhill Dragon will appear.)

Alice: "I don't know but when you guys found that cave I started to think about the Springhill dragon."

Franklin: "Maybe we have a dragon who lives in there."

Alice: "That's what Dave thinks. I think it was Dave or maybe…"

Terra looking at Dave: "Remember when you thought that? Dave thought it might be the Springhill dragon."

Michelle: "Well, I think he lives, a little, um. When I saw a Springhill dragon at my la[st], at my Tiger school he just took off his cape and sit on a log and runned away, (laughs), when I was a little girl. I was sooo little. (Laughs). I can't even see that in my mind." (Interesting to note how Michelle uses the Springhill dragon to connect her experience from her old school to Springhill school. But can't "see it in her mind" since he wasn't actually at her old school.)

Alice: "I wonder if Amy even knows about the Springhill dragon."

Dave looks at me and asks, "Do you Amy?"

I respond, "I've heard a little bit. Can you tell me about the Springhill Dragon?"

Michelle: "Yeah!"

Dave shouts: "I SAW IT LAST YEAR!"

Amy: "You saw it last year, where'd you see it last year?"

Robert: "SHHHH." (Robert has some sensitivity issues to too much noise.)

Dave: "In the forest room."

Alice says, "Was that too loud for your ears, Robert?" (Alice acknowledges Robert's feelings and provides language to his feelings.)

Michelle answers, "In my classroom…when I, when we saw Springhill dragon, he came in our yar[d], the Springhill's dragon, ummm, ummm…"

Alice helping her come up with the word offers, "Playground?"

Michelle: "Playground, outside where we played in the sandbox. He opened the gate and came in."

I respond, "He did?"

Michelle: "But he didn't blow fire. He's a nice one." (Children seem to take pride in overcoming their fears of the dragon.)

I ask: "He's a friendly dragon?"

Michelle, needing a little extra assurance, that it *is* indeed a friendly dragon, turns to Terra for confirmation: "Right?"

Terra nods her head yes and comments: "Do you know the song? You could sing her the song."

They start to sing me the song about the Springhill dragon. "Hey Springhill Dragon, you look like a friendly dragon, we're so glad to see you and we hope that you are glad too…"

At the end of the song, Michelle says, "Well, when you use loud sounds he will go away, right?"

Terra: "That's right, you have a good memory."

Michelle: "You just have to be quiet if you come. But we gave him presents, remember?"

Terra responds, "I remember. Do you want to tell Amy about those presents?"

Michelle: "They were really pretty and he got them and he was REALLY happy.[74]" (Notice how, in considering how this gift makes the dragon feel, Michelle shows her ability to take on the perspectives of others. This challenges a widely-held view that 3 and 4-year-olds are primarily egocentric.)

Amy: "Ahhh."

Alice: "They were made out of sewing, some of them."

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[74] Interesting to note she refers to the dragon as a "he" even after seeing last year's dragon revealed as a female teacher.

Terra: "We, I sewed those with you guys. Do you remember that? We sewed on some of the ribbons."

Michelle: "Yeah."

The Springhill Dragon is a powerful example of a story co-constructed by community members that has become a deeply-rooted tradition at Springhill.

In this vignette, we also see how Michelle connects her old school with her current school, Springhill. As humans, we make sense of our experiences through narrative--the ordering of events and sharing of stories (Siegel, 1999). In this case, Michelle seems to appropriate the dragon as a tool to bridge significant memories together. The power of narrative is that it brings diverse experiences under the umbrella of coherence in order to make meaning out of them.

In the Gardenia room, most of the children have knowledge of the Springhill Dragon from their prior years at Springhill or from older siblings in their family. In the following vignette, some children have recently spotted the dragon for the first time that year (May 25, 2010) and are filled with excitement and anticipation for more visits. To capitalize on their enthusiasm, Sophie takes out "The Springhill Dragon" picture book written and illustrated by a group of Gardenia room children during the 2008-2009 school-year. Sophie sits down in the book corner and a group of children join her to listen to the story.

Sophie reads the first page of the book, *"The Springhill Dragon is nice."*

Grace, remembering the experience last year, shouts out, "He brings strawberries!"

Fiona, a child visiting from the Rainbow room: "But, I didn't see him holding a basket?"

Kate jumping up and down says, "One day, one day, me and the Forest room went to our Springhill mailbox, opened it and there was, and we thought that, and we saw strawberries in it and we thought that the Springhill dragon putted the strawberries in the Springhill mailbox!"

Sophie replies in feigned surprise: "In the mailbox there were strawberries?"

Kate: "Mmm-hmm!"

Sophie: "Well, did you see any strawberries today?"

In unison children respond, "Noooo!" as if it were a silly question.

Sophie reads the next page, "*The dragon hides because it's shy,*" as she pretends to hide her head behind the book.

Sophie asks the children, "Did you see the dragon hiding?"

Stella responds, "Behind those leaves!"

Sophie: "Behind the leaves, Stella, that's right."

Sophie reads the third page of the book, "*The dragon hides behind the shed sometimes.*"

Sophie asks the children, "Have you ever seen the dragon hide behind the shed?"

Inviting Matthew into the conversation, Sophie asks: "Matthew, have you ever seen the dragon hide behind the shed?"

Matthew shouts, "YES!"

Sophie: "You have?"

Sophie reads the next page in a whisper, "*The dragon peeks in a window sometimes.*" Sophie adds, "And the dragon did come close to the windows today."

Kate interrupts, "And one day in the forest room, one day in the forest room, we saw the Springhill dragon. He was hiding behind a tree and I was scared of him."

Sophie asks, "Were you scared of the dragon Kate?"

Kate says, "Yeah. I thought he was a real dragon and he was going to put fire out of his mouth."

Sophie: "OHH!"

Matthew explains, "But when I was only, not one, when I was um, um and I was two, and then I was three, I was still scared, but when I was get older, I, I was getting ready to like the Springhill Dragon."

Sophie asks, "So do you like the dragon now?"

Matthew answers, "Yes, because I'm four." (Notice how the concept of *courage* is being socially-constructed in this exchange.)

Sophie asks Fiona, "What about you? Were you scared of the dragon when you were little?"

Fiona: "When I was three I was."

Sophie: "When you were three you were scared of the dragon?"

Fiona: "Yeah, because my brother was at the school."

Sophie tells Fiona, "I remember when Andres was here." (Because of the long-term retention of faculty at Springhill, most of the teachers know the older siblings.)

Kate: "When I was two I was scared of the Springhill Dragon."

Sophie continues reading the story.

Shortly after finishing the book, several children spot the dragon outside their window.

Grace shouts: "I see it! I saw it!"

Several children move to the window and call out: "Come here Springhill Dragon!"

Children spontaneously start to sing the Springhill Dragon song out the window. "Hey, Springhill Dragon, you look like a friendly dragon. We're so glad to see you and we hope that you are glad too. Hey, Springhill Dragon you look like a friendly dragon. We're so glad to see you…" They continue singing the song.

Several children who suspect that Nicole is the dragon start to sing: "Hey Springhill Nicole, you look like a friendly Nicole…"[75]

Stella, Grace, and Kate decide they would like to make some letters for the dragon. They write notes to the dragon so "it will love us and hug us." The following day Sophie and Jess put out a basket so the girls can deliver their letters to the dragon's mailbox outside. Note how in this kind of environment, children see the value in writing letters and initiate this work on their own. Several days later, Kate creates a map of where she thinks the Springhill Dragon lives. (In doing so, Kate initiates an experience that connects the Springhill Dragon's visit with their ongoing explorations of maps.)

In a further extension of the story, one day after the Springhill Dragon's visit, the children spot a man in the distance doing some electrical work. He is wearing a red shirt and several children are convinced it is the Springhill Dragon. Taking the children's lead, Nicole takes the group on a "Springhill Dragon hunt" to investigate and report back to the larger group. (Note that Nicole doesn't tell the children "That's not the Springhill Dragon!" but instead let's them investigate for themselves.)

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[75] The forest room also developed their own version of the Kook-a-Bura song: "Springhill Dragon sits in the old gum tree…"

The Springhill Dragon was also included in the "Preschool Memory Book" that Alice helped children create as they prepared for their transition to the new school campus. For example, Lizzy, a five-year-old in the Magnolia room, painted the Springhill Dragon in the "cave" and surrounding trees. Lizzy explains: "I would like people to remember my classroom. I want them to remember that everybody says the Springhill Dragon lives in a cave. The cave is hiding behind a big tree. He has a basket that he puts strawberries in. Maybe he has a little strawberry plant, and he picks them" (Retrieved from Atelierista Blog, May 2010).

All of these events suggest the special significance that this deeply rooted tradition holds within the Springhill community, both for children and adults alike. In fact, early in the school year, many parents and teachers shared with me how meaningful and joyous the Springhill Dragon experience is, and strongly suggested that I be there for the Springhill Dragon's visit in May.

The Springhill Dragon tradition contributes to many elements of a democratic community: 1) children are able to overcome their fears within a supportive environment; 2) children's ideas are taken seriously as teachers follow the children's lead in projects that unfold involving the Springhill Dragon (e.g., collecting clues, creating a picture book); 3) children build many hypotheses about the dragon (e.g., where it lives, who it is, what clues it leaves), supporting their growth as critical thinkers; 4) children help shape the tradition as they create new ways of interacting with the dragon (e.g., writing letters, making a gift); 5) children respond to the Springhill Dragon's visit in many creative ways, and are supported by teachers in their imaginings, wonder, and play; 6) children participate in a tradition that is dynamic and evolving along with the people in their

community; and 7) children experience a deepened sense of communal solidarity from the many shared experiences, history, and narratives centered around the dragon.

Pencil Night and Closing Circle. On the last day of the school year, the Springhill preschool classes come together for a closing circle. During this final community gathering, each child is given a special pencil either gold or silver. Gold pencils are for children who are moving on to a new school and silver pencils are for children who are staying at Springhill for another year. Attached to each pencil is a special note written from the child's parents and a photo of a collaborative project that parents have created using repurposed materials during an evening gathering called, "Pencil Night." As Mary explains, both Pencil Night and the Closing Circle have evolved over the years (Interview transcription, November 17, 2009, lines 970-994):

> At the end of the year we have a closing goodbye circle, [an] end of the year circle. And at that circle we give the children pencils…So out of that has evolved a tradition of inviting parents…to write a note on it. And then, parents started making these huge constructions…And then people started bringing toys to attach [to the pencil]. And then we said, "OK! We need to change this." [Laughs] So, we've done it two years in a row now, that we have invited parents [to come] for an evening to create something for the pencil, but we've invited them to create something [collaboratively] that then we photograph and then it goes on every child's pencil and then the [parents] write their own note. So the teachers-- and the parents have created these elaborate constructions out of… repurposed materials and some of them just on a tabletop…Some of them last year in the Rainbow room…had a structure that reached to the ceiling that used all sorts of

things. So that the children had an opportunity to come in and experience it and

draw it and think about their parents having been there and built it for them. And

then, the pencil became a reminder and remembrance of that-- a memory keeper

for that particular experience of the parents being involved in the life of the child

at the school…So it's been a very rich evolution of that experience for us. As

we've tried to figure it out. It became-- that's a place where competition entered.

And while the people that were creating these toy-like things probably didn't feel

particularly competitive about it, other people felt really daunted by it and then

started purchasing things and then children…in the circle were receiving gifts and

so. Anyway. Yeah, it's a bit challenging.

So with this particular tradition, a problem arose as the task of creating a special

remembrance token for children started to become a competitive and stressful project for

many of the parents. However, by staying attuned to the needs of the community,

reflecting on the tradition, and revisiting the ultimate goals and values that guide their

practice, the Springhill faculty were able to collaboratively problem-solve and develop an

even richer process and more meaningful end-of-year project for children and families.

To illustrate the collaborative shift that occurred, I will share the following

example from the 2009-2010 Gardenia room.[76] For that year's Pencil Night project, the

parents were encouraged to work collaboratively, rather than individually to make a

miniature Gardenia classroom out of recycled materials. Sophie and Jess asked the

parents to "create our classroom through your child's eyes." The resulting Pencil Night

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[76] For another example, see Rainbow Room's "Pencil Night" documentation in Appendix O

project and reaction from the children is described by Sophie in the following

documentation (May 16, 2010):

PENCIL NIGHT

The children have really enjoyed the 3-D map of the classroom that you created during Pencil Night.

They reacted to this miniature classroom with surprise and delight and they spent a long time examining all the details: from the tiny Bilibos to the reproduction of the kitchen area -- they were thrilled to see familiar objects reproduced in miniature form. They all enjoyed finding where their doll was placed in the "classroom". One of the really delightful aspects of Pencil Night is that it is a collaborative project, and so although not all of the parents could attend everyone made sure that all of the children were included in the miniature classroom.

While working on this project, several parents commented on how difficult it is to create objects in a different scale. We have also noticed that some children seem to be particularly aware of the problems of scale – Oscar was concerned that the miniature art table was not large enough to be accurate. Many of the children have been working in the Studio to create a large map of the Gardenia Room and Oscar has been focusing on creating the art table on this map.

Oscar remarked that the miniature art table that the parents had created was not big enough. However, Zach knew that his mother had worked on making this art table and he was reluctant to change the table. He suggested that "well maybe that table could just pretend that it's big".

They agreed to compromise by placing a larger table beside the small one.

We invited the children to take a photograph of their paper doll.

We also asked the children if there were things that were missing from this reproduction of the classroom. They immediately started suggesting things that could be added and several children began making items to add.

Kate and Grace made more tiny baby dolls. Perhaps inspired by the smaller scale they used tiny, high voices when playing with these little dolls.

Oscar used birdseed to make thinking pens for the miniature art table

Several children made more Bilibos.

This reproduction of the classroom has also helped the children think more about the large map of the classroom that they are working on in the studio. Alice brought the large map in for circle one day and the children were able to generate a list of things that they still need to include in the map. Having a 3-D model of the classroom was a great way to prompt the children to think more about the geography of our classroom.

This documentation provides a good example of the kind of rich experiences that have emerged out of Pencil Night projects. Pencil Night projects contribute to a

democratic ethos at Springhill in many ways: 1) while collaborating on this project, parents are able to build connections with other families; 2) the process helps parents consider the classroom experience from the perspective of all the children, sending a powerful message that, "we look out for all children in our class, not just our own;" 3) in this case, the 3-D map served as a catalyst for children's negotiations and problem solving (e.g., Zach and Oscar negotiate over the art table); 4) the project created an interactive space for back-and-forth collaboration between parents and children (e.g., the children decided that they needed to add fruit to the snack table to represent "Fruit Fridays"; and 5) Sophie and Jess intentionally relate the Pencil night project to children's explorations of size, scale, photography, and mapping, resulting in deeper thinking, discussion, and inquiry in the classroom.

In a democratic community, parents must continually be challenged to think not only in terms of "what's best for my child?," but also "what is in the best interests of all of the children in the group." In turn, when parents can authentically model concern for the group, their children receive a clear message about the importance of taking care of others. For example, following Pencil Night the children were eager to share with me the miniature 3-D map of the Gardenia room that their parents created (May 12, 2010). Duke invites me over to show me some of the details. During the tour, Duke explains to me: "My mom made this little baby. She did, she made it for Kate, because she knew Kate loved babies. Yeah, and me too." Notice how this project not only helps shift parents thinking, but as a result, it cultivates children's disposition to consider other children's interests and feelings as well.

Other traditions. There are other traditions in the Springhill community one of which is the "Portraits of Mothers" created by children each year as a mother's day gift. Mary (personal communication, November 17, 2009) explains:

> There's also mother's day, which there's been a history of giving something to mothers for mother's day. But in recent years when we've been inspired by Reggio, we've invited children…to draw portraits of their mothers. And so we take pictures of the mothers and invite children to think about that so the parent-- the mothers have a series of portraits that the children have made of them over the course of their time here. [See Appendix P, "Portrait of Mothers" for more details on this tradition.]

Although all of the Gardenia room children lived with their mothers in traditional nuclear families, it should be noted that this tradition could unintentionally normalize and privilege certain family compositions and unwittingly alienate children living in a more non-traditional family structure (e.g., having a stepmom, or two dads, and/or no mother involvement). From a democratic perspective provisions or adjustments to this special tradition may need to be considered to make sure that children from all types of diverse families are included.

Two other traditions worth noting are the Springhill community campout with families and teachers on the school grounds each fall, and the Birthday circles as discussed briefly in chapter five.

Conclusion

Do children grow to see themselves as actively constructing the world in which they live, or do they see themselves merely as navigating their way through a largely

predetermined world that is impervious to change? Are young children given the opportunity to build an internal locus of control, or are they conditioned to be passive and have an external locus of control? In the approach taken to rituals and traditions in the Springhill community, it is clear that in this community, children are empowered to be more than passive consumers, but rather active producers of the social structures around which their lives are organized.

In this chapter, I have attempted to demonstrate that there is a strong connection between Springhill's democratic mission and the routines, rituals, and traditions within the school. That is, in a school where learning is not a product but an active process which is grounded in social relationships and depends on respect for students, it is appropriate that rituals and traditions bear the stamp of communal co-construction.

I will conclude with several themes that emerge from the routines, rituals, and traditions within the Springhill community. Springhill traditions, routines, and rituals are:

- dynamic and evolving in order to meet needs of the community

- based on a deep respect and strong image of both adults and children

- supportive of children's sense of agency throughout the learning experiences

- focused upon building connections, relationships, and collaboration

- socially constructed in a way that values everyone's voice and a diversity of opinions

- conducive to the sharing of identity-shaping narratives and feelings of communal solidarity

- based upon careful observation, inquiry, and reflection of life in the Springhill community, so as to take advantage of the unique capabilities and identities of Springhill community members

- carefully planned to allow children engagement, freedom, and shared responsibility

- antithetical to conventional traditions that are often dominated by prepackaged, passive, consumer-driven celebrations that allow for little uniqueness, creativity, innovation, or originality on the parts of adults and children.[77]

The significance of these rituals and traditions was communicated to me by faculty and families across the school. During my interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators, they describe the end of year's closing circle and picnic as a very emotional experience. It seems when the traditions and rituals emerge within the community with all members involved in shaping them (e.g., symbols, room arrangement, documentation, Springhill dragon, intentions), there becomes a community investment that seems to be well beyond that which I have observed at other preschool programs.

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[77] In addition, when based on religious traditions they often alienate subgroups within the community.

CHAPTER 7

DEMOCRATIC LEARNING COMMUNITIES: WHERE EVERYONE TEACHES AND EVERYONE LEARNS

In a well-functioning, democratic learning community, all citizens have opportunities for growth and support as lifelong learners. In this chapter, I discuss how teachers, parents, and children participate together in Springhill's community-wide learning processes; situate this type of learning community within a constructivist framework; and share examples of how this learning community shapes parents' and teachers' thinking.

Children and Adults Learning From and Teaching Each Other

May 21, 2009

Oscar and Stella are working at the writing table when Stella asks Oscar, "What are you writing Oscar?"

Oscar replies, "I'm not writing, I'm drawing."

The teacher says, "What are you drawing, Oscar?"

He answers: "I'm drawing a violin."

Stella says, "I want to draw a violin too."

The teacher asks Oscar if he would show Stella how to draw a violin. He agrees and the teacher encourages him to start a new drawing. Oscar shares his expertise with enthusiasm while Stella listens and watches intently.

Then Stella draws her violin and says, "I did it!"

In a democratic preschool environment, children are encouraged to learn from all members of the school community, including fellow classmates. The above excerpt from documentation created by the 2008-2009 Forest room teachers (placed in both Stella's and Oscar's portfolio) serves as one such example. A few other examples of Springhill's culture of collaboration discussed in previous chapters include the following: Oscar teaches Kate how to sharpen a pencil; Zach teaches Duke how to write the word "mommy;" Duke shares his expertise about an x-ray machine; Matthew helps his friends put on coats and shoes; Kate shares her discovery about the camera lens; and Larry helps Orson peel an orange. A democratic learning community that encourages such "horizontal" sharing of knowledge and expertise clearly sits in sharp contrast to the "traditional hierarchy of teacher as the autocratic knower and [the] learner as the unknowing, controlled subject [merely] studying to learn what the teacher knows" (Fosnot, 1996, p. ix).

In the following excerpt from an article posted on Springhill at Stonewood's website and entitled, "We Each Teach" (Ferguson, 2010), Sophie (the Gardenia room teacher) provides insight into the thinking behind Springhill's educational philosophy:

[E]very person, regardless of age, is not only a capable learner, but also a capable teacher. Age is not the crucial factor – what counts is the possession of some knowledge or skill that can be shared with others. The idea that knowledge and understanding are constructed in collaboration with others is a cornerstone of our educational philosophy.

…This emphasis on children learning from each other – what we term social learning – pays off because we know that social learning leads to cognitive

development. As children mature and develop, so does the sophistication of their interactions – nurturing and modeling become mentoring and tutoring, which creates a subtle but significant paradigm shift in the classroom. The classroom invariably becomes *more democratic* and *less hierarchical* when we view children as teachers as well as learners: learning becomes a reciprocal experience where everyone has a responsibility for the teaching and learning that is taking place. This climate of co-operation is beneficial to both children and adults. When children teach newly-learned skills to other children, it consolidates their own learning and strengthens understanding. In addition, children in a teaching role develop important leadership skills. Those children who are learning from their peers are likely to engage in more complex activities than they might otherwise attempt. Such a learning environment makes it possible for the work of the adult teacher to be concentrated where it is most needed.

…We consider this an essential part of the collaborative work that takes place in our school. Making teaching and learning a reciprocal experience creates a strong sense of community – a place where we each teach. (para. 2-8)

Cross-age learning and teaching: Making a Batman's tail the "Oscar way."
Beyond individual classrooms, cross-age collaborations are encouraged. Recall how Valerie (4-year-old in the Rainbow room) teaches the Forest room children (2- and 3-year-olds) how to use her gumball toy and how the Forest room children reciprocate by showing her some of their inventions with the gumball toy. Or, recall how Mel and Ashley (5-year-olds) work together to help Lila (3-year-old) make a clown hat to wear.

Cross-age collaborations include adults within the community too. The following excerpt from "Doing Things That Are Hard," an entry posted on Alice's "Atelierista: Stories from the Studio" blog (February 16, 2010), highlights this mutually supportive and reciprocal learning environment.

One day, Oscar came to the studio with a note that said "Do you have any Batman pictures?"
I showed him my binder full of pictures of heroes. He found a couple of Batman pictures, and brought them to the Gardenia room to finish the picture he must have been working on.

Later, he came back with the same note. It now said, "Can I cut one of the Batman pictures out?" He wanted to cut "A Batman", which is what he called the bat symbol, out of one of the pictures in the binder. I told him he couldn't do that, but that I could show him how to draw the bat symbol.
I showed him how to start with a sort of 'M' shape. He followed along, though it was hard. You can see some of his tries on the front and back of the note. He had trouble with some parts, and began to get frustrated. Many times he said he couldn't do it. Valerie told him that "you have to just keep doing things, sometimes you have to try a lot of times, then you learn it."
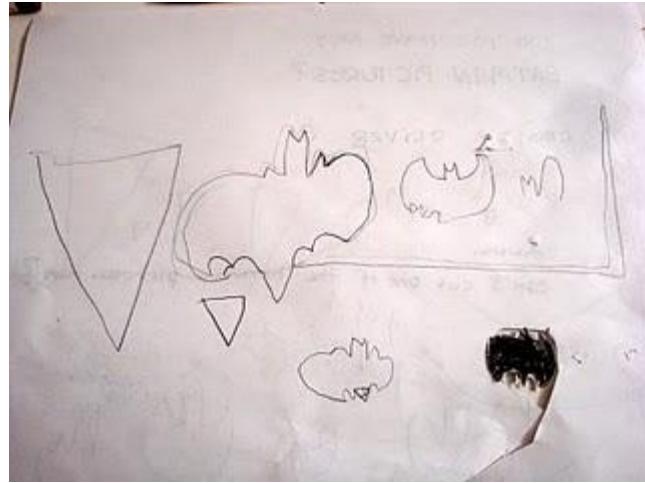
That gave Oscar new energy to keep trying. After he finally figured out how to draw the pointy tips of the wings, Oscar took me aside. "I don't like the big triangle you make", he said. He showed me how to make a shorter triangle for the tail piece. I learned how to make a shorter tail, the Oscar way.

Then, he colored and cut out one of the bat symbols, and brought it back to his room.

In Alice's documentation, we see Oscar follow his own agenda, but within a social context where both Valerie and Alice are able to serve as facilitators of Oscar's learning. Further, the *reciprocal* nature of this type of learning community allows adults and children to be comfortable in both roles of learner *and* teacher. So in the above example, Alice and Oscar reverse roles when he teaches her how to make a shorter tail the "Oscar way."

Children, teachers, and parents learning together. Springhill teachers regularly provide documentation and experiences that invite parents to learn about children's work and see situations from the child's point of view, which, as the following Magnolia room teacher's documentation shows, can lead to a deeper appreciation and

understanding of children's (often under-estimated) powers of observation, analysis and creativity.[78]

Parents and Children Learning Together: Drawing

DRAWING US TOGETHER

Focusing on drawing was not an intention for our classroom as we started the year, but it has certainly become a dominant feature for the group of children. We had an idea to have the children draw during circle one day when princess talk was so big in our room and we were reading stories like *The Rough Faced Girl*. The children loved drawing all in a group as they listened to a story, and so we continued the practice reading myths and other tales. We have seen this willingness to draw and their facility develop as the year has gone on. Some children were already comfortable drawing but not everyone. One child who was very reluctant to draw at all in the beginning now chooses to draw most every day. It has become a source of joy for him, a tool, and a language.

Observational drawing is a practice that we usually employ every year, in all the classrooms. We invite children to slow down and look carefully at an object. It takes practice (even for adults) to draw what you really see instead of what you want about a thing. Which features are visible from a particular angle and which aren't? We encourage the children to notice details and to look closely at parts to notice where elements are in relation to each other. Early on a child's drawing may contain many disconnected parts, but as they develop, they begin to position the parts on the page relative to each other, placement becomes meaningful. We began observational drawing back in October with Mr. Bones, our skeleton model. Now we set up an object everyday for observational drawing…

Drawing together-

While reading some Greek myths, we used our stage as a low table and had the children draw on a large piece of paper. This became a community activity that the children would stay with for an extended time. One day we offered a large piece of paper to a child to make an oversized drawing, and when others wanted to join, he

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[78] As parents are invited to regularly think together, alongside the faculty, certain images of children will inevitably emerge, such as their being capable of deep thinking and sustained project work. Without teacher's intentionality of including parents in the process, it is likely that this would not be accomplished. (See "Parent and Faculty Discourse: A Child's Eye View" in chapter 5 and "Friendships and Play Dates" in chapter 9, for two more examples.)

happily invited everyone in. We wondered if sharing a large piece of paper and making work together as a group had become a natural and enjoyable activity.

(represent - to present again or anew)

We also used drawing to have the children recall our field trip to the church a couple days after going. This meant translating an experience into visible form. The drawing show many varied impressions of that same experience. Rita's drawing includes several children (notice the dialogue bubbles), teachers and objects that she noticed. Stella made a map of the entire school including hallways, stairs and the parking lot. In total, the drawing recalled objects, parts of the experience (trying to lure the mouse), spatial awareness, interpersonal connections, and nature. We ended up with a window into each child's experience and an understanding that we might not have the privilege of any other way.

Drawing has become many things, a language through which these children represent their ideas and understandings, a way of connecting with others, a method for settling into the room, and a vehicle for processing new information. And for the teachers and parents, it is also a window through which we can better come to know these children.

PARENTS EXPLORE CHILDREN'S DRAWINGS

We invited parents to recreate one of their children's drawings. We hoped that this would allow them to notice things about their child's work that a cursory look would miss.

We also wanted them to leave a record of that focused attention for the children to see [including the following two parent quotations.]

"*One thing I loved about drawing his drawing was how I saw things in the lines like the ear shape that is part of the guitar on the right side and also the details of lines and tuning pegs. It has a three dimensional look and seems to ring a big sound when I look at it because of the broad, amble neck and the depth he sketched in the body. The contrast of the traced one on the right side interested me also since it was so much flatter. His guitar drawing reminded me of his cello. I wonder if his cello knowledge informed this drawing and if he'd thought about the similarities between the instruments. You ask whether he worked quickly and I do not know. This question as well as the experience of copying his work made me realize how we have missed time drawing together. Sketching is not something that I think of doing very often. Luckily I have a boy who can help me see.*"

"*What struck me immediately when I finished my copy of Rita's drawing is that even though I had tried to reproduce it faithfully, mine lacked the joy and exuberance of*

hers (especially the stained glass window). I also had a much finer appreciation for the detail her drawings are starting to have."

This documentation highlights the ways in which parents are invited to think more deeply about children's work and, in turn, develop a greater appreciation and respect for that work. Arguably, it is only when children's work is respected, understood, and engaged by parents in this way, that children can be seen as co-equal citizens of a democratic learning community. By offering an opportunity for parents to recreate their children's work, teachers help parents to engage the *process* of children's learning in a way that is atypical of most early childhood programs (where parents generally encounter little more than a finished product or an "objective" assessment). Instead, at Springhill, parents are asked to slow down, reflect, notice the details of their children's work (e.g., details of Rita's work and joy), make connections between experiences (cello & guitar similarity), and, in the process, participate authentically in a non-hierarchical, democratic learning community.[79]

In another example of parents' entering the process of children's learning, during an interview with Sue, a Magnolia room parent, she explains how her perspective on children's learning has evolved over the years as a result of being part of the Springhill learning community (personal communication, June 3, 2010):

There are so many times in life when a kid just cannot have any control over the direction of the day, or the hour, or the activity and...I'm pretty organized. I'm

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[79] As Nanette and Sally point out in their documentation, they leave the parents recreations of their children's drawings displayed for the children to see. In the reciprocal nature of this type of learning process, seeing their parent's work perhaps inspires even more reflection and further work by the children, extending their learning yet again. In addition, when children see their parents focused attention to their work a message is clearly communicated to the children that they are co-equal participants with their parents in this democratic learning community.

pretty goal-oriented…So Rita [her daughter] and I will sit down to paint a trash

can and I think probably three years ago, I would have set down the trash can and

said how the trash can [should/could] be painted. Insisted it was going to be

painted with the paints that I chose for her to paint…Not intentionally trying to be

mean about it, but just sort of the idea of a place to go…[But] watching the way

Springhill [teachers] would let her decide to put tissues on the trash can, or paint

the inside of the trash can, or the outside of the trash can, or just allow her

creativity to determine more of the project, when it's possible.

So, as a result of her exposure to Springhill's non-hierarchical approach, Sue has learned

not to predetermine the outcome of Rita's projects at home, but rather to allow her

daughter to participate in the decision-making and creative process.

To illustrate her growing awareness of how children learn and the creativity,

critical thinking, and motivation that can arise when children are allowed the freedom to

create their own representations, Sue (personal communication, June 3, 2010) shares the

following story:

I had a really interesting experience with Rita and a bunch of other preschool

kids. We were on vacation with three other families over spring break two years

ago and one of the other moms had brought a craft and it was paper plates and

you were supposed to draw a flower on the paper plate and then put a…pipe

cleaner through the bottom to be the stem and all the other kids, you know, very

patiently took their paper plates and drew their flowers and put their stem on and

Rita made -- she got like ten pipe cleaners and made them into petals around the

paper plate and then made the stem coming out of the middle of the paper plate

instead of down from the bottom so it was a three dimensional thing…And the mom was like, "No Rita. That's not the way you do the project"…You know? And…I've had probably half a dozen instances like that. I mean, I would love to think that Rita's inherently genius and creative, but I think that's really been nurtured by Springhill. So that kind of thing, like letting her. I mean, honestly I probably would be the mom who would be like, "No Rita, that's not what we're doing in this project" and I really learned to say, "That's a really awesome way to think of something that I hadn't come up with" and, "great job," just sort of more flexibility…And there's just a lot of really practical advice about teaching like you don't have to correct their spelling. When they're really precocious and they're learning how to write when they're four. Don't correct them. They don't need it. They'll figure it out on their own…Just like really practical examples like that. (Interview transcription, lines 646-670)

What started as a well-intentioned craft project that offered little more than a lesson in following instructions, instead turned into a creative project in which Rita was able to invent her own representation of a flower. As a result of being part of Springhill's community of learners, Sue's growing awareness about how children learn shifts the way she approaches learning experiences with Rita and in the process opens up new possibilities for Rita's critical thinking, creativity, enjoyment, and overall growth.

A Constructivist Perspective of Learning: Situating Springhill's Learning Community within a Constructivist Framework

To fully describe Springhill as a community of learners, it is necessary to first understand the underlying theories of knowledge and learning that inform their approach

to teaching. The theory that most reflects Springhill faculty's work stems from a

constructivist perspective. As defined in *Constructivism: Theory, Perspectives, &*

Practice, Fosnot (1996, p. ix) explains:

> [T]he theory [of constructivism] describes *knowledge* as temporary,
>
> developmental, nonobjective, internally constructed, and socially and culturally
>
> mediated. *Learning* from this perspective is viewed as a self-regulatory process
>
> of struggling with the conflict between existing personal models of the world and
>
> discrepant new insights, constructing new representations and models of reality as
>
> human meaning-making venture with culturally developed tools and symbols, and
>
> further negotiating such meaning through cooperative social activity, discourse,
>
> and debate.

It should be emphasized that constructivism is *not* a description of teaching but

rather a theory about knowledge and learning. In the following section of this chapter, I

will situate the Springhill community of learners within a constructivist framework. For

organizational purposes, I will use five general principles of learning derived from

constructivism, as outlined by Fosnot. In addition, I will discuss examples of how these

learning experiences emerge from the daily life of the classroom and school community.

> **Principle one.**
>
> Learning is not the result of development; learning *is* development. It requires
>
> invention and self-organization on the part of the learner. Thus teachers need to
>
> allow learners to raise their own questions, generate their own hypotheses and
>
> models as possibilities, and test them for viability. (Fosnot, 1996, p. 29)

There are numerous examples of the above learning principle in action within the Springhill community. In fact, a significant amount of time each day is spent engaged in raising questions, generating hypotheses, and testing out different possibilities. As discussed in both chapters 4 and 5, children explore many questions and hypotheses, such as: *Where is the creek water coming from? Where is it going? How do you make pink? How do we make an x-ray?* Teachers support both individual and groups of children as they test, refine, revisit, and innovate in an ongoing learning process. This type of learning requires space and freedom for children to try out various solutions to their problems and queries. For example, recall in chapter 4, Kate and Larry encounter a problem while playing the snail game (e.g., "Who is going to throw the dice first?"). Instead of imposing a solution for the children, Nicole supports Larry and Kate as they discuss several possibilities and negotiate their own innovative solution (e.g., both children will hold on to the dice and shake it together). Or, as described in chapter 5, recall children's year-long explorations centered on photography as they continuously develop, revisit, and refine various theories about how a camera works. As children test out their theories, they assimilate new understandings with prior belief systems and re-organize these new meanings to fit with their shifting perspectives. Ideally, this dynamic learning process continues indefinitely and sets a path for lifelong learning.[80]

Adults in the Springhill community also take part in this type of learning process. Recall teachers' action research projects in which teachers develop questions for sustained, collaborative research and study (e.g., exploring questions around children's

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[80] As suggested by several recent research studies (Dangwal, 2011; Mitra, 2005), children, as human beings, are naturally capable of putting themselves in self-organizing systems. During my interview with Sophie, she shared her interest and study on this topic of schools as sites of self-organizing systems.

sense of place as part of the school-wide "Umbrella Project" as discussed in chapter 5, and teachers' yearly individual and classroom intentions as described in chapter 6). Further, by sharing their learning through group discussions and documentation, teachers make meaning and build shared understandings with the other adults in the community. These processes underscore the built-in systems for teachers' ongoing professional development that help support a community of learners. By modeling this type of approach for parents and engaging them in the discourse (e.g., parent dialogues, blogs), the teachers invite parents into the learning process. (See, "Shifting Perspectives: Sue's Story" subsection of this chapter, for another example of how questions and topics of inquiry within the Springhill community generate shifts in thinking and require the reorganization of past belief systems with newly co-constructed knowledge for *all* members of the community, including the adults.)

Principle two.

Disequilibrium facilitates learning. 'Errors' need to be perceived as a result of learners' conceptions and therefore not minimized or avoided. Challenging, open-ended investigations in realistic, meaningful contexts need to be offered, thus allowing learners to explore and generate many possibilities, affirming and contradictory. Contradictions, in particular, need to be illuminated, explored, and discussed. (Fosnot, p. 29)

Again, throughout this dissertation there have been many examples of children's misconceptions or contradictions being used as a starting point to facilitate further learning. Recall in chapter 5 the following exchange:

The children shift into a conversation about children's ages and start to make correlations between age and height. Lila explains that she and Kate *must* be the same height because they are the same age (both 4-years-old). Abigail rejects this theory and insists that she is taller. Lila explains to Abigail, "you can't be taller than me because I'm four-years-old," and Kate supports Lila's position saying: "I already know that Abigail, Lila and me are the same size." Sophie listens to them discuss their hypotheses and debate for several minutes without intervening or giving the "correct" answer. However, once snack is complete, Sophie invites them to test out their theories. She gets out a yardstick and helps them measure each child's height for comparison. In this way children have the opportunity to revisit and revise their initial hypotheses.

Instead of correcting children's errors, Sophie provides support for them to investigate their theories, wrestle with the contradictions, and take ownership of their learning process.

Several times I observed teachers pointing out their own mistakes to children. In the process, teachers both model the attitude that "everybody makes mistakes," and encourage trial-and-error learning in the classroom. As the revered political thinker Mohandas Gandhi puts it, "Freedom is not worth having if it does not connote freedom to err. It passes my comprehension how human beings, be they ever so experienced and able, can delight in depriving other human beings of that precious right."

In a community where "everyone teaches and everyone learns," the advantages of disequilibrium hold true for the adults in the community as well. Mary and Lisa (Springhill administrators) understand that trying new teaching approaches and

innovations involves taking risks, making mistakes, and wrestling with a certain amount of cognitive disequilibrium, all of which are necessary, and inevitable parts, of an authentic learning process. Alice explains (personal communication, December 16, 2009, lines 584-594):

> [T]hat's a huge difference [with our community] I think--that we don't have to justify the outcome before we do something. We can just see how it goes and the administration… [says] that "if it doesn't work out for one thing, we'll all learn from it." But, we'll also try it again a different way. So, that makes us move kind of slowly through things, but hopefully with more true learning for grownups and for kids. That's a really big difference [compared to traditional preschool programs].

Sophie mirrors this sentiment during our interview. She points out that one of the exciting things about working at Springhill is being part of a faculty that is able to continuously change and improve their program. As she explains (personal communication, November 3, 2009):

> [It's] sort of like a metamorphosis…and we're always trying to refine our practice and just you know, *learn from our mistakes* and *learn from the things that we have succeeded in*. So I feel like we are learning a lot *by* the children and that's a really important thing. (lines 106-111)

This type of learning environment requires teachers to have a significant amount of trust and openness with fellow colleagues and administrators, along with a certain amount of vulnerability and willingness to let go of the need to *control* outcomes.

Is this type of adult learning possible in a competitive teaching environment where teachers are judged on discrete and measurable "learning outcomes"? In all likelihood, the-answer to this question is that teachers who are situated in a performance-based, competitive type of environment will be hesitant to try innovative approaches, take risks, or engage community members in discussion and brainstorming, for fear of punitive consequences and repercussions if their ideas do not work out as planned (e.g., shame, reprimands, loss of performance-based or merit pay, and in the worst case termination of employment). By implication, this more traditional approach carries with it a diminished image of the teacher, stunts the motivation of teachers to continue developing their craft, and offers little incentive for teachers to stay in the field.

By contrast, when teachers are in a nonhierarchical, relationship-based, democratic community of learners, a much stronger image emerges—the teacher as trustworthy and capable collaborative researcher and learner. Teachers who are viewed this way are free to take risks, raise questions for study and research, garner community input, continue to improve upon their practice, and share valuable learning with the community. And in terms of constructivism, this process begins with the assumption that contradictions and errors resulting from pedagogical experimentation are not a bad thing, but rather a necessary, albeit challenging, component of the self-correcting process of improving one's craft.

Principle three.

Reflective abstraction is the driving force of learning. As meaning-makers, humans seek to organize and generalize across experiences in a representational form. Allowing reflection time through journal writing, representation in multi-

symbolic form, and/or discussion of connections across experiences or strategies may facilitate reflective abstraction. (Fosnot, p. 29)

As described in chapter 5, the Gardenia room children engage in project work throughout the year by participating in ongoing activity, discourse, and representational work. In the process, children co-construct new meanings and shared understandings while weaving a tapestry of connected threads across varied experiences. For example, an initial circle discussion about x-rays and bones spurs Duke to develop a theory about a "mouse x-ray machine" the following day. He shares his thinking with Sophie and she encourages him to draw a picture of the machine on paper. In the process of creating and sharing his representation of the x-ray machine, Duke makes a connection between cameras and x-ray machines both taking photographs, a linkage that had not yet been discovered by the larger group. Further, when he shares this theory during closing circle, it sparks Evelyn to 1) reflect more deeply on her initial representation of her brother's x-ray machine (or "calculator"), 2) revise her initial theories of how the machine works, and 3) make a new connection between the x-ray machine and their earlier experiences creating cyanotypes ("sun prints").[81] Thus children's representational work in multi-symbolic forms (e.g., drawing, map-making, clay work, storytelling, dance) allows them as "meaning-makers" to reflect upon previous experiences, express ideas, think abstractly, make connections, develop more nuanced perspectives, deepen their understandings, coordinate their new knowledge with existing schema, and develop a platform for further thinking and discussion.

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[81] A photographic process used for creating blueprints (for further detail, see Alice's blog documentation, Appendix K).

In addition, when children work on collaborative projects, they must consider how individual parts are connected to the whole, requiring yet another layer of reflection and abstraction. For example, consider the large classroom map the Gardenia room children created as a collaborative, culminating project for the year. Each child had to 1) figure out how to symbolically represent specific parts of the classroom; 2) consider how and where their individual representations would fit within the larger context of the classroom map as a whole; and 3) negotiate the size and scale of their individual drawings so that they will correspond with other children's representations to accurately reflect the classroom space. In this process of reflection and representation, children's learning both individually and as a group moves forward.

Consider too, how the Springhill children create multi-symbolic representations of objects and concepts of inquiry. For example, while exploring the "forest" and "leaves" in the Rainbow room multiple types of media were used including clay, drawing materials, painting materials, tracing materials, recyclable materials, photography, sewing, and storytelling. So how do these multiple forms of symbolization impact learning? When children create a leaf out of embroidery materials, they may consider details such as the color and vein patterns. However, when children use clay to represent a leaf they may consider the 3-dimensional aspects of a leaf and/or the corresponding front-and-back veins of the leaf. Or, let's say the children create a story about the leaves. This may lead them to consider leaves in the context of the forest, in the changes of color that occur over time, in the leaves' relation to the rest of the tree, or perhaps in the context of their own imaginative and whimsical tales. Finally, if children chart the leaves' evolution on a tree throughout the school year in their journal, they may consider

yet another aspect of leaves, such as the dynamic nature of objects, growth patterns, and life/death issues. Each time a child uses a different medium to represent an object or idea under study; he/she must attend to new details and consider varied perspectives of the object. In the process, children gain more nuanced understandings and learning progresses.

It should also be noted that the reflective abstraction that drives learning is also supported by the multiple tools and strategies children use while investigating a topic of inquiry. For example, as the Gardenia room children had many opportunities to explore camera lenses, microscopes, magnifying glasses, telescopes and binoculars, they were able to make connections between these tools and their related purposes in image manipulation (e.g., making things appear bigger, smaller, closer and farther away).

Principle four.

Dialogue within a community engenders further thinking. The classroom needs to be seen as a "community of discourse engaged in activity, reflection, and conversation" (Fosnot, 1989). The learners (rather than the teacher) are responsible for defending, proving, justifying, and communicating their ideas to the classroom community. Ideas are accepted as truth only insofar as they make sense to the community and thus rise to the level of 'taken-as-shared." (Fosnot, 1996, p. 29-30)

The following excerpt from a piece of documentation from the Rainbow room, titled "Painting" (February 5, 2010), offers an example of this fourth constructivist principle of learning in action:

Tonya, Franklin and Nathan were interested in painting. I asked them to draw their ideas for their paintings. Tonya said she wanted to paint on the table while the boys wanted to paint on the easel. Nathan's plan: "When tree cutting guys were here. This is the machine that cut the tree and this is the one that shreds it up." Tonya tells me about her plan: "My mom is picking me up and my sister and dad is with me." Franklin's plan: "Square ones are caterpillars and round ones are worms." Tonya worked very carefully on her painting, paying close attention to details like hair color. Nathan got into making marks with the different color paints. He decided to deviate from his original plan and create the inside engine of one of the trucks. He also showed the top of the truck and the bottom with the wheels. Franklin was very excited about painting.

Franklin enjoyed the movement of his whole arm while making the multicolor grass beside his caterpillars and worms. Nathan asked Franklin where his caterpillars and worms were in his painting. He was not able to see them. Tonya and Nathan helped him figure out what he needed to do so that we could see them clearly. They talked about the grass that they were on. They noticed you could see the grass through them. We talked about if our hand was on the ground, could we see the ground through our hand? They came up with painting in the worms and caterpillars.

In this exchange, the teachers ask the children to draw out their "plan" for painting. In doing so, they lay the foundation for children's later discourse and extended thinking. As Forman explains (1996, p. 179), "A plan is a symbol that carries implications for the execution of action. It is more than a representation of static features of an object."

Further, "the plan is read as a set of instructions for action, and this allows another child

to join into the process of symbolization and discourse with the first child" (pp. 179-80).

At Springhill, children are regularly encouraged to make plans prior to executing their

ideas. In this case, Franklin's idea to create worms, visible on his initial plan but not

visible when he uses paint as his medium, serves as a catalyst for the children's

discourse, reflection, and collaborative problem-solving. This rich learning experience

may not have occurred without having a plan as a referent to provoke Nathan's question

and certainly not if the culture of the classroom community had not already been

established as a "community of discourse engaged in activity, reflection, and

conversation."[82]

Discourse in the Springhill community includes the adult learners too. For

example, Terra and Gina share this piece of documentation with Springhill faculty and

parents. Mary (the early childhood director) responds by email (February 5, 2010):

> Gina and Terra, This story reveals so clearly how moving an idea from one
>
> medium (drawing in this case) to another (painting) helps to increase and
>
> highlight the possibility of learning inherent in an experience. Franklin makes a
>
> drawing of worms but when he translates this into paint he is inspired by the
>
> sensory experience of painting to add the landscape. Sometimes the teacher takes
>
> the next step here but because the children were observing carefully and are
>
> comfortable talking about each others' work, the problem emerges. Nathan points

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[82] It should be noted too, that Gina and Terra's documentation also serves as an example of the learning principles previously discussed-- Franklin's painting error brings about cognitive disequilibrium, discussion, reflection and finally solutions (second principle). Franklin must make new considerations when he moves from one medium (pens) to a new medium (paint) to represent his worms (third principle).

out to Franklin the worms aren't visible since he has added the grass. So the

children have an opportunity to wrestle with a problem that could have been

inferred in the drawing but only became truly visible in the additions brought

about in this new medium. Not only does this story share a classic approach to

working across media but the photos are gorgeous. Thanks for this close-up view

of the classroom.

When Mary shares her response to this piece of documentation, she sparks further adult

discourse adding another layer of "meaning-making" and thinking together as a group.

This type of collaborative learning is not encouraged in most traditional preschool

environments. In contrast, feedback from traditional program administrators is often

given to teachers in the form of yearly/bi-yearly performance reviews (often featuring

rating scales of 1 to 5). Certainly, this type of assessment creates little room for

constructive feedback. Instead it often encourages either empty praise and/or negative

feelings, neither of which encourages teacher's growth and learning.

As Mary points out, for *children* to communicate and to learn from each other

there has to be a classroom community that models, supports, and cultivates this type of

collaboration on a daily basis.[83] The various school rituals and routines discussed

throughout this dissertation were designed to encourage community discourse at all

levels.[84]

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[83] In addition, children's previous experiences observing, color mixing and representing meaningful objects in different media makes this type of focused work possible.
[84] Some examples include parent circles, weekly faculty meetings, children's circles, and documentation, all of which are arranged to encourage discussion and thinking together about various questions and topics of inquiry.

Principle five. "Learning proceeds toward the development of structures. As learners struggle to make meaning, progressive structural shifts in perspective are constructed—in a sense, 'big ideas' (Schifter & Foster, 1993). These 'big ideas' are learner-constructed, central organizing principles that can be generalized across experiences and that often require the undoing or reorganizing of earlier conceptions. This process continues throughout development." (Fosnot, 1996, p. 30)

To fully describe this principle of constructivist learning and how it reflects Springhill's community of learners, I will start with a piece of documentation from the Gardenia room's exploration of maps (April 18, 2010):

PERSONAL GEOGRAPHY: MAPPING OURSELVES

Map making is an important form of graphic representation for young children and it is something we see children undertaking from a very early age. Maps are a record of how we make sense of space around us and so it is not surprising that maps hold great appeal for young children.

Children's maps are often highly subjective explorations of self and surroundings. Their representations reflect personal experience and interests. Maps created by young children do not necessarily conform to the conventions of adult maps. Children's maps provide us with a glimpse into how they are developing a sense of their own personal geography.

Orson's
"Star Wars Lego Map"

One day **Duke** announced that his fingers have names: on his left hand his fingers are named *Fred, George, Crookshanks, Scabbers* and *Harry Potter* (all characters from the Harry Potter books), while the fingers on his right hand are all called Bob!

Earlier that morning children had been tracing around their hands and so when **Duke** told everyone at circle about his fingers having names the children were very keen to draw around their hands and name their fingers. They referred to these drawings as "maps".
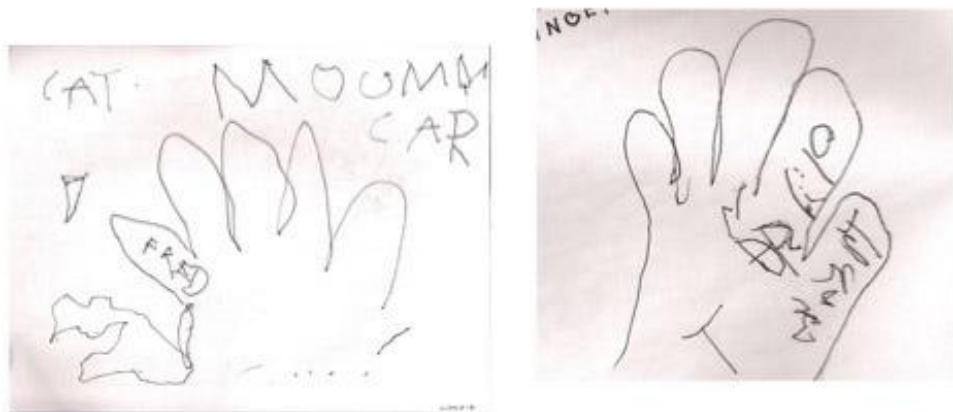
Duke's map of his hand   **Lila's** map of her hand

Around this time we had been enjoying a delightful book by Sara Fanelli, which is full of whimsical maps. The children were further inspired to draw personal maps – **Orson** drew a map of his stomach, **Duke** drew a map of his heart and several children drew maps of their families. These maps are a study of identity and self.

Duke's map of his heart
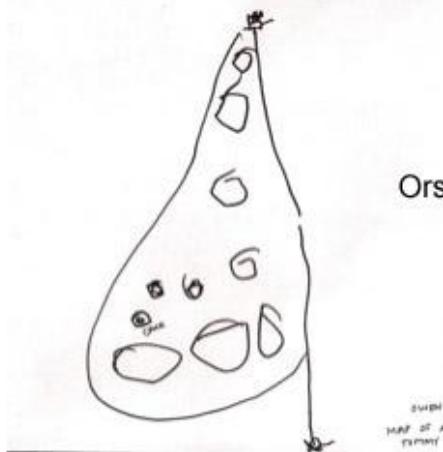
Orson's map of his tummy

Memory plays a significant part in the maps created by three and four year olds. At the beginning of the school year when we asked children to bring in a summer memory, a number of children brought in maps they had drawn. While these maps included some geographical elements, they were mostly based on memories of people and places they had visited.
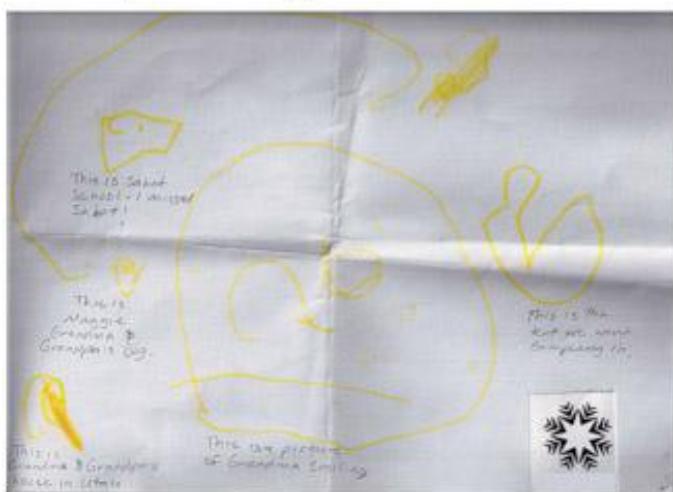
Grace's summer memory includes the tent she camped in, her grandparents' house and dog in Utah, her grandfather smiling and Sabot school.

Children this age do begin to incorporate geographical elements into their maps – we see references to things like direction and landforms – for example the North Pole, a sea map, a mountain map. Perhaps these representations are more about children's attempts to understand natural elements like thunder or water.

Thunder map by **Larry**

Water map by **Ethan**
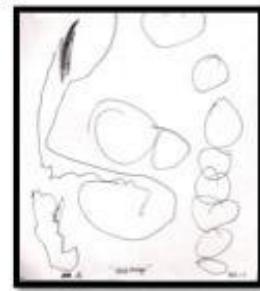
Sea map by **Abigail**

The maps these children are creating are based in reality, yet have an imaginative quality to them. **Orson** drew a map of the sun rising and recently, when looking at maps in a book titled *You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination*, I was struck by the similarity of **Orson's** map with several of the maps in the book.

"SUN rising map"
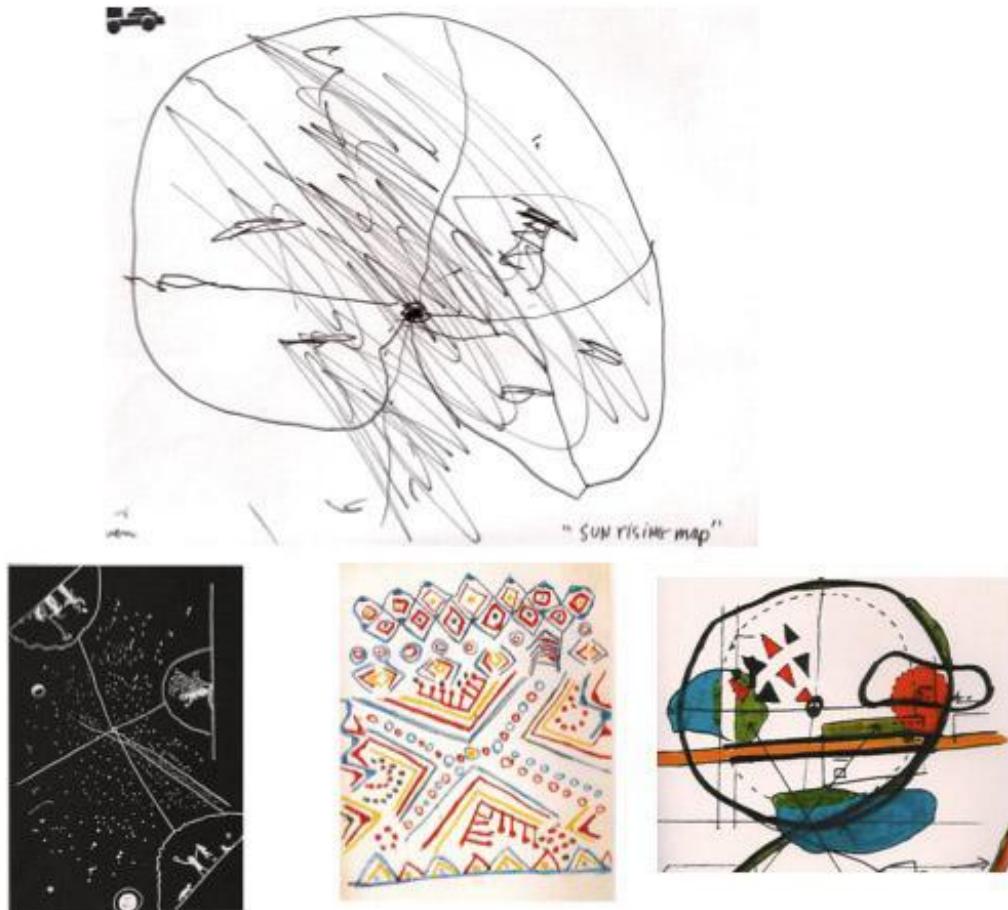
These maps are based on dream maps from different cultures around the world. Is it just coincidence that these maps, like **Orson's**, include an axis in the middle of the page? Could there be archetypal symbols related to mapping, even imaginative maps?

In this piece of documentation, Sophie and Jess share possible "big ideas" that have emerged as children work to "make-meaning" through various mapping projects. For example, Sophie hypothesizes that perhaps these representations go much beyond

children's explicit intent of learning how to make maps of various forms, but also touch upon the less visible "big ideas" that children are working to understand including: 1) elements of nature; 2) personal identity; 3) sense of place; and 4) imaginative possibilities.

From this constructivist perspective, teachers work to understand the meaning children bring to their experiences. As Fosnot (1996, pp. 212-213) puts it, when teachers ask themselves questions such as, "What are the big ideas the child is grappling with?" they're able to focus "on content ideas that often require structural shifts in thinking for children, rather than on skills or behavioral objectives." For example, in chapter 9, when Zach draws a detailed picture featuring a story about "Arfie" and "Tubby" as best friends and the many ways they happily play together. On the surface, Zach seems to be interested in creating a story about these make-believe characters and honing his writing, drawing and storytelling skills. But upon closer reflection, Zach seems to use his knowledge and skill in drawing and writing as safe mediums to grapple with his bigger challenge—"How can I make sense of, and navigate the complexities of, friendship?" When teachers look beyond the surface towards children's "imbedded" intents (Oken-Wright & Gravett, 2002), they are able to help scaffold children's learning.[85]

Constructivist Principles in Action

Parents as co-constructors of curriculum design: Lighting the labyrinth.

During my interview with Lisa (Executive Director of the school), I ask her, "What is

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[85] For another example, see Gina and Alice's discovery of children's "big ideas" that emerged out of their collaborative play, see "Teachers Co-Construct Understanding through Documentation: Tigers, Birdies and Kitties" in the section below. In this example, children grapple with safe and fulfilling ways to deal with issues of fear and power, and with ways to negotiate space for their individual identities to prosper within the larger group.

your overall vision for parents and what kind of involvement do you look for?" In her response, Lisa describes the central role of parents as collaborators and co-constructors in curriculum design, highlighting their critical roles with a pertinent example (personal communication, December 15, 2009):

I think at its deepest level, and when it has worked most magically for us, it's been *when parents think with us about the children*. And so, there have been some stellar examples of *the parents really taking our thinking to a new place in that process*. And we've tried, but it's not the way parents tend to think about their role in the school. So it's partly a process of our kind of really bringing them into that. We had the experience-- in the preschool, we have a structure for what we call Parent Circles…[and] occasionally they are dedicated to the teachers sort of bringing to the parents, "We're thinking about this. Help us think about how we might do that. Or, what are some of the different ways that might take shape?" So, gosh. It was probably five years ago…There were a group of children…[in] the Rainbow room age group who were interested in light and dark and day and night and who started to play with the idea of what would it be like to be at school in the dark and not use the lights. And so, the teachers started to think about providing a nighttime experience for the children at school. And that would obviously, out of necessity, involve the parents. So at one of the Parent Circles, they asked the parents about "What do you think? Would you be game for that? And what are some of the ways that we could set that up?" So, there were ideas about flashlights and about candlelight suppers and about maybe just using the light tables and the overhead projectors as the only sources of light in

the building. And then one of the parents said, "What if we could light the labyrinth?" and so, everybody kind of went, "Wow!" so it was kind of wow! That could be really cool! How would we do that? [Laughs] and so people generated some ideas that night and then one parent kind of went off and tried some things and the teachers all brought in different things-- jars that we could put tea lights in…but one of the [parents]… had the idea of what if we used apples. And so, we figured out that could be cool. You'd sort of dig out a place for a tea light and it'd be an apple lantern and that would be affordable and biodegradable and all that good stuff. And so, then we brought in different kinds of apples and what kinds of apples will work best? And so we ended up with 144-- and then we counted the spaces in the labyrinth that we would have to light. It was, conveniently enough, a gross, 144. And we tried them and the teachers came at night to look at them at night to see how they would look. And then on the day of the night time gathering at school, one of the parents, Jane whose kids are in second grade now, brought her drill with a drill bit and cored 144 apples on the kitchen of the annex. [Laughs] and then while the children were inside, you know, doing-- sort of playing with flashlights and having their candlelight dinner, several of us placed the candles in the labyrinth and we said to them at the end of the dinner-- we said, "What do you think it's like outside now? Why don't we go out and see?" and they were like, "Ooh! It's gonna be scary. And so we just sort of got together in a group and went through the playground and went through the playground gate and the first child who got around the corner-- somebody who's in third grade here now, sort of just stopped and went, "UNBE-WEEV-ABLE!" [Laughs] because

you could see the candlelight, you know? And so then we went and the children

walked through the labyrinth and then we stood around the labyrinth and sang and

then we blew out the candles and it was just exquisite. You know, it was really--

and it would never have happened without the parents. You know? It would

never have happened without the parents having lent their thinking to the

thinking. So that's when we get-- you know that's when it's really the real rich

stuff. But certainly, beyond that, we know that our parents have all of those

multiple intelligences, too, and they sort of-- having them enrich what we do from

their own skill set has been absolutely huge for us. You know, the graphic

designers and the interior designers and the contractors and the architects and

landscape architects and the gardeners…There's a garden committee that's

meeting now to plan… And, so, just *having parents… scaffold our work by*

bringing their work and their passion to it has-- is probably a more common way

that we work with the parents and it's just hugely enriching for us. The other

piece, then, of course, is knowing the child. And knowing that we can't know the

children without knowing what the parents know about the children. And…we're

able to help the parents see parts of their children that don't become readily

apparent, you know, when they're at home or when they're not in the learning

environment. So that piece of together sort of constructing or understanding of

the child, of thinking together about supporting the children in their learning, and

then just having the parents bring their strengths and their skills to us, and all of

that. And then, of course…our board is largely a parent board and so they also

have the role as directors, so stewards of the school. (Interview transcription, lines

410-475)

Lisa's story highlights the ways in which collaborating and thinking together with parents

moves the group's thinking forward and opens possibilities that would not have been

thought of if teachers work in isolation. As a result, the children gain an engaging and

social learning experience and parents are able to share in the children's contagious joy in

discovering the "UN-BE-WEEV-ABLE" labyrinth.

In this interview, Lisa also mentions that parents make up the board and thus as

directors are the stewards of the school. When parents are making structural decisions as

board members, they understand how the school works in an intimate way (through

sharing in curriculum design, star parenting, parent circles, etc.). Therefore, board

members can base important decisions on this participation and make more informed

contributions to the learning experience at school.[86]

Parent-teacher conflict as catalyst for learning together: Prohibition of

weapon play. During my interview with Lisa (Executive Director of the school), I asked

her how she handles conflict with parents. She explains that her approach is "to deal

directly and to make it a conversation" and "to be open to their perspective." As an

example, Lisa shares a significant event that happened the previous year involving

conflict around children's weapon play. The situation arose when a mother of a

preschooler was working as a "Star Parent." While she was in the school hallway, a little

boy walked by her, saying "pow-pow" and pretended to shoot her with his finger gun. As

a result this mother and her husband were quite upset and went to Lisa about the

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[86] See, chapter 11 for more on the impact of the board on school operations.

situation. These particular parents wanted teachers to impose an absolute prohibition on children pretending that they were playing with weapons. However, the faculty was uncomfortable with an absolute prohibition. In the following passage, Lisa shares some of the history behind this conflict and explains how it was ultimately resolved (personal communication, December 15, 2009):

So, we had [a] prohibition years back. But what we found that it was a false prohibition because we couldn't control [children's violent play]. We couldn't stop it. Because it was, you know, this…[Lisa gestures karate chops with her arms.] There were moves. You know? [Laughs] There were kernels of rice that children could use to pretend they were shooting. And so, years ago we…read a lot of respected authors, we read Diane Levin about the peaceful classroom[87] and read Vivian Gussin Paley[88] and different people writing about children's fantasies and then the function of that kind of play in particular. And so, what we decided was that we would try to support the play--We would try to learn more about how it was functioning for the children. And we would support it and support the children who were uncomfortable with that play or didn't want to be present for that kind of play. But even with what we thought was a carefully thought through

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[87] Lisa is referring to educator and author, Vivian Gussin Paley's books including, "You Can't Say You Can't Play" (1993), "Child's Work: The Importance of Fantasy Play" (2005), and "The Boy Who Would Be a Helicopter: The Uses of Storytelling in the Classroom" (1991).

[88] Lisa is referring to "Teaching Children in Violent Times: Building a Peaceable Classroom" (2003) by Diane E. Levin and "The War Play Dilemma: What Every Parent and Teacher Needs to Know" (2005) by Diane E. Levin and Nancy Carlsson-Paige. In other discussions with Springhill faculty, they've discussed influential works such as "Under Deadman's Skin: Discovering the Meaning of Children's Violent Play" (2002) by Jane Katch and "Killing Monsters: Why Children Need Fantasy, Superheroes, and Make Believe Violence" (2002) by Gerard Jones and Lynn Ponton.

approach to it, we had this one family that came to me. They called me one day

last year and said, "We need to see you this afternoon." And they came and they

were here for two hours and they said, "You will have a policy or we're leaving."

And so, you know, I told them everything that we had studied and everything that

we had observed over the years and I said, "But, we will take the conversation

back to the faculty. We'll make sure that all the faculty is using the sort of

template that we created years ago. Because it's very possible, if not likely, that

people have come into the school that weren't there then. And so, maybe we

haven't really presented this as fully as we could to them." So we went back to

the faculty. Faculty went back to some reading. Mary was researching; I was

researching, "What's the writing since our last go-round with this?" And actually,

in that study, *we came to a new place*. And the new place was that we realized

that while we were trying to figure out how this play was functioning for children,

we weren't really supporting them in their process. So what we decided as a

result of that study was that we would disallow the [weapon] play until there was

an adult present to support the play. And so, if there's a classroom where this is

going on and there's a teacher who's free to be present to it, that's fine. But if

not, then it's the kind of thing where we would say, "Well, I'm not available to

you right now. We can do that later. I'll find you when I am." Because we

realized that we weren't really taking the next step. If we're saying children are

trying to figure out power or they're trying to figure out the reality of death, we're

not taking the next step in being with them to sort of explore that. So, the process

helped us. The other thing that we did was that we called for a forum of parents

and we said, "We know this is a question, we know this is a conversation on the playground. This is our history. This is our thinking." It was a very, very emotionally charged and pretty difficult evening in a lot of ways. There were a lot of tears. Faculty were crying. Parents were crying. And it was partly out of, you know, just the sort of deep, automatic feelings that a lot of us have about violence. Or people that have had experience with gun violence, real or threatened in their lives…But there was also the sentiment expressed that night, "I'm so proud to be part of a community that can look at this question. It's so hard. It's hard for us. We don't agree with each other. We care about each other." And so there was that sort of feeling of "Wow. This…is good. This process is good and important." And then there were some people saying, "Can't we just pretend we have a policy, just so this family won't leave?" And we said, "It's really not fair to the children. And it doesn't give them credit." And so the family left and we-- I mean we had explained to everyone what the changes were, but it wasn't the absolute prohibition and so they [the family] chose to leave. And it was a sort of tearing kind of separation. A lot of sadness among the families. The mother, in particular, had become a really central part of the community. And so there was a lot of sadness among the other families about their leaving. Sadness among the children about their friend leaving. But we really felt as a school, we needed to work out of what we understood to be our best understanding of children and their development and how this was functioning for them. And at the same time, to be *open to the voices and the concerns and the perspectives of everybody else*. It seems that we have-- that we are now in-- at a place in the

community where that issue strengthened us, where I think people really feel like they were heard. You know, it sort of brought us to some conversations with parents about parents-- it sort of helped parents to understand the fears that they have about their children and their safety at school. And how much information do they need and how much should they hear about every minute of every day. And sort of helped us to process some of those things. And about when information might be too much information and not necessary and not even good or healthy. So I think it's brought us to a place that feels kind of more solid and healthier because of that...[A]s Sophie Smith says, for instance, you can run but you can't hide. It's just a part of our culture and it's a part of what children are grappling with and we need to help them grapple with it. So, I would say, I really welcome the debate and I feel really comfortable with it. (Interview transcription, lines 484-551)

Although conflict and debate are difficult and emotionally challenging, in the process of thinking, sharing, researching and debating together the Springhill community arrives at a better understanding and deeper place than when they started. If Lisa had tried to avoid the conflict, the learning surely would have been truncated and community members would likely have become more polarized and/or alienated from one another. For example, consider two alternatives: 1) if Lisa were to take the perspective that "parents are the consumers and the school is the product," then she may simply yield to the parents requested prohibition; and 2) if Lisa were to take a hierarchical perspective on her role at the school, she may exercise her authority as "the boss" by imposing a unilateral decision effectively saying to the parents, "that's our policy, take it or leave it."

Instead, Lisa chose to take a more difficult path, a slower and (in this case) more contentious process, to open up the issue for more reflection, study, discussion and debate among all faculty and parents. From my interviews with parents, administration and teachers, it seems that Lisa (along with Mary) really set the tone for the community by embracing challenge and conflict as an important and healthy part of the process of building community, with confidence that openness will result in moving the group as a whole forward to a better place. During one interview, a faculty member mentioned that Lisa often uses the phrase, "together we're a genius." This type of dialogue and negotiations around conflict would not be possible without a foundation of trust, respect, and connectedness where adults feel safe to bring up these sorts of tough issues.

How is it that Lisa became so comfortable with these types of challenging situations? First of all, it should be noted that she has her Ph.D. in Special Education and her research focused on working with parents. In addition, in an interview with me Lisa referenced several books that were instrumental in shaping her approach and helping her to think about how to handle conflict and negotiate solutions.[89]

Given that, in this particular conflict at Springhill, the family with the initial concern did end up leaving the school, it should be emphasized that everything does not always turn out perfectly in emotionally charged, real-life situations. In fact, the emotional intensity and significance of this event was brought up during several interviews with teachers, administrators, and parents and clearly reverberated throughout

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[89] The books that Lisa referenced include, "Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time" (Scott, 2004) and "Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In" (Fisher, Ury, & Patton, 1991)

the community for a long time. Yet, through this type of democratic process perhaps the best outcome emerged: teachers, administrators, and parents were able to thoughtfully study and think together about the issue, reflect on current practices, consider and solidify community values, and as a result move thinking forward toward deeper, shared understandings. In the process, community members build relationships, trust, and connectedness among the group, all of which may not have been possible otherwise.

The gun play conflict that arose during Springhill's 2008-2009 school year continued to shape teachers' thinking and work in the following school year. For example, several pieces of documentation teachers created had an intentional focus on classroom experiences that arose as children explored scary, aggressive, and/or violent play scenarios. In the documentation, teachers are transparent about how their research and study on the topic has shaped their thinking and approaches to these challenging situations in ways that best support children. (For two examples, see Sophie's documentation, "Robots and Shooters," Appendix G, and Nanette's documentation "Imaginings: and The Less Comfortable Side of Pretend Play," Appendix N.) In addition, as mentioned in chapter 6, Springhill faculty also chose to focus one of their 2009-2010 parent evening dialogues on "children's conflict and aggression."

The following example provides insight not only into how conflict is approached within the Springhill community, but also demonstrates how conflict can serve as a powerful learning tool. During my interview with Jenny, a parent from the Magnolia room, I asked, "What values would you like Ashley [her daughter] to take away from her experiences both at home at school?" In her response, Jenny shares two values she hopes Ashley will take away from her experience at Springhill: 1) being part of a community

that addresses tough issues through "good listening," "sane conversations," and "negotiations;" and 2) treating others with "kindness" throughout the process. Jenny uses the gun play conflict from the previous year, as an example of how the community was able to come together to negotiate conflict. Yet, she also uses the example to reflect on some of the challenges that arise for adults and children within this type of learning community (personal communication, June 2, 2010):

> I remember the [gun play] conversation being…sort of orchestrated around the rules of engagement with gunplay. [But], where are the rules of engagement about kindness?...There was sort of this assumption on…the teachers' part, that, "Well, of course that's what we're doing." But with all the conversation and the sort of structure of this other piece, it felt like these really fundamental core values [kindness and respect] were so unspoken that they were kind of disappearing -- not disappearing, but somewhat, they felt that way, a little. (Interview transcription, lines 304-312)

In the context of adult learning, Jenny's description of the gunplay issue provides a somewhat different perspective from Lisa's. While Lisa emphasizes the openness and participatory quality of the gunplay dispute, as a parent Jenny experienced at least in part a limited focus to the adult discussions of gunplay. From Jenny's point of view, some of the teachers came into the conversation with such a strong position and focus on how to handle gun play that it perhaps prevented a true dialectical exchange with parents, narrowing the discourse to "rules of engagement with gunplay." So on the one hand, the faculty took the parents' concern around gun play seriously and, as continuous learners, researched the issue anew, carefully coming up with what they thought was the best

strategy—a thoughtful and intentional approach that was much appreciated by parents. [90]

Yet, on the other hand, when the teachers came into the conversation armed with so much knowledge and focus, it perhaps made parents feel there was little room for authentic debate on the larger issue of whether weapon play is appropriate at all. In a culture where teachers and administrators are the highly respected experts and authority figures, parents may find it challenging to voice dissenting opinions, even in a "non-hierarchical" environment.

Jenny's comments point to the complexity and challenges that come with being part of a democratic learning community, where difficult issues are brought to the fore and opened up for discussion among all members of the community. With emotions running high, some of Springhill's core values (e.g., treating others with kindness and respect) felt to her like secondary considerations in the adult discussion. People's strong feelings about challenging issues are not easily changed. Coming to a place of mutual understanding takes much time, study, reflection, and careful attention to varied perspectives. Further complications involve the various cultural norms, expectations, perspectives, prior experience ("baggage") and previous knowledge that various people bring into the conversation. This may suggest why a more autocratic approach is often the default used in many preschool programs. Yet, considering the ways in which people learn and build relationships within a community, this more traditional autocratic

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[90] It seems the Springhill faculty wanted their focus to be not just on children's *act* of treating people with kindness (socialization), but equally upon helping children feel authentically and emotionally predisposed to do so (love, empathy, solidarity and friendship). Presumably, the parameters around gun play were put in place to safely allow authentic expression of feeling, and not to be sacrificed to any *purely* behavioral value (e.g., behaving nicely toward peers).

approach in the long run would not be effective. (It also reminds us that conflict and negotiation are challenging for adults, as well as children, and should be handled in a similarly democratic way—slowing down the process, being both respectful of feelings and focused on relationships, and open enough for negotiated discussions and problem solving.)

On a final note, in the context of Jenny's discussion of "treating others with kindness" during our interview, she talks about how it sometimes felt like a handful of children tended to dominate the circle conversations, depriving quieter or more reserved children the chance to be heard. By offering this example, Jenny makes an analogous point between the challenges of creating a space (even *within* democratic communities) where *all* parents feel able to authentically contribute to the discussion process (e.g., the adult gun play debate) and a similar challenge of making sure *all* children's voices are heard and acknowledged in classroom discussions. In both cases, Jenny's concern about *kindness* seems to refer to a certain type of *political equality*, where the subtle dynamics of the group may prevent equal opportunity during group discussions (in both adult and child contexts) and perhaps may affect the rights of some participants, even though there may not be any signs of overt conflict. In the same way that this phenomenon calls upon teachers to appropriately step in and offer support in ways that ensure equal opportunity for all children in the classroom context, democratic administrators are faced with the same challenge in overseeing adult discussions.

Teacher's co-construct understanding through documentation: "Tigers, birds, and kitties." During my interview with Alice, the studio teacher, I ask her to tell me about the dance project that emerged in the Rainbow room the previous year. As

Alice shares the following story, the significance of the gun debate reemerges once again (personal communication, December 16, 2009):

> Last year…there were all these girls who…really seemed to be afraid of the boys, scared of rough behavior, loud behavior, in all the rooms. But the Rainbow room seemed pretty extreme, this division between the quieter children and the rougher children and meanwhile there was a huge big scandal and drama because a star parent out in the hall was sitting there and a little boy walked out and went "Pow, pow, pow," and shot that parent. That parent did not believe in any kind of gun play and actually brought it to the point where we had this big school-wide meeting, about [how] they wanted us to ban it or they were taking their child out and the teachers decided that we don't want to ban it because it felt sort of disenfranchising of the children to say, "This is, we're not going to let you say these words, were not going to let you play this way," so we explained our position. This family actually wound up leaving. So, that was bad. Meanwhile, this is going on in the Rainbow room where the children are talking about being afraid…[Then], Gina [a Rainbow room teacher] put on the "Stars and Stripes Forever" one day and they made this dance. Where…tigers would come out when the music got loud [during] the big march, and then when the music was the little flutes, the little birds and kitties would come out which were all these girls and a couple boys, like Madison, was more in with the girl group. And so Gina and I were working on this project and Gina is a dancer so we were like, "Wouldn't it be cool if they could mark their choreography somehow, signify each move, so that they could be teaching the dance to other children." I didn't know, but that's called a score for a dance. And so we were working on this

thing where the kids were making a score and listening to the music over and over

again, and practicing moves. And, *all of a sudden* we realized, together, as we were

going over documentation that this dance was the story of the timid children and the

loud children. And what actually happens in the story is that the tigers come out and

they're marching all around and then the birds come out and the tigers don't want to

scare them so they hide and the birds dance around and then when the tiger music

comes out. The birds run away because they're scared. The tigers dance some more,

and then the birds come back out. And then, in the end, and the music does sound

like it's all playing at once, they come out and they dance together. And Gina and I

all of a sudden realized that these children are telling the story of how they can learn

to get along with each other when they're scared. The little shy people are scared of

the loud people and the loud people do not want to offend the scared people, but they

still have to be their tiger selves, and it was like for one thing, the *brilliance of the*

children, to be working on this while the grownups are having this awful drama and

not getting along and not listening to each other and refusing to budge and here the

children are working through this whole thing. So that was one thing, just children,

oh my goodness, they're so amazing, the other thing was *the power of documentation*

because if we hadn't of been going through all the documentation together and

talking about it all the time, we would not have seen probably that this is what they

were actually doing. So, yeah it was really amazingly cool and that made raw

documentation into such a better focus for me after all these years, because that's a

thing that can get really overwhelming about this kind of teaching, like "what are they

talking about in Reggio?" You know? You just have to keep working and working

and working and then all of a sudden in that process I realized that it was *the dialogue*

between Gina and I, and…*the children's words,* and all that and back and forth

between us two talking about it and going back to the children and doing a little more,

that *told the story.* The children may well have gone and done it all on their own

anyway but nobody would have seen it, so that was a beautiful moment. (Interview

transcription, lines 268-311)

Alice's story points to some of the insights that can be gained in this type of

democratic learning community, where documentation is used to support reflective

practice. Some of this insight includes the following:

- Children are capable negotiators and problem-solvers. Gina and Alice's

  documentation provides a record of the ways in which the children use expressive

  dance play as a medium to work through social issues. The children are able to

  successfully negotiate a safe space that allows both their individual identities and

  differences to prosper, while simultaneously supporting their mutual desire to

  grow as a cohesive group. As a result, a new and powerful, child-created

  narrative was formed.

- Taking the time to reflect on raw documentation[91] is a powerful tool in the

  learning process, not only for children, but for teachers as well.

- Dialogue and collaboration are critical components in the learning process. Gina

  and Alice may not have had this insight into children's thinking if they looked at

  the documentation as separate individuals, without the benefit of collaboration.

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[91] *Raw documentation* refers to the ongoing documentation collected by teachers (e.g., observation notes, photos, children's work, and transcribed conversations) rather than a documentation panel completed at the end of a project.

- The weapon play issue and teachers' ensuing study of the topic shaped their thinking and created a new lens for looking at and interpreting documentation of children's experiences, opening up new possibilities for further insight and learning.

- Finally, through revisiting raw documentation, and reflecting together, the teachers are able to see beyond the children's actions to gain a better understanding of the "big ideas" behind this tiger, kitty, and birdie dance. Without observing, documenting, and reflecting, and talking about children's work, the "embedded intents" (Oken-Wright & Gravett, 2002) underneath the children's overt actions may not have been discovered.

As a final note, Springhill teachers often share stories like the "Tiger, birdie, and kitty dance" on blogs and in early childhood workshops outside the school and invite other people (with diverse perspectives) to comment on those stories. In doing so, they create for themselves yet another opportunity to deepen their understanding of what is happening in the classroom.

Parents as Learners in the Springhill Community

All the parents I interviewed believed that they had learned a significant amount about children and parenting as a result of being part of the Springhill community. In particular, parents talked about the way Springhill faculty had taught them to be more respectful while handling children's conflicts and dealing with children's strong emotions, helping them in the process to become better parents to their children. For example, in an email correspondence with Susan (Duke's mom), she explains (personal communication, August 16, 2010),

I learned so much when my daughter [Springhill graduate] was at Springhill about how to handle conflicts. I am still learning and Duke [current Springhill preschooler] is such a different child so it is a new experience. I continue to learn from Springhill and from my child. I am very big on natural consequences, which is consistent with Springhill. I do try to allow Duke to express himself and I try to teach alternatives to the negative responses that he might have. He has a tendency to lose his temper and that is something I am still working on how to handle – right now I am busy finding alternatives that let him get out his anger without taking it out on those around him or his toys. With other children and responsibility issues I like to follow the Springhill plan…*Check in* with the child, see what you can do if you wronged them, help to set things right - my job [is] to help scaffold the situation so that Duke learns the words and actions, but I do not force an apology which is also as Springhill does things.

To probe a bit further I asked Susan, "What have you learned from your experience as a member of this school community?" She responds (personal communication, August 16, 2010):

I have learned so much about how to work with children in groups and with my child individually. How to *look beyond the acts* my child is doing to *see the thinking that is going on* there. I have learned that *social behavior must be taught and practiced.* I have learned that time is what my child needs. *Slowing things down* is a good thing for a preschooler. More is not always more – less is often more…I have learned that it is hard to leave this school and it is great to be back.

I am not actually sure I could tell you all that I have learned in this note or in any

other manner. I am very grateful to have been a part of this community (twice!)

Clearly, Susan values Springhill as a learning community for parents. As described

above, she has incorporated many of the Springhill values (e.g., checking-in, slowing

things down, allowing children to express their feelings, understanding the thinking

behind children's behaviors) into her parenting repertoire.

Another parent, Cindy (whose four children all attended the Springhill preschool

and whose youngest child is currently enrolled), describes how appreciative she is of all

the things the teachers have done for her children but also for her family. She explains,

"I've learned so many wonderful parenting tools that I could take home with me, from

seeing how they interact with the children here" (Cindy, personal communication, May

26, 2010, lines 86-89). Cindy describes how her discipline techniques at home have

changed as a result of being part of the Springhill community (personal communication,

May 26, 2010):

> Well, it's interesting because it really has changed for me at home, like I said, the
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> tools that I've learned as a parent from being here has really changed my method
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> of parenting…I can remember with my oldest [son], and I feel bad about it
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> actually…because he has some sensory problems, and so he would react *huge* and
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> I can remember trying to make him stop his temper tantrums because [the way] I
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> spent my childhood, that was not allowed, you know, the "I'll give you something
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> to cry about" kind of methodology was what I was getting from my dad at home.
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> So, my dad has never been comfortable with my children crying in front of him a
>
> lot because he can't understand what that is and that it's actually an okay thing.

So I would always try to stop my child's tantrum and I'd say, "Okay, I'm going to count to three and if you don't stop, you're going to lose a privilege," and that was how I started out and *then* from being here, and learning more, and reading more, and being involved in the teaching role here, you see that the tantruming is very important, the crying is important, and you know it's nothing to be ashamed of, because I think as adults you can't help but feel like it's a reflection of your parenting if you've had parents like my dad was and so just learn, you learn how to work with that, so I think, brilliantly, most of the teachers here, really do help children discharge strong feelings and use their words instead of hitting with their bodies and it's a natural tendency to want to strike out, but you know, our job as parents, you know mine has changed so much…not from a discipline standpoint, but a teaching them standpoint. If they don't have the tools, you know when you think of how my parenting has changed, I didn't have the tools before and that's what I used to do, and I didn't know what else to do. So that's what I'm saying, our children don't naturally know what to do in all these sticky situations and you don't need to prevent them from having these sticky situations. That's not what's most healthy for them. But, letting them know what they can do, and what their choices are, some good choices, then they're going to take those from here, hopefully and use those wherever else they go. I think it should be *teaching* not discipline. (Interview transcription, lines 120-153)

Cindy's response underscores the value of a school culture that supports not only children's learning but adult learning as well. Cindy wanted to approach conflict with her children in the best way possible, but didn't have the tools or know what that optimal

approach should look like. As she explains in this interview excerpt, she knew what didn't feel right but not what to do instead.

Cindy's example also suggests the challenges that arise when parents use a relationship-based, democratic type of approach to discipline outside of the school and in the wider cultural context. In fact several parents mentioned how their experience using a more relationship-based approach made them feel like they were going against powerful cultural norms. In Cindy's case, allowing her sons to express strong emotions made her father feel uncomfortable. Along with feelings of pressure to conform, parents have the additional challenge of dealing with their own fear, baggage, and guilt that arise when they consider whether or not they made the "right" parenting decisions (e.g., Cindy's guilt about the initial ways she handled Todd's emotional upsets). In a society accustomed to (in Cindy's words) "I'll-give-you-something-to-cry-about" parenting, where most of the focus is on controlling children's "behavior" (e.g., getting the child to do what I want) and "measurable performances," treating children with respect and kindness as fellow human beings is, sadly, viewed as abnormal--or as one parent referred to it, "hippy-dippy."

Shifting perspectives: Sue's story. What are the possibilities and challenges that arise when families, coming from a more traditional parenting paradigm, join a democratic community, such as Springhill? Oftentimes, people are attracted to environments with like-minded people. So, while the parents, without exception, told me that they had learned a lot at Springhill, particularly around behavior management and conflict resolution, I wondered if most of the parents actually selected the school because so many of the Springhill philosophies and approaches resonated with their own. To seek

disconfirming data, I chose to interview a particular parent, Sue, who enrolled her

daughter Rita at Springhill with (compared to other parents I interviewed) a much more

traditional approach to parenting. During the interview, Sue openly shares her

perceptions and feelings about the "Springhill approach" to discipline, and the tensions

that approach begets in her own thinking (personal communication, June 3, 2010):

> I think Springhill has taught me a lot about parenting. I think probably if we
> were not at Springhill, I would be a *lot* more inclined to be a little more traditional
> in discipline. And by that I don't mean hitting. We never hit, even before
> Springhill. We did timeouts and that sort of thing, but at Springhill they don't
> really do discipline. They talk about what's going on…They don't do timeouts.
> We *do* do timeouts at home. [Rita] told me once, "You know, they don't do
> timeouts at school," and I was kind of like, "Well what, well what, what do they
> do?" You know, they just—I don't know. They make it work. So I would say
> we're probably a…little bit to the right of Springhill in terms of [discipline]. We
> do do timeouts…We do take away TV or something like that. That's [Rita's] most
> dreaded punishment. She hardly ever gets to watch TV and if she does something
> we don't like, you know, we'll say, "you're not going to be able to watch TV if
> you do that." And my perception of Springhill is that they would never use such a
> crass, coarse, you know, rewards, kind of method. But, I think that as a result of
> being in the Springhill community, I think we're a lot more likely to talk through
> feelings, understand that kids are acting out because of something that's going on
> and not just because they want to be a pain in the butt. It's not always as practical
> when you're with the kids for 24 hours a day, then when you're with a kid for

three hours, and when they're related to you, but I think sometimes -- I mean, I really, really like the *respect* that Springhill has for children.   I think it has taught me a lot. I have had conversations specifically with Mary and Nicole where I feel like they could teach a master class on parenting, just how to deal with frustrating things. And Mary will say something to me -- she'll tell me some technique and I'll be like, "Oh, that is totally bogus. That would never work," and then I come home, and I try it, and it WORKS!…Rita is an endless negotiator and she's always saying, you know, "do this five more minutes, I want to do this. I want to go here. No, no, I won't do this" at which point we say, "OK Rita, if you don't come to the car now we're taking away television!" And, Mary said, "Just tell her, 'Rita, we're not going to discuss this anymore. You need to come to the car right now,'" and damn if it didn't work.[92] Not all the time, but sometimes it did work *without the threats*." (Interview Transcription, lines 211-242)

Three points of interest emerge from Sue's response: One, it is her child Rita who initiates Sue's growing awareness of alternative approaches to handling challenging behaviors when she explains to her mom that Springhill teachers do *not* use timeouts. Secondly, it seems that Sue does not completely "buy into" the Springhill way of approaching challenging situations, or really have a clear understanding of what and why

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[92] From my observations of the Springhill faculty, this parent's version of Mary's advice doesn't quite correspond with the respectful interactions that are typical at the school. Springhill faculty supports children's long-term goal of self-regulation and not just the short-term goal of behavioral compliance. It makes sense that Mary would suggest that Sue refrain from "discussing" (a.k.a. negotiating/bribing/threatening) Rita's behavior in this situation, if she truly was not able to offer any other choice. But what appears to be missing from Sue's account is the validation of Rita's point of view (along with a respectful tone of voice) that would most likely go along with requiring Rita to comply with her mother's request.

they use certain methods. Yet, when Sue tries some of the "Springhill approaches" that Nicole and Mary suggest, and they're met with success, some subtle shifts in her parenting approach begin.

As the interview continues, Sue explains some of her critiques and perceptions of the "Springhill approach" (personal communication, June 3, 2010):

I do think sometimes, you know, it's kind of a joke among Springhill parents – "Springhill speak"…some of that stuff I think is a little too soft pedaled honestly. I mean, I was in a classroom and there was a kid throwing marbles at another kid and the teacher said, "I'd like to invite you to put those marbles back where they go" and it's like, "no," you know, "no" -- On some level there's no deciding…and there's very little that's ever just completely forbidden, which I think works like 90 percent of the time, but it was one year when Rita had a really, really challenging kid in her class -- a really challenging kid and…my perception was that he [was] just completely out of control in the classroom because…there was no discipline and there was no way to deal with that and so when he got out of control they would hold him and tell everyone that he was having strong feelings and…Maybe that would have happened anyway, if they had tried something else. That's entirely possible…But I think in general, I mean, I think we're very closely aligned. I think if we weren't we wouldn't have lasted there very long. I think my brother and sister-in-law, for example, who are super strict, super traditional would hate Springhill…They would just think it was *not* disciplining your own children and letting children run the show…I don't see it that way…So the year that Rita was in his class he had a shadow and so in a sense he was much more

constructive than the year before because he had one-on-one attention…But almost every time I was at that school he was having a total freak out, melt down in the corner of the room and there was either his shadow or another teacher was just holding him tightly and…that in itself was disruptive to the classroom…Like I said, I don't know that anything different would have resulted [in] a different behavior from him because I think there were a lot deeper issues going on there, but it does seem sometimes like it's -- using a flyswatter for Godzilla. You know, like being super gentle stuff. But, I think in general…it's a really good place to start. Start with respect for the child. Start with listening to the child. Start with understanding these things are coming from developmental type places and that they're supposed to be resisting you and they're supposed to be disobeying.

(Interview transcription, lines 244-284)

In this passage, Sue goes back and forth between positive and negative feelings in her assessment of Springhill's approach, and often times, seems to have conflicting views herself. On an intellectual level, Sue appreciates the level of respect and input children are allotted, but on an emotional level (perhaps reflecting the cultural and socio-historical position in which she is situated) feels that sometimes "punishments," "threats," and "rewards" are needed. She seems to acknowledge a certain level of comfort within that traditional paradigm. On the one hand, Sue acknowledges that the "disruptive" child was much more constructive than in the previous year, that Springhill faculty had certain systems in place (e.g., providing an adult "shadow" to be with him one-on-one for the day), and that other approaches may not have worked any better. Yet, on the other hand,

she feels that some children cause so much disruption that some control and discipline need to be put in place.[93]

It should be noted, that during all of my field observations at Springhill, I never saw a teacher "invite" a child to not hurt another child, as Sue mentions in her example of the marble throwing. On the rare occasions that a child tried to hit someone, the teachers always made it clear, in no uncertain terms, that any physical violence towards other people was unacceptable. Teachers used phrases such as, "No. You can't hurt her," "It's not okay to hit," and/or "We don't hit our friends." And, when necessary, teachers would physically intervene to prevent the action. But, with that said, during the process, teachers always used a calm, respectful voice and validated the feelings behind the child's actions (e.g., "Oh, I see you're feeling really angry that John knocked over your blocks."). The teachers also used the situation as a learning opportunity, by requiring the child to "check-in" with the other child and figure out a solution to the problem. (It seems there was a misperception among some parents that if rewards, punishments and threats are not used, then the alternative "Springhill approach" must be to allow children carte blanche freedom to do whatever they desire.)

In terms of democracy, Rita benefits from being part of a community that treats all children with respect, even those with special needs and outwardly disruptive behaviors. In my view, the Springhill approach develops children's ability to be more tolerant and accepting of all different types of people.[94]

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[93] Sue's perspective seems to be focused on a short-term, fix-it approach, and does not seem to take into account the long-term stakes involved in the choice between coercive and self-regulatory approaches.

[94] The point is that feelings cannot be suppressed but must somehow be processed. That will not look the same for every child, but skipping over the processing would likely have

Sue continues to share her perceptions of both the value and the challenge of using the Springhill approach, particularly outside of the school community:

I think -- one of the things on the topic that's been very interesting is the way that Springhill deals with child-on-child violence. [It] is really, really weird in the real world. And I think it's great and really helpful. Let's say Rita smacks Valerie, you know, they'll be separated. Somebody gets down at eye level and says to Rita, you know, "Rita, I think that made Valerie feel [sad]" and "Valerie, do you have something you'd like to say to Rita?" and "Rita check on Valerie and see if she's OK."…If you were on a playground in the real world and you do that, the kids who got hit, the kid is going to look at you like you're insane…I mean, other parents who are not used to the Springhill way have absolutely no patience for that kind of approach. (Interview transcription, lines 286-296)

These comments point to the intense pressures that parents feel to conform to societal expectations of what constitutes an "appropriate" response (punishment and shame) to children's misbehaviors. Sue seems to be defending a harsher approach based upon *other people's perceptions* and *not* based upon what is best for the child's emotional growth and well-being. Sue continues:

What [other parents] want to see is you taking your kid and punishing them visibly and quickly and letting them know that this is absolutely, under no circumstances, allowed or acceptable in any way and put a quick end to it. And, if you do anything else…it's really looked down [upon] and we've talked about

long-term negative emotional consequences (Fosha, Siegel, Solomon, 2009; Gerhardt, 2004; Szalavitz & Perry, 2010). Sue may not take into account that many children with extreme impulsivity control issues are the *least likely* to respond to negative discipline approaches, especially if they have received an overdose of it at home.

that at Springhill meetings before. Almost every Springhill meeting I go to where
we're just allowed to ask questions about child development or whatever
somebody raises a hand and says, "OK, how do you deal with this stuff in the
world around you when everybody else is not a Springhill parent?" Nobody's
going to say "I'd like to invite you to stop throwing rocks at my child"…You
know? I mean, that's not the way it works so…it's really funny to see the way
that Springhill kids interact with each other, and the way they interact with other
kids who aren't used to that, and the way that the parents interact with each other.
I mean, [when] Rita has a conflict on the playground at Springhill I really feel
comfortable that me and the other parent can figure it out and it's completely
different in other places.

I ask Sue if she's had any situations where a conflict has arisen with maybe other
children, outside of the Springhill community. She responds (personal communication,
June 3, 2010):

Yeah, for sure…Many, many times. Many times…I mean, Rita is a very
aggressive -- I don't know how well you got to know her, but she's assertive,
aggressive. She's like an alpha kid…So we'll be on the playground and she -- this
is less true as she's getting a little older. So, you know, she hits a little bit, but, you
know, she'll shove a kid out of the way for the slide. And what that other parent
expects you to do is to run over there, grab her arm, pull her away and say, "Rita,
that is not allowed. You are not allowed to push them away from the slide.
You're in timeout for doing it." That's what's expected and so what happens is I
go over there and say, "Rita, I noticed that you wanted a turn on the slide and that

someone else was there first. Can you tell me what's going on?" I mean, it's just like, you know, you can see them. It's like give me a break. I mean, it happens a lot and I have found myself definitely bowing to the peer pressure before where I will run over and grab Rita's arm and say, "Rita, stop it. That's not allowed," but it's like habit, you know? …It's *socially acceptable in that situation*, which *doesn't feel good later* but, you know, that's what happens. I'm telling the truth. (Interview transcription, lines 317-336)

Sue is candidly describing here the cultural tensions that arise when moving back-and-forth between a more traditional approach to discipline and a more democratic, co-constructed, and relationship-based approach to conflict. On the one hand, Rita's mom recognizes what cultural norms of behavior are expected from her as a parent (e.g., control Rita's behavior and impose a punishment when she gets out of line). But at the same time Sue is aware that there is an alternative to this approach that both feels and (from her point of view, *usually*) works better. What seems to be acceptable in her adult peer group negatively impacts her relationship with her daughter and vice versa. But when she takes a respectful, relationship-based approach with Rita, Sue feels she is alienating herself from her peers.

Perhaps too, Sue is projecting some of her own ingrained traditional beliefs about handling children's behavior onto the other adults in the community, assuming that they want her to react a certain way. It should also be noted that her image of Rita seems somewhat deficit-based (e.g., "Alpha-kid," "aggressive," "brat"), a perception that stems from a behavioral paradigm. In fact, during my observations I came to perceive a very

different image of Rita; she had warm, affectionate relationships with the other children in her class and did not appear to dominate or control their play at all.

Understandably, parents want their children to fit in and belong in society and it is important to address this issue openly. Sue's interview underscores the value of having parent coffees, meetings, and workshops, and the benefits and importance in allowing dialogue about these pertinent issues. If the Springhill faculty, as the experts, acted merely as "talking heads" preaching certain methods, but really did not engage families in a dialogue about the realities and challenges of implementing them in a society whose gestalt seems to be antithetical to Springhill's community and democratic values, learning or change might not be possible.

In contrast, I am reminded of my experience in a child care center that was trying to incorporate some relationship-based approaches into its discipline practice. Many of the teachers and parents, understandably, were not aware of this alternative approach and requested some guidelines outlining the techniques. Therefore, prior to resigning from the school, I co-wrote (with the curriculum coordinator) a document outlining the approach and underlying philosophy for teachers and parents. Shortly after my departure, some of the administrators thought about making the guidelines mandatory reading and testing for both teachers and parents, to assure that everyone was "on the same page" as the school. However, as research (Nimmo & Park, 2009; Ryan & Greishaber, 2005) and Sue's story suggests, the process of reconsidering deeply held values and learning new approaches takes much time, experience, and emotional investment; such transformative changes cannot simply be poured into people's heads or mandated. Arguably, testing adults on the guidelines will not bring any authentic change in people's thinking.

Rita and Abigail's friendship. Rita (Sue's daughter in the Magnolia room) and Abigail (a preschooler from the Gardenia room) are in two different classrooms but nonetheless have an extremely close relationship. They often write notes to join one another in their respective classrooms to play, eat snack, and have circle together. In fact, the following excerpt written by Alice [the studio teacher] on her blog titled, "How Do You Know It's Love?" (May 13, 2010) highlights the girls' close bond:

> Abigail lights up whenever she (or anybody else) mentions Rita. I told her I noticed this, and asked what she feels when she thinks about Rita. Where is the feeling, inside or outside of her? She drew a picture of the people she loves. Then she created a beautiful metaphor for the feeling she has when she thinks about Rita…and her family. She said "There's a great, big circle around me and Rita. The circle is music, and we dance. When I feel love, flowers go all around me."

During my interview with Sue, I tell her that I've noticed Rita and Abigail seem to have a really special relationship and ask her how their friendship came about. She responds (personal communication, June 3, 2010):

> What's funny about Abigail on the very first day of school we were all on the playground after school and…Abigail wanted to be on the swings and Rita wouldn't let her go on the swings…—This is really, really funny to think [about] because of our conversation—And I was getting really annoyed because, you know it's unflattering when your kid acts like a brat. New little girl and she was very shy. She was so quiet and reserved, and Rita is an alpha kid, and she just wouldn't let her go and so I talked to her about it and I said, "You know, Rita,

Abigail's brand new at this school. How do you think she's feeling today?" And, at one point Rita even said like, "No, I don't like you. I'm not going to be your friend."…Something really mean [the] very first day of school. And I think this whole…what Adam and I call the *Springhill approach* of talking to her, trying to get her to think, "See how Abigail's feeling," checking-in with her and, Rita voluntarily…on her own…decided to give up the swing to Abigail after this conversation that we had, and immediately after that, Abigail was like in love with her and…I mean…the third day of school they wanted to have a sleepover…And it all started with Rita acting like a total shithead to Abigail because she knew she could boss her around because she was a little—you know, she was a littler girl. She was new and she knew she could boss her around...And when I talked to her about her responsibility to…help kids that are in a—lesser position. It was really interesting…Instead of just saying—what I wanted to do was say, "Get off the swing or you're losing TV today…Give someone else a turn and if you're going to be a brat about it, get off the swing, you're going in timeout," something like that. That was probably my first instinct…That's just kind of a funny example…But…they're really, really sweet together. I mean, Abigail is very precocious for her age. She's exactly a year younger than Rita and they have—they have a really, really sweet connection.

To me, this is a poignant example of how being part of the Springhill learning community can begin to slowly shift people's way of thinking. It takes much practice and lived experience to embody a relationship-based, democratic approach and to see the fruits of its labors. Let's consider what may have happened if Sue had followed "her instinct,"

coercing Rita off the swing in this situation: Would Abigail and Rita's friendship still have developed? Or, would Rita have ended up resenting Abigail for taking over her swing? Would Rita begin to develop skills in seeing situations from various perspectives (and not just her own desire for the swing)? Or, would Rita be denied the chance to experience the joy of sharing (and the mutual pleasure it brings to both giver and receiver?) Would Abigail feel welcomed into the community on her first day of school? Or, would she feel shame for causing Rita to get in trouble? Would forcibly removing Rita from the swing alienate her relationship with Sue, building resentment on both ends? Would it further solidify Sue's view of her child as "brat" or a "shithead"? Would Rita begin to internalize feelings that she must be "selfish" and "bratty" to want to stay on the swing? Would Sue feel satisfaction for coercing Rita off the swing or feel shame and guilt for the way she handled it?

As Sue explains above, her initial instinct was to threaten Rita with punishment. Her perception of Rita was that she was merely taking the swing to be a "brat" trying to "boss" Abigail around. Sue doesn't seem to consider less ignoble motives behind Rita's behavior. For example, perhaps Rita was so wrapped up in her own perspective (e.g., pure enjoyment in swinging) that she didn't really consider Abigail's perspective. Yet, Sue goes against her instinct (e.g., threaten loss of T.V.) in the safe context of the Springhill playground and tries a more democratic, "Springhill approach" which yields positive results. Not only did Rita willingly give Abigail the swing, she planted the seed for their close relationship that lasted throughout the year. It seems these types of interactions show parents how different approaches to children's behavior can yield quite

different results[95] and as a result slowly shift their image of their child. Through her counterintuitive act, Sue is able to see her child is both competent and capable of sharing and understanding her social responsibility to others.

In another environment, "correcting" her child's misbehavior and taking away privileges would have been the norm (and have gone unquestioned) and in certain ways, an easier approach. However, in the Springhill community there is an expectation that all people's feelings will be respected, and that moments of conflict will be used as opportunities for authentic dialogue and communication until all perspectives are considered, all voices are heard, and the issue is resolved.[96]

Sue seems to be a border crosser, in the sense that she straddles two significantly different "world views" on her role as a parent. On an intellectual level, she has bought in to the "Springhill approach" and yet, in her actual interactions with Rita outside of school, she still hasn't fully embraced the approach. Understandably, outside of Springhill she wrestles with cultural expectations (e.g., on other playgrounds), family expectations (e.g., her brother and sister's more traditional approach), and her past experiences (perhaps the way she was raised). Shifting paradigms is a difficult process, it calls into question the way one views the world and requires multiple and varied real-life experiences to slowly shift perspectives and construct new ways of viewing the world (*knowledge*). Significant change requires continued practice with repeated experiences-- just like democracy, which must be lived and not just taught. In Sue's stories, we see how being part of the Springhill learning community changes her relationship with Rita

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[95] It is important to note that, when we ascribe the best possible motive to children's behavior and offer opportunities for the child to rise to the occasion, they generally do so.
[96] In this case, Rita was able to see the situation from Abigail's perspective and Sue was learning to see the situation from Rita's perspective.

and, in a spiraling fashion, affects the relationships Rita develops with others. Above all, the essential thing to notice is that her shifting perspective did not come out of peer pressure from the Springhill community, or "brainwashing" or social pressures to conform, but rather from her own experimentation using a more relationship-based approach.

Sue's comments perhaps reflect the fear many parents have that their children are going to turn out bad, conforming to the "spoiled" and "egocentric" image of children that is projected in media, advertisements, and the larger culture (Eiss, 1994; Linn, 2004; Steinberg & Kincheloe, 2004; Thomas 2007). Clearly, parents don't want their children to turn out mean or "spoiled," yet sometimes unwittingly compound the problem by embracing society's prescribed solution, which is to be ironfisted towards children's "spoiled behavior" with little regard for their inner feelings. Parents want what is best for their children, so working against these often ingrained cultural messages is hard and scary. The Springhill experience suggests that, when faculty and administrators validate parents' feelings and share their own personal stories about their children, they send the crucial, non-shaming message to parents that it's okay to make mistakes, which allays many of their fears. Sue gives an example during our interview (personal communication, June 3, 2010):

> One of my favorite things about Lisa is she will be the first to tell you that when her son was in preschool she was worried that he might be a psychopath. Something about that is so validating because there's this amazing model of childhood education. You know, you think that her kids probably do everything perfectly and that her home life is amazing. Here's her saying she thought her

kid's a psychopath because developmentally they're doing crazy stuff at this age.

It's really reassuring. (Interview transcription, lines 621-626)

Lisa, along with the rest of the Springhill faculty, disrupts the more traditional, hierarchical roles of the all-knowing-expert and the learner-as-empty-vessel, passively waiting to be filled with knowledge. Instead, the staff works toward creating and sustaining a nonhierarchical, democratic community where everyone learns and everyone teaches.[97]

Conclusion

Letting go of adult agendas and slowing down the learning process is especially tough in our quick-fix, overwrought, overscheduled, and rewards/punishment-oriented society. Throughout my interviews with parents there seemed to be a universal acknowledgement that being part of the Springhill community had shifted the techniques they were using with their children. As parents are immersed in the Springhill culture, their thinking seems to evolve around conflict resolution from a traditional "discipline" approach to a more nonhierarchical, relationship-based, respectful, caring, "Springhill-y" approach. This shift is accomplished by watching teachers as they interact with children (through star parenting, reading blogs and documentation), reading parent resources shared by faculty (e.g., Patti Whipfler articles), participating in the various discussion groups (parent coffees, parent circles) and daily conversations with faculty. This type of

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[97] Tormala's (March 2011) study suggests the effectiveness of a leader who does not consider herself/himself to be the all-knowing-expert. Tormala discovered that people are more likely to be receptive to, or persuaded by, authority figures who "express uncertainty about their opinions" (para. 1).

learning requires shifts in self-organizing cognitive structures (as described in the social constructivist theory), and does not come automatically but rather through a much-slowed-down process of trial-and-error.

Cindy (personal communication, May 26, 2010, lines 247-251) sums it up best when she explains, "I know a lot of parents value what they're learning as grown-ups as much as what their children are learning, but if people don't know that, that's one of the really important things about what this program is giving our community, you know, is that education for parents too."

The structure of a democratic preschool community provides opportunities for *all* participants to be lifelong learners, not just children. It should be noted that this proposition was not in my original working definition of democratic educational practice. But as a result of this case study, I have come to see this as a critical component of a well-functioning democratic environment.

CHAPTER 8

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CONCERN FOR THE COMMON GOOD IN DEMOCRATIC ENVIRONMENTS

Taking Time at the Creek

Week of March 15, 2010

Between cold weather and snow, we have been unable to visit the creek for quite some time. Today, with the sun pouring down and the children eager to go, we pulled on our boots and headed off.

Everyone managed to slip, slide, and climb, down to the water, where they eagerly threw rocks, noticed a "cave," got stuck in the mud, went "fishing," and talked excitedly the whole time. Eventually, we wondered if they would like to visit another section of the creek. "Yes!" they shouted, and began to haul themselves up the bank, hanging on to roots and branches as they made their way to the top.

But Nora was reluctant to climb up. And instantly there was a bevy of friends ready to offer her a hand. "How can we solve this problem?" Sydney asked Nora a question we teachers often ask when there is a knotty conflict in the classroom and we want the children to work with us in coming up with a solution.

Nicholas said, "I can help her!" He reached down first with his hand and then with a stick. Harry also squatted by the bank with a stick in his hand. He even climbed back down and tried to push Nora up the hill.

"We need a rope," said Gabriella and though we couldn't find a rope, we did find a long bamboo pole which Boyd, Nicholas and Harry carried over to Nora and inched it down to our stuck friend.

It was a great idea but Nora decided it didn't work for her. In the end, she had to have a teacher move her body to another location further up the bank, where she was finally able to ascend to the top.

Her friends greeted her gladly, and Harry even offered to hold her hand for the walk back to the classroom. We never made it to the other entrance of the creek, but no one complained. Consistently throughout this year we have seen the children comfort and care for one another during those hard spots of the day. They are always eager and willing to problem solve and often come up with solutions we teachers would not have considered. How do we continue to welcome their ideas, their creative thoughts, and, as a result, support the ways they show compassion to others?

[Retrieved from Umbrella Project Blog, Forest Room, teachers Jane and Leanne]

In contrast to cultural stereotypes of young children as selfish and antisocial, research[98] (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000; De Waal, 2009; Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009; Kohn, 1990) for some time has acknowledged the rich capacities of children to act upon altruistic motives toward their fellow human beings. As confirmation of this research, there is the case of Springhill, where the evidence of caring and compassion among the children is striking, especially when the support of teachers is included as part of the picture. The above documentation from the Forest room (a two-year-old class) suggests not only that young children have a tremendous desire *and* ability to care for and help others, but also, that teachers can play an instrumental role in supporting children as they cultivate their growing sense of social responsibility and disposition to care for fellow human beings.

Children in the Springhill community do not idly sit by when their classmates are in distress; instead, they work together to problem-solve and find ways to help their

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[98] "One study of preschoolers during free play discovered that sixty-seven of the seventy-seven children shared with, helped, or comforted another child at least once during only forty minutes of observation" (Kohn, 1990, p. 66). Further evolutionary and neurobiological research supports children's inherent desire to help others (De Waal, 2009; Keltner, February 2009; Sunderland, 2006).

friends. The following is a list of just a few observed examples of how children's care and help for one another has been deeply integrated into the daily routines and classroom culture at Springhill.

- Children help each other with daily tasks such as tying shoes and putting on coats.

- Children help each other at the snack table. They peel each other's oranges, open their snack lids when they get stuck, pour water from the glass pitcher for each other, and help their classmates clean-up spills.

- Children help their classmates take care of classroom materials. Recall from chapter 4 (see "I didn't do it!" section) when Ethan draws on a classroom stool. Evelyn and Sophie help Ethan scrub the chairs clean, in this case helping Ethan meet his social responsibility without shame or social isolation.

- Children help each other with problem-solving and conflict resolution. For example, when Kate shares her cardboard "birdhouse" in circle, the other children notice that part of the birdhouse is broken. Larry immediately offers to help. He says to Kate, "I know how to fix it. Can I try?" Kate, trusting Larry's good intentions and competence, gives him the birdhouse to fix. He takes on the project as a serious task, respectful of Kate's work.

- Children help each other in their individual areas of expertise. Some examples described in the Gardenia Room's Composite Narrative (see chapter 4 for more detail): Zach helps Duke spell the word "mommy," Fiona helps Walter form the letter "A," Oscar shows Kate how to sharpen a pencil, Evelyn helps Lila get her baby doll dressed.

How is this disposition to care for and help one another cultivated at the Springhill preschool? This chapter illuminates how Springhill's faculty supports children's growing sense of social responsibility and concern for the common good in the following ways: 1) by creating a culture of care, kindness, and respect for fellow human beings and their environment; 2) by creating a nonhierarchical network of community support and shared decision-making by all community members (a shift from dominant power structures); and, 3) by creating a culture of collaborative problem-solving and conflict negotiation. The chapter concludes with some cultural and situational factors that can sometimes subvert children's sense of responsibility to help and care for others.

Culture of Care, Kindness, and Respect for Fellow Human Beings

Research (Staub, 2003) suggests that "certain conditions in children's lives—such as warmth and affection from adults and peers, and effective guidance, especially when this guidance is *not* punitive—have been found to contribute to caring for and helping of others" (p. 2).[99] It is hardly surprising that the children at Springhill are regularly observed caring for and helping each other, considering the level of warmth, affection, and non-punitive guidance that they receive from teachers throughout each day. Caring[100] is provided by Springhill faculty in several crucial ways: 1) teachers take children's ideas and pursuits seriously; 2) teachers respect children's feelings and emotions; 3) teachers promote children's ability to understand multiple perspectives; 4) teachers model kindness and respect in their daily interactions with children and other

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[99] On the flip side, Staub's research (2003/2005) suggests that when parents lack empathy for their children, it is most often a result of their own lack of receiving or witnessing empathy when they were children.

[100] By "Caring" I mean caring as specific *measurable actions,* not just a frame of mind.

adults; and 5) teachers pay attention to children's pro-social relationships and make them visible to the greater Springhill community.

Teachers take children's ideas and pursuits seriously. Taking children's ideas and questions seriously has many benefits for children's individual cognitive growth. However, research suggests that taking children's work seriously has another important benefit—it increases the likelihood that children will exhibit prosocial[101] behaviors with other adults and children. In the context of a comprehensive review of research on caregiving approaches and their relation to prosocial behaviors, Alfie Kohn (1990) argues that one of the most important factors in cultivating prosocial children is a "fundamental attitude toward…taking a child seriously, treating her as a person whose feelings and preferences and questions matter" (Kohn, p. 95). This "fundamental attitude" and approach with children is clearly reflected throughout the Springhill community.

Springhill teachers not only carefully listen and pay attention to children's interests and pursuits, but they also support children by following-up with questions, observations, and materials to support and deepen their thinking. To illustrate this point, consider three examples highlighted in chapter 4, "A Composite Narrative of the Springhill Preschool:"

First, recall when Walter works to create the "Brooklyn Bridge" out of chairs and wooden blocks, Sophie supports his project. She makes sure to leave his "work in progress" out for several days so that he is able continue his work. She also provides a book filled with pictures of bridges to extend his thinking and invites a class discussion to

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[101] Prosocial behavior meaning "actions undertaken voluntarily and intentionally to benefit someone else" (Kohn, 1990, p. 63).

help him think further about his work with the group. In taking these steps, Sophie clearly sends Walter the message, "I take your work seriously."

Second, recall when Oscar requests a photo reference of a piano so that he can create a piano keyboard out of wooden planks. Both the "Star Parent" and teachers take his ideas seriously and help him find an accurate keyboard representation to follow-through on his plan. The Gardenia room teachers continue to support Oscar's work throughout the year, including creating his own "violin" symbol (see chapter 6, "Symbols") and making a drum-set in the studio. Consider also that Oscar's keen interest in musical instruments first appeared the previous year in the Forest Room, where his teachers also took his interest seriously, facilitating related projects, which included making representations of his violin, playing his violin in circle, and creating an "Oscar's Instrument Book."

Third, Springhill teachers consistently take children's *questions* seriously. Recall when a child in the Rainbow room picks up a gumball, takes it to Terra and asks her, "Does picking the gumballs hurt the tree?" Terra takes this question seriously and invites several other children to join their conversation. They discuss the gumballs that are on the ground versus the ones that are still hanging from the branches. The children collectively decide that they won't pick any more off the branches, but that it is okay to collect the ones that have already fallen off the trees. (Note in this exchange, Terra does not laugh at this "cute" or "silly" question, but treats it as a serious investigation.)

Regardless of how "off-the-wall" or "nonsensical" children's thoughts may be from an adult perspective, Springhill teachers show respect for those ideas and feelings. For example, when Lila and Kate are in conflict over a puzzle piece that will make them

"more of a mom," Sophie is respectful and does not cast aside their idea as a silly notion.

From an adult perspective it may not be clear what the connection is between being

"more of a mom" and having a certain puzzle piece. Yet, Sophie does not dismiss or

belittle the girls' feelings. Instead, she trusts the girls' capability as problem solvers,

acknowledges their right to articulate their own goals (to be "more of a mom"), and keeps

irrelevant adult questioning (e.g., "how does that puzzle piece make you more of a

mom?") out of the conversation. In the process, the focus stays on the negotiation

between the children.[102]

In democratic communities, teachers respectfully support children as active

creators of their own ideas and investigations and treat their pursuits as serious work. In

turn, children respect their fellow classmates' ideas and investigations as serious work

and feel a sense of responsibility to help their peers when support is needed.

Teachers respect children's feelings and provide support as children process

strong emotions. The following brief exchange between three-year-old boys in the

Gardenia room highlights children's ability to be sensitive to, and respectful of, other

children's feelings when they are in a supportive environment.

Duke, Matthew, and Zach are playing with wooden blocks on a large table.

Matthew accidentally knocks over Zach's block "castle."

Matthew quickly reacts by saying: "Sorry. I won't do it again."

But Zach's attention is focused on something else in the classroom and he hasn't

even noticed yet what has happened to his structure. Matthew quickly rebuilds Zach's

castle anyway, despite the fact that Zach hasn't yet noticed the incident.

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[102] See chapter 9, "Puzzle Negotiations: We're Both More of a Mom" for a full
description of this exchange.

A moment later, Duke (who *did* see Matthew knock over the castle) asks

Matthew: "Did you rebuild Zach's [castle]?"

Matthew: "Yeah."

Duke: "He'll be SOOO happy!"

Matthew smiles: "Yeah!"

From this brief exchange, we have two examples of social perspective-taking. First,

Matthew and Duke share an awareness of what Zach's perspective would have been had

he witnessed the collapse of his castle. For Matthew this empathic awareness spurs him

to rebuild the block structure, without being asked to do so. Second, Duke and Matthew

again take Zach's perspective after rebuilding the castle, and express a shared feeling of

satisfaction as they consider how "happy" Zach will be over this turn of events.

How are children's perspective-taking abilities cultivated during their preschool

years? As mentioned in the previous section and supported by research (Brazelton &

Greenspan, 2000; Kohn, 1990; Lickona, 1992; Szalavitz & Perry, 2010), if children's

own feelings are regularly respected, they are more likely to be sensitive and responsive

to other children's feelings. As an example, Springhill faculty puts a primary focus on

respecting and validating children's feelings, allowing children space to get their strong

feelings out, and remaining with children as long as it takes for them to process those

feelings. [103] (See chapter 9, "Closing Circle Conflict: I Don't Think They Want to Play

With Me," for a specific example of this type of teacher support as children process

strong feelings.)

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[103] Springhill faculty's approach seems to be strongly influenced by Patti Whipfler's work on supporting children through emotional distress (see handinhandparenting.org).

For instance, in a democratic culture with a foundation of deep respect[104] and care, teachers understand that crying is a necessary way for children to emotionally release their stress and that crying, in fact, supports healthy development.[105] In this way, teachers do not distract, ignore, punish, or shame children out of their crying. As Springhill teachers show us, the alternative is to remain with the child as long as it takes for him/her to release the stress and hurtful feelings. Depending on the child and the situation, the teacher may hold the child in her lap, gently rub the child's back, hug and cuddle the child, or simply remain seated in close physical proximity to the child. The teachers are responsive and attuned to the children and offer gentle comments to help validate their feelings (e.g., "I can see you're feeling really angry he knocked over your tower;" or "I can see you're feeling really sad that your mommy had to go to work."). At Springhill, sometimes the teachers don't say anything for several minutes. They understand that staying with the child for emotional support is of crucial importance, but offering teacher solutions or advice is *not*. I *never* observed a teacher trying to talk a child out of his/her feelings or make a child feel that his/her feelings were inappropriate. Throughout this process, teachers seemed to send children two powerful messages: "You will not be abandoned during these times of high-emotional intensity" and, "We respect your right to express and work through these complicated feelings."

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[104] *Respect* is defined as "showing regard for the worth of someone or something. It includes respect for self, respect for the rights and dignity of all persons, and respect for the environment that sustains all life" (Lickona, 1992, p. 67).

[105] Research also suggests that crying may reduce stress-related illnesses (Solter, May 1992). Further studies (Solter, 1997; Frey & Langseth, 1985) suggest that crying releases toxins from the body, lowers blood pressure, lowers body temperature, and lowers pulse rate.

Springhill administrators make this way of supporting children's emotional processing visible to the parents to ensure respectful community-wide support of children. For example, as part of the orientation process into the school, administrators give parents a packet of articles and information, including an article titled, "Understanding Tears and Tantrums," which underscores the importance of respectful approaches to children's emotional processing. Beyond articles, Springhill faculty has orientation meetings, parent circles and discussions (as discussed in chapters 6 and 7 in more detail) to create dialogue and a shared understanding within the community. During my interviews with parents, it became evident that the faculty's respectful approach to working with children is shared and made visible to the entire Springhill community of learners. All of the parents mentioned the high-level of respect that they saw teachers give to their children and how it affected them as parents. For example, when I asked Duke's mom what she has learned most in the Springhill community, she replied (personal communication, August 16, 2010, lines 110-116):

> Anger, frustration, and other "negative" emotions are still valid ways to feel and shouldn't be shuffled under the carpet or negated. But your child needs to be helped with ways to acknowledge these emotions and deal with them. Choice is very important to children – it is a way to show respect for them, but if it isn't a choice don't make it sound like one. I have learned about how children think and learn, the value of nature, the importance of the environment, and the importance of listening to my child. I have learned that great things happen in places where everyone's intentions are for the best of children.

Teachers also make sure that children, as co-participants in the classroom community, are aware of and respectful of other children's feelings. For example, when a child is involved in conflict, they are expected to "check-in" with the child in distress and help to make the other child feel better. These strategies help build children's dispositions to take into account other people's perspectives and feelings, especially during times of conflict.

Springhill's respectful approach to children's feelings is supported by a large body of research (Carlson, 2006; Kohn, 1990; Narvaez, 2010; Szalavitz & Perry, 2010) which suggests that the more nurturance, affection, and responsiveness children receive during their early years, the more likely they will help others, treat others with kindness, be more empathic, and have higher moral development. Certainly, these are necessary traits of a democratic citizenry.

Teachers serve as role models as they practice acts of kindness, empathy, respect and care throughout the day.

Stella walks by Grace and accidentally knocks over part of Grace's "house." She immediately fixes it and says: "Sorry Grace!"

Grace immediately responds: "That's alright!"

Here is another brief exchange that suggests how endemic Springhill's culture of respect and care is in the Gardenia room. Notice it was not necessary for Sophie (the teacher) to say, "You need to apologize to Grace." It was simply Stella's automatic response, a response that has been consistently modeled throughout the Springhill community. Many educational scholars (e.g., Kohn, 1990; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2000; Lickona, 1992; and Noddings, 2005) suggest that it is more effective to *show* children

how you want them to be in relation to others, than to merely *tell* them. In other words, *modeling* kindness and respect is essential in cultivating children's sense of care and responsibility for others.

Springhill faculty model respect and kindness in myriad ways, as indicated below with some corresponding examples:

- *Teachers talk to children as fellow human beings, in a kind and caring voice. (I never observed teachers talking in a condescending, judgmental, or angry tone.)*: Nicole is about to take a small group of children, including Grace, outside. As they are leaving the classroom, Nicole notices that Walter, who is staying behind with the larger group in the classroom, has a crestfallen look on his face. Aware of Grace and Walter's close connection, Nicole understands that this may be the cause of Walter's sad demeanor. She gently acknowledges his feelings and in a caring voice says: "You really like being with Grace, don't you?"

- *Teachers are quick to apologize to children when teachers make mistakes*: One morning, Jess asks Duke to please go and wash his hands. Duke explains to Jess that she already asked him to wash his hands and that he already has. Jess apologizes to Duke saying, "Sorry, even teachers make mistakes."

- *Teachers are physically affectionate with the children in many ways. They regularly massage children's shoulders, rub their back, provide a lap, and give hugs*: Sophie, who is highly attuned to children's emotional states, uses physical touch to help prevent situations from escalating into conflict. For example, when Sophie notices Ethan reaching a high level of frustration, she subtly starts rubbing his arm, to help calm and de-escalate his feelings of stress.

- *Teachers pay attention and listen to children and participate in meaningful conversations with them on a daily basis*: As described in "Chapter 4: Composite Narrative," there is teacher-child dialogue throughout the day, while working in the studio, participating in closing circle, and eating snack. Children and teachers discuss a wide range of pertinent topics, such as shots at the doctor's office, the Springhill Dragon, grandma and grandpa's house, play dates, upcoming Kindergarten, favorite cartoon characters, past memories at Springhill, and current project work.

- *Teachers regularly help with the daily tasks and responsibilities, such as cleaning up the classroom, rather than merely overseeing and/or dictating orders*: When a group of boys are finished playing with a large pile of sandbox toys, Nicole helps them gather the toys and put them away in the shed, rather than making them clean up by themselves.

- *Teachers participate in activities along with the children and follow their lead:* Several children decide they want to decorate the classroom for an upcoming child's birthday circle, but they also realize they need some adult help. So, the group of children solicits Jess's help in hanging their decorations. Jess agrees, follows their lead, and helps them to implement their plan.

Children are highly attuned to the ways that adults model respect and care, not only towards themselves, but also to the way adults treat other children in the community. For example, imagine if a child is upset because someone is already using a toy they

wanted to play with, and if the teacher responds in the following way[106]: "Stop crying. You're acting like a baby. It's just a toy. You can play with it when John is finished. If you can't control yourself, you'll have to leave the area." What messages do such comments send to the distressed child, and to the other children in the class? Perhaps the message is: "You're not worthy of being part of this group. Your feelings are not important and should not be expressed. You *are* a baby. Either figure out a solution for yourself or I'll impose one." Not only will this disrespectful treatment shape the way the child sees himself, it also affects the way the other children will view that child. Over time, the other children may begin to treat that child as if he's not worthy of equal support.

Compare this scenario with the way I observed Sophie respond to a similar situation. Sophie gently wraps her arm around the child and says: "I can see you're feeling really angry. You must have really wanted that toy. Hmmm…I wonder how we can solve this problem?" In this latter case, Sophie models a high level of respect for the child, by valuing his feelings and showing confidence and trust that he'll be able to find a solution to the problem. Sophie also models for the other children: "We help each other in times of distress, regardless of the reason. All of us are worthy of care and respect." In a democratic community, teachers must treat *all* people in their community with equal respect and kindness.

Teachers provide many opportunities for children to help one another.

During a planning circle one morning, Sophie lets the class know that Evelyn won't be at school that day. Sophie explains that she is concerned because she doesn't want Evelyn

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[106] I am using an example of the types of comments that I have heard used frequently in various preschool settings by different teachers.

to miss out on having a sunprint made. She seeks the other children's help and several children eagerly volunteer.

In this exchange, Sophie models caring and sends children the implicit message, "We look out for each other in this community." Oftentimes in early childhood programs, when a child is absent, they simply miss out on that day's activities. However, Sophie takes a different approach, using Evelyn's absence as an opportunity for her classmates to help, and at the same time sending Evelyn the message that she is cared for.

According to Staub's research (as cited in Bornstein, November 8, 2010), "the best way to create a caring climate is to engage children collectively in an activity that benefits another human being."[107] Sophie sets up many opportunities for children to help each other throughout the day. As discussed in chapter 4 (see "Searching for the Cave"), Dave and the other Rainbow room children help several Gardenia room children with their search to find the "cave" in the forest by answering questions, showing photos, and sharing their expertise about the cave over several days. In another instance, towards the end of the year, several of the Magnolia room children carefully help the Gardenia room children learn how to use the pottery wheel.

When children get stuck on a project, Sophie often refers them to other children in the classroom for help. For example, when Kate has trouble getting her baby doll dressed, Sophie refers her to Evelyn (e.g., "Evelyn's very good at that, how about you ask her to help you?"). In circle, Sophie and Jess invite children to share special projects and

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[107] According to a New York Times article, "Fighting Bullying with Babies" (Bornstein, 2010): A large Canadian study found that a program titled "Roots of Empathy" which brings in and teaches elementary-age children about babies reduced bullying behaviors by over 80 percent. As an added benefit, they found it also made the teachers more empathic.

invite them to use their expertise to help others. For example, when Evelyn shares a "crown" she has made, Sophie tells the children if they're interested in making one and need help Evelyn is the person to go to. Or, as discussed later in chapter 9, Sophie invites Zach to help his friends on various projects. Springhill teachers create many opportunities for children to discover the pleasures of helping others and make mutual aid an expectation of the classroom culture.

Teachers pay attention to children's prosocial relationships and make these strong images of children visible to the entire Springhill community. During a faculty meeting, a teacher shares some of her documentation about her class of two-year-olds and the ways in which they collaborate and help each other. This spurs a discussion among teachers about similar experiences they've observed in their classrooms.

Referring to an example from her group of four-year-olds, Gina explains: "We've noticed a lot of that [helping, helping each other] in here too. Timmy got those little sticker things [from forest plants] all over him and Franklin was picking them off, and Eloise sat there for probably 10 minutes and picked them off."

Gina continues: "Timmy, a little bit later, got several more [stickies] on [him] and it was, 'Oh, come here Timmy dear' and [Eloise] was picking them off again, [saying], 'You poor dear!' or something like that. But, the fact that [the children] go out of their way to help each other, I mean…"

Terra: "and [helping each other] up and down the creek, that's pretty amazing."

Gina: "Yeah."

Terra: "And to see them reach out to people, that you wouldn't necessarily, and we do, we point it out, "It looks like Ryan needs a friend," or something like that. But they're right there. I mean they're pretty amazing."

When teachers pay attention to children's acts of kindness and share these stories through discussion and documentation, they are able to reinforce a strong image of the child and make it visible to all members of the community. In the above example, teachers discuss their observations with fellow colleagues.

Teachers also share their stories with the children in their classrooms. For example, when Sophie notices several instances of children helping each other (and helping teachers) throughout the day, she shares her observations in closing circle (see chapter 4, "Friends helping friends; Making solidarity visible in the classroom," for full description). Some of her observations include: Matthew helping other children put on coats;[108] Orson sharing his sled with Walter; several children helping Nicole (the resource teacher) clean up the Meadow area. It is also important to note that when Sophie shares the ways that children helped each other, it isn't artificial praise, as in, "You're such good boys and girls." Instead she emphasizes the perspective of the cared-for people and how the action makes them feel. Sophie's approach helps cultivate children's perspective-taking abilities and prevents children from being motivated simply by considerations of self-interest.

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[108] It seems that putting forth a strong image of Matthew as helper and coat expert was particularly valuable at this time. He was the youngest three-year-old in the class, relatively new to the school, had lots of energy, struggled with writing/drawing tasks and sometimes got into conflict because he had not yet figured out how to negotiate a solution. Consequently, having other avenues for success that could be projected back to him was crucial to his self-image.

Teachers also make this culture of care and collaboration visible to parents through regularly produced classroom documentation, such as the "Taking Time at the Creek" documentation shown at the beginning of this chapter. (For another example, see "First Days; Making Connections" in chapter 6.) When Springhill teachers take the time to observe and make visible children's many displays of affection, collaboration, and care for one another, they are able both to project a strong image of children as prosocial and to reinforce a community culture centered on kindness, respect, and care.

A Non-Hierarchical Network of Community Support, Responsibility and Shared Decision-Making by All Community Members

In a democratic community, all members of the community are treated with respect and care. In "Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility," Thomas Lickona (1992) explains, "Responsibility is an extension of respect. If we respect other people, we value them. If we value them, we feel a measure of responsibility for their welfare…It means orienting toward others, paying attention to them, actively responding to their needs" (p. 44). Thus, responsibility includes "taking care of self and others, fulfilling our obligations, contributing to our communities, alleviating suffering, and building a better world" (p. 68).

Springhill faculty's network of support. During my interviews with Springhill teachers and administrators, they shared with me the way that the faculty takes care of each other and serves as a network of support. As executive director of the school, Lisa explains (personal communication, December 15, 2009):

Probably one of the biggest perks of working here is the way that people take care of each other. It's a pretty *extraordinary safety net*. So for example, when we

were preparing for my daughter's bat mitzvah, and I was a wreck because I'm not

Jewish and I had no idea what I was doing… It was like planning a wedding. I

mean I hate to say that because it sounds so disproportional, but there are all the

same questions and logistics. So one day I got to work, and there was a card in

my mailbox, and it was a note saying the teachers had planned to have two meals

delivered to us. This was for the month leading up to the bat mitzvah. So they

were feeding us, you know, while we were in that process. And then, I think for

her bat mitzvah, they did a dinner for our extended family the night before and for

my son's bar mitzvah, they did the brunch the day after. So, and then, we did

Nicole's [the resource teacher] daughter's rehearsal dinner. And…we cater for

each other. Nicole's 25th anniversary party…and so there's that…This kind

of…family that does the kind of celebrating with you. And then mourning, we've

been through a lot of death. A lot of us have lost parents over this period of time

that we've worked together… So that's a huge-- that's a huge resource that's kind

of incalculable. But that's a lot of the glue of why I—people [are] here.

The research on teacher retention supports Lisa's contention that Springhill's

safety net is critical to the faculty's high level of professional commitment and

continuity. As discussed in chapter 2, research suggests that "teachers remain with a

district when they feel strong bonds of connection to a professional learning community

that has, at its heart, high-quality interpersonal relationships founded on trust and respect"

(Wong, as cited in Portner, 2005, p. 45).

In interviews with the faculty I encountered similar sentiments. For instance, in

an interview with Terra, who is both a Rainbow Room teacher and a parent of three

children who have attended Springhill, she explains (personal communication, November 10, 2009):

> This community is just, it's unbelievable as a parent, it's unbelievable as a faculty member, who really do go the extra distance for one another. If someone's sick or someone has a baby, they're right there with meals. It's just amazing. It's amazing and the faculty is an incredible support to each other, so it's all levels. It really is on all levels.

During my field observations, I observed teachers treat each other with respect and care in their daily interactions; the teachers seem to be genuinely concerned with each other's welfare. In fact, when my grandfather passed away, I mentioned it to one of the teachers in an email correspondence. Shortly thereafter, I received a card, signed by all the faculty members offering condolences. (See chapter 11 for more about close relationships among the faculty and their deep foundation of trust.)

In the Springhill community, there is an expectation that administration, teachers, parents, and children alike, will all treat each other with respect and kindness. Again, from my interview with Terra:

> Children are sort of expected to rise to the same level of consideration as adults are, and we are expected to treat children with the same level of consideration that we ask them to treat one another, and I think across the board *respect* is huge because it's again horizontal and vertical and I think decision-making for the most part is too. I mean the children's work is often discussed, what they're thinking about that work is discussed. I think…once the safety piece is out of the way,

there's a lot of leeway for other decisions and the children's influence on those

decisions. (Interview transcription, November 10, 2009, lines 429-436)

Sophie shares similar sentiments about Springhill's non-hierarchical, egalitarian

relationships during our interview:

I think [being] this *responsive* school, where everybody's voices are

important…And, you see that on every level, the parent meetings that we have,

the parent involvement. And…this was the thing that I noticed about Springhill

from the very first time I encountered it was that—the youngest child was valued

as much as the older child, and you know the way that I had grown up, there was

always a hierarchy at home and at school. You know the eldest, like that. And it

was the same…in Ireland [where Sophie grew up]…[For example], you [would]

have to wear knee socks to school until a certain age and then you can progress to

wearing tights. I remember boys have to wear shorts until a certain age and then

they can wear trousers. So there's this very, very defined hierarchy and I just

remember the way, being struck by how Nicole [the Springhill teacher] was

talking to the youngest children, that their voice was important. And I think that

is what is important about a democratic community—that the most vulnerable

person, the most vulnerable member of the community is as important as the most

powerful. (Interview transcription, November 3, 2009, lines 412-423)

Springhill leadership establishes an expectation of social responsibility and care

from all community members right from the start and sets up the environment in ways

that intentionally support these democratic aims. For example, in describing the

orientation process for new teachers, Mary (ECE director) explains (personal communication, November 17, 2009):

> We give a long piece on social responsibility in which we show videos and now, what we found is that we invite the whole group [other faculty members] into the orientation of the new folks and have conversations. So it's a conversation about social responsibility. We'll show something provocative and then have a conversation about it. And it's-- it really capitalizes on the experience we have on staff and really utilizes all of that know-how and good energy and all of those anecdotes.

Administrators' and teachers' emphasis on social responsibility and respect is made visible to Springhill families starting at the initial stages of enrollment. In fact, during my interview with parents, some of them mentioned selecting Springhill preschool over other schools in the area largely because of Springhill's focus on social responsibility and respect. As Duke's mom explains (personal communication, August 16, 2010):

> I loved the social responsibility piece of the school, the respect that everyone who worked there demonstrated for children and their thought processes, the creativity with which they approached every challenge, the environment and how it was set up, the way they provide provocations for the students and then watch to see where the students take things, the thought and time they put into every choice, and the way they provided scaffolding to students to support their social and intellectual development.

Personal reflections: "What's in it for my child?" Springhill's agenda for creating a culture of respect and responsibility is not limited to what happens within the school, but also extends to the surrounding community. In my interviews, Springhill administrators, teachers, and parents all expressed a deep sense of responsibility to contribute to the early childhood community and society as a whole. For the purposes of contrast, I begin this section with a story from my past experience.

While I was the director of a NAEYC-accredited preschool, we decided to redesign our playground in order to create a more engaging and natural outdoor environment for the children. This was a multi-phased project that was going to take several years to complete. The children were intimately involved in the process. Rachel, a four-year-old in the Chestnut classroom was particularly invested in the re-design process. The previous year when Rachel entered the Chestnut classroom, she spent much of her time observing other children and was quite tentative about leading projects. However, the next year Rachel's strong interest in the playground design inspired her to form and lead her own "playground committee." Rachel and the rest of the group decided the committee's focus would be to re-design the climbing structures inside the bike path on the preschool playground. For several weeks, children took on a variety of tasks. They drew various sketch's of playground equipment, studied the space, looked at the maps of the playground equipment, negotiated how to fit their designs together onto one final plan, and held several meetings with the classroom teacher, with the director (me), and eventually with the carpenter to discuss their designs.

The children were very serious about their work and were extremely creative in finding solutions to problems that emerged around their designs. From my point of view,

there were many ways that children benefitted from this project, which required initiative, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, collaboration, and negotiation. I was perhaps most excited that the children were actively participating in contributing to the larger school community. However, much to my astonishment, the very fact that these children were participating in a project that touched upon the lives of so many different community members became a source of conflict with the parents of these children. When the classroom teacher shared the children's work with a group of parents, they immediately wanted to know, "Why should our children be investing all this time on a project that they will not benefit from?" Given that these children were preschoolers who would be moving on to kindergarten before the completion of the project, it was true that the children would not experience the direct benefit of playing on the playground equipment they were helping to design. But how is it that the experience of altruistically helping others is not considered a valuable benefit for children? (Not to mention all the benefits children gained during the process.) To help address the parents' concerns, I explained that at the completion of the project we planned to have a celebration with current families and past alumni so the children could see the project come to fruition (and play on the equipment).

In contrast to the strong *consumerist-orientation* of the parents, it should be noted that the children showed no concern at all about whether or not they could play on the equipment. Instead, the children were focused on the excitement of being actively involved in the creative process. They also loved the idea of contributing designs that would help future groups of children have an improved playground experience (and for a few of these children, this included their younger siblings).

For me, this experience illustrates the "What's in it for me?" consumerist way of thinking that prevails in many of our preschool programs, and it sits in sharp contrast to the way a democratic community encourages a sense of responsibility to help others beyond the immediate group.

Extension of social responsibility beyond the Springhill community. As reflected in their interviews and the actual outreach work they do outside of the school, Springhill teachers and administrators alike have a collective sense of social responsibility for the greater community. Mary (Director of Early Childhood Education), who co-teaches a class on social constructivism at a local university, talks about her personal and school vision of community outreach during our interview:

We've always had the idea that part of the reason that we're doing this and…I think [there] is the personal place this sits for me, and there's probably a place that I can talk about that it sits for the school and the expression of that was in Springhill's *mission statement...* And the way it sits for me is that I really feel that this is a place that I can contribute to the world. This is a place that I can take an idea that has implications beyond me and that has implications for the future and that will make a difference. So it's kind of my way of making a difference. So…the outreach, then, becomes a way of sharing what I think is a different way of understanding children and knowing children. And, you know, I see the way that we are with children in the world and then the history of the world is kind of a developing or evolving or moving into greater understanding of the human experience and what it means to be human and what the possibility is to be human. And so, with a goal of keeping humanity going [Laughs] is sort of our

larger goal. Our biggest goal. And so I see this work as a step in that direction and I see sharing it with anyone who's interested in it as a way to spread the ripples in the pond. To kind of help move out…from the center. So it's not just our school but a growing number of schools…And now we've put the onus on ourselves to speak at the Virginia conference [as well as several other national conferences]. That is more so that we make ourselves more available, accessible in that realm. And I mean I'm just really thrilled. Alice is writing a lot there and has her blog out there…I do see the class on constructivism as kind of the next step and that's been valuable. We've just gotten the projects back from that--that people take it in the summer and then their projects go during the course of the fall and then they send their projects in. So I'm beginning to see ripple effects in public schools…And so all of that, I mean I don't know what to say about it except that it really is our intention. And Lisa [Executive Director] and I have talked about it over the years and it certainly was one of the expressed *intents--* Springhill as a preschool to have an *outreach* component. So as we develop our mission, the mission is not finalized for Springhill at Stonewood. But I expect that will continue to be the direction we're headed as well.

When I asked Lisa (Springhill's Executive School Director) about her vision for the school, she also underscored the importance of outreach and making Springhill's educational approach more visible to the greater early childhood community. Lisa explains:

I definitely envision our work being more visible. I mean we've been talking for years about the books and I think the first book-- I think we agreed probably three

or four years ago that the first book that ought to come out of the work of the

preschool is about what we've learned about learning in groups. Sort of about co-

construction, really… So, it's kind of how do we find the time to do that? We've

also envisioned a book called "Invitations" that would be mostly, almost a photo

essay of the ways that teachers arrange the classrooms or different locations or

provocations within the classrooms to engage kids and provoke their interest.

She adds:

So…that's definitely part of my vision is, our collective vision, is getting our

work out more. So we've been able to do that to some small extent through

presenting at NAEYC and mostly that-- I mean mostly at the early childhood

conferences. We've also hosted our own workshops and conferences and sort of

one-shot training experiences [open to the whole community]. So, for example, a

year ago, we had an evening on finding the forest and …our experiences with

children in wild spaces and the outdoors…We offered that on the heels of a

symposium that was sponsored by Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden about young

children in nature. And so we decided-- we helped them to plan that symposium,

but then decided that we would do a follow-up session that was based strictly on

sharing our experiences and so there was a good draw from the community.

As indicated in these interviews, both Mary and Lisa seem to have a personal sense of

responsibility to help care for and improve the broader community.[109]

As Mary mentions, Alice (the studio teacher) has an ongoing blog featuring her

studio work, and the faculty has a blog on their school-wide intentions/inquiry project,

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[109] In fact, Lisa and Mary were both involved in helping to create a middle school for
girls and then later a middle school for boys in the Richmond area.

"Umbrella Project."[110] In addition, the faculty presents many workshops at state and national early childhood conferences. Sharing their work with the larger community is not only encouraged by Mary and Lisa, but there seems to be an expectation of outreach. Leadership provides a lot of paid time and support for teachers in this outreach mission.

Springhill parents are also encouraged to actively participate in the wider community. In fact, parents and faculty came together and wrote a book titled, "Richmond is for Children." As Lisa explains:

> In 1975 when there was a gas shortage, the Springhill parents decided it might be a good community service project to publish information about what people could do close at hand, in and around Richmond. And so they created this book called "Richmond is for Children." And we ended up doing five editions of it over the years.

Children's sense of responsibility and care for larger community.

"Environmental responsibility *is* social responsibility—there is no separation between how we treat the environment and how we treat each other." Wangari Maathai

Springhill teachers create opportunities for children to cultivate a disposition towards social responsibility and care for their environment and the larger community. Here are just a few examples from the Gardenia room:

- Evelyn pours her leftover water from her snack cup into one of the classroom plant's soil;

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[110] An "umbrella project" is a series of provocations based on an idea that is meant to spark creative thinking and connect students across classrooms and age-levels…We use the term metaphorically to mean we are thinking of one big idea, one rich concept, as the 'umbrella' under which we all gather to start an investigation or inquiry" as defined on Springhill's "Umbrella Project" blog (2010).

- Orson takes his orange peels and places them in "worm world" to feed the class worms;

- Grace puts her granola wrapper in the recycling container;

- Zach takes the compost refuse (e.g., banana peels, apple core, and orange peels) collected at snack and dumps it into the large compost ball on the playground.

The Gardenia room children seemed to take pride in participating in these activities and began to come up with their own ideas of how to take care of the environment, as described in the following vignette:

Kate and Matthew play with the birdseed that is in the sensory table, along with several scoops, cups, and one larger bucket. After Matthew leaves to go outside, Kate continues to play, and then discovers that several scoopfuls worth of birdseed have fallen onto the floor. As someone who is accustomed to taking care of the classroom, Kate takes out a child-sized broom and dustpan and begins to sweep up the dropped seed. Lila then offers to help Kate clean up, revealing both her sense of shared responsibility for the classroom and her desire to join Kate. To help matters along, Jess (the teacher) gets Lila a broom and dustpan. After a few minutes of filling up their dustpan, the two girls decide that instead of throwing away the dirty birdseed, they would like to take it outside to feed the birds. They explain their idea to Jess, who responds, "The birds will like that." Jess helps the girls find a paper cup in which to put the birdseed.

When Lila and Kate finish sweeping, they take the birdseed out to the playground. Once they go out the doors, they (break out into a run towards the picnic table) with excitement. Lila shouts: "We had a good idea!"

Kate: "Yeah." They put the cups on the picnic table for the birds. They wait about 30 seconds for the birds to come before Kate suggests that maybe they should play while they're waiting for the birds.

Kate: "Let's keep the birdseed there, here [the picnic table] so, so, so the birds will get it. Maybe we should play while the birds fly, fly, fly, find the bird seed. That way, they won't see us. Okay Lila?"

Lila agrees: "Okay let's go play!"

When children live in a community where care for their environment is modeled, practiced and supported by teachers on a daily basis, that attitude seems to become a habit of mind for children as well.

Teachers encourage multi-aged, non-hierarchical community support. In the following section, I provide examples of how the Springhill faculty creates a nonhierarchical culture based on respect and responsibility inside and outside of their classrooms and how they actively involve children in shared decision-making and choices in the daily functioning of the school.

In a democratic school culture, the goal is for power to be shared by all members of the community. This egalitarian approach to power creates a non-hierarchical community where relationships of care and support can develop naturally and without regard to age or status in the community. Here are a few examples of the fluid relationships that emerge in a non-hierarchical context:

- Some children in a toddler classroom discover several of the "gumball toys" that Valerie (a 4-year-old) created and left in the forest earlier that week. (See chapter 4, "Following Children's Individual Pursuits" for description of how

Valerie's gumball project came about.) The toys were lying directly underneath the toddler's "peek-a-boo" tree[111] in the forest. The toddler teachers and two of the children tell Terra (Valerie's teacher) about their discovery and invite Valerie to come over and teach them how to use her gumball toys. Not only does Valerie show the toddlers how to twirl the gumball toy around and around, the toddlers also share their own discoveries about how to play with the gumball as well (e.g., as a "fishing pole."). (See Appendix Q, "Forest Room Documentation," October 16, 2009, for full description.)

- Alice (the studio teacher) pokes her finger with a sewing needle. Robert (a 4-year-old) takes it upon himself to help take care of her boo-boo, gives her a band-aid, and gently adhere it to her finger. Alice respectfully accepts his care (see chapter 4, "Sewing in the studio").

- Each day, Nicole takes different groups of children outside to help her set up the playground and decide what materials should be set out.

In democratic environments, all members of the community help each other and share in the responsibilities and well-being of the group. Therefore, children are able to be both the *receiver* of and *provider* of help and care, reinforcing the idea that all human beings need and appreciate support (even adults). As suggested by the above examples, teachers create this non-hierarchical culture of support in the following two ways:

First, teachers share decision-making and choices with children. Children participate in deciding what projects and inquiries to pursue; share in decisions about

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[111] The Forest Room children have created names for several different trees in the forest.

how to decorate the classroom (see chapter 6, "Decoration and documentation," for more details); move freely throughout the classroom and school spaces; help negotiate classroom rules (see "Children renegotiate classroom rules" in the section below for an example); and participate in activities that serve the common good, such as spreading out mulch on the playground and washing the easels. The Springhill faculty has intentionally set up the school environment to allow children lots of freedom to make choices, to be actively involved in caring for their environment, and to share in the decision-making process.

Second, teachers encourage the development of supportive relationships across different age groups and classrooms of children. In democratic environments, group divisions should be blurred and malleable, respecting the right of each child to pursue whatever relationships he or she wishes to pursue in the community. In a similar fashion, democratic practice generally eschews rigid roles and divisions of labor, favoring instead a more fluid, overlapping arrangement of involvement and support (Dewey, 1997/1938; Goodman, 1992; Putnam, 2000). For instance, notice in the following example how multi-aged support among children is fostered by the teachers at Springhill:

Lila (a three-year-old from the Gardenia room) comes to the studio with a plan to make a clown hat. She has made several unsuccessful attempts to make her hat on previous days. Several 5 year-old-girls from the Magnolia room are already in the studio working on various projects.

Alice (the studio teacher) comments to the older girls: "You guys, Lila's been trying to make a clown hat, and she's been trying to make it for a few days, so if anybody has any ideas…"

There is an instant barrage of suggestions from the older children, who are happy to help Lila in her pursuit.

Rita, working on a beaded necklace, suggests: "Maybe you could, like, get some beads for the balls, on top of a clown hat."

Ashley has another idea: "maybe you could draw a clown hat and then get, out of paper, and um, and then cut it out and then…"

Alice asks Ashley: "Would you like to do one? You could do one and show her?"

Mel: "No, no, I have a good idea…"

Rita: "I could draw a clown hat for her and then cut it out and then she could wear it on her head."

Alice: "I'm sure she would like that."

Ashley: "You know how I would draw a clown hat?" Ashley takes out a piece of paper, sits down next to Lila, and starts to draw her idea for Lila's clown hat.

But as Ashley draws her idea of a clown hat, Lila finds a solution for herself. She unrolls and rips off a long piece of 3-inch wide calculator paper that she found on one of the art shelves. She takes it back to the table, decorates it, and says: "I'm done! I'm done!"

Lila holds her decorated paper out for Alice to see. At this point, Lila just needs a way to wrap her "clown hat" around her head and attach the ends.

Alice suggests: "Show it to Ashley or maybe Mel and maybe they could help you." (Notice Alice doesn't attach the hat for Lila, but points her to the Magnolia room girls for help.)

Eager to help, Mel announces with excitement: "Oh, I could!" So, Lila hands her the hat.

Simultaneously, Ashley shouts: "I could!" and joins Lila and Mel.

Mel carefully wraps the clown hat around Lila's head, but realizes she needs some tape to attach the ends. So Ashley says she'll hold the piece of paper around Lila's head while Mel gets the tape. Once Mel returns with tape, she carefully starts to attach the two ends together while Ashley continues to hold the paper onto Lila's head. But the girls suddenly realize they need another tool, scissors, to cut the end of the tape off the roll. They decide that Ashley will continue to hold the hat *and* tape on Lila's head, while Mel retrieves the scissors. Mel quickly returns with the scissors and cuts off the end of the tape. As Mel and Ashley finish attaching the hat, they let Lila know it's fixed. With a great big grin, Lila thanks the girls for their help, and all three girls exchange smiles of satisfaction.

Together Mel and Ashley were able to help Lila follow through on her plan to make a clown hat, and collaboratively help Lila on a task that she most likely would not have been able to complete alone.

By creating an environment where children have many opportunities for cross-aged support, Springhill teachers cultivate children's sense of social responsibility and a natural disposition to help all members of the community.

What role do rules play in social responsibility and concern for the common good? Shared decision-making and control in democratic environments. During my interviews, I asked each Springhill teacher and administrator the question, "What is the purpose of rules?" All of the responses were very similar, and it became evident that

there is a community-shared understanding around the purpose of rules (which they typically refer to as "guidelines" or "conventions"). As it was explained to me, these guidelines have two primary purposes: (1) to ensure the *safety* of each individual*;* and (2) to maintain *respect* for all community members and their shared environment. Similar to the rules governing a participatory democracy, the Springhill guidelines are not created or used as arbitrary sources of adult power and control. Instead, they emphasize an expectation of and primary focus on social responsibility and concern for the well-being of the community. During her interview, Sophie explains (personal communication, November 3, 2009):

> I think people sort of say, "well rules are definitely for safety," and that's definitely the bottom line, is safety, but then there's also *respect* and things like that. And, I think when you're in a community, it's about figuring out what your belief system is and what the community is comfortable with and that's what the rules should come from.

With that said, I asked Sophie if she could give me an example of a rule that emerged out of the unique experience of the Springhill community. She responds:

> Well…the "stop signs" are sacred [laughs] because that's a *huge* safety thing…So that's really a big, big one and you know the other rules are about not hurting people or hurting materials.

Children renegotiate classroom rules. Sophie continues by sharing an example of a classroom rule that the children in her class challenged and successfully renegotiated. She explains:

Sometimes when we've had rules, we've sort of questioned why we've had them. I mean, it's little things, like the sensory table or the other little table. We often say just two children [can be there at a time]. But then last year, the children in here, there were…a number of little friendships, where there were three children, and they were really unhappy about that and so we had a circle about it and said, 'you know, some people are saying that they want to have three children at this table and other people say they just want to have two and what should we do?' And we took a vote and they decided that three children could be at a table and so we [added] a little symbol up there [next to the sensory table] with three children. But, I had used some pictures of the dollhouse characters…I used a picture of the dollhouse characters [featuring two girls and one boy] and [the children] said, 'It means that only two girls and one boy can play here.' [Sophie laughs.] So, yes, they're still so concrete about it. So it became another negotiation.

In this example, the Gardenia room of 3-year-olds felt safe to voice their dissenting opinions about a classroom "convention" and share in the decision-making process as they negotiated new terms. Within a trusting environment, when teachers listen to children's perspectives, treat their ideas seriously, allow flexibility around class rules, and share in the decision-making process, children are able to actively participate in democratic governance. This type of approach is antithetical to the top-down, hierarchical control of children.

Rules that spark group solidarity and problem solving: "It's a Conundrum."
When I asked Gina (a teacher in the Rainbow room) about classroom rules, she responded (personal communication, November 18, 2009):

We don't have a lot [of rules]…basically respecting each other, respecting

materials. When we find something broken we'll normally bring it to circle and

we'll talk about that. Or, if we see somebody just come and rip something then

we'll talk about that, so they'll understand that these are either somebody's art

work or classroom [materials]…A prime example of that is, in the beginning of

the year, a child rolled [a stump] outside, when we were making camp, it was a

big stump that we had water and cups on,[112] and they rolled it down into the creek

and we kind of talked about it as a class. We didn't really point fingers, but now

it became a "conundrum," a problem for the class, and "How were we going to

get our log back up?" And it actually became a very bonding experience for our

whole class because they really had to figure out how to do that, and…I think the

child that pushed it down, learned a lot without having that child, or having that

finger pointed at them, but that consequences happen when you do certain things,

so that's part of respecting the materials and "Let's work together as a class. If

something get's broken, we fix it." (Interview transcription, lines 234-260)

In other words, their classroom "guidelines" are centered on building children's sense of

social responsibility, and *not* centered on "pointing fingers" or shaming children for

inappropriate behaviors. Terra and Gina use the log "conundrum" as a catalyst to help

the children problem solve *together,* develop a sense of responsibility for the care of their

classroom materials, and cultivate a disposition of active citizenship.

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[112] The Rainbow children and teachers use a log, standing vertically, approximately 2 ½ feet tall, on which they place their water pitcher and cups each day for snack in the "forest" (see chapter 4, "Snack Routine in the Forest" for further description).

Terra and Gina shared this log experience with the Springhill community in their ongoing classroom documentation (Excerpted from Gina and Terra's Documentation, September 30, 2009):

> We saw perhaps the most powerful example of large group work last week. The log we use for our water had been rolled down into the creek. We spent a great deal of time both that afternoon and the following morning discussing the strategy the children would use to get the log back up the hill. After much discussion the children settled on trying to use rope. We went outside Friday AM (the wettest, muddiest day yet) and the children began to tackle the problem. They measured rope, climbed down the hill, tied the rope and then began to negotiate with friends at the top of the hill about when to push and pull, how hard, and how far to go. Children pushed and pulled. Finally, after many attempts, the log reached the top. There was dancing, high fiving, and general excitement. Solving a problem as a group is a powerful process, and the children were reaping the benefits. As teachers, this was a thrill to see, these children have come together so beautifully. It will be exciting to see where their explorations go from here.

As this example illustrates, the child who pushed the log down the hill was not left by himself to figure out how to solve the problem. A powerful message was being sent, "When I make mistakes I have a community of support. I can depend on my friends and teachers for help when I make mistakes. I do not feel shamed, punished or excluded from the group. However, I take this problem seriously and need to figure out, with support, a way to solve it and take responsibility for my classroom."

Children participate in creating rules for a "shooting game." During my

interview with Terra, I asked her the same questions about the purpose of rules. She

responds with an example (personal communication, November 10, 2009):

I have an example today. There were 2 [children], who wanted to play a shooting

game outside, and we do have some…Springhill rules about shooting games, and

the children were able to tell me what those were: "You need space. You need an

adult. And, you can have a shooting game *only* if other children around you want

to do it as well." So I asked them if they had those things and they said, "Well,

we have space" and they pointed to the other side of the forest. "And, we have

two of us who want to play, and we just need an adult. Will you do it?" And I

explained that there were 13 outside and I couldn't take just two [children]. So

they went around and asked friends if they wanted to play a shooting game and

they got a group of 6 or 7 together and they went through all the rules. And I

said, "Yep, we have all those, but I'm worried about some other things." So I

took them over to the large area in the forest and I said, "I'm worried that

someone will get hurt and I wonder if we should have some rules around getting

hurt" and they came up with, "No contact." Those were their exact words, "No

contact, except your sticks could touch. No running." And, when you were

walking you had to have your stick down to the side, and so they came up with 3

additional rules, and it's so easy to hold children to rules they created because as

soon as one of them would start to run I would just say, "Ryan" and he would say,

"Oh yeah, running." I mean it was amazing! So there they were having their

shooting game, which quickly became something unrelated to shooting. And, I

think we provided them the chance to express whatever they needed to express. So yeah, I think there are definitely rules. I think there are rules about harming other people's work or harming other people, I think there are personal boundary rules, about your personal space and the work that you do and certainly, although it's not explicitly said, if someone saying to someone, "That's stupid," or "that's ugly," related to the work that they're doing. That would not be acceptable. So I mean we don't have them posted on the walls, you know, "respect your elders," or anything like that, because there's none of that, but, yeah, there are expectations for "respect of yourself and others"… So, I think…there needs to be a reason behind the [rules]…and then once there's a reason behind them [and] the child understands that, then I think there's often complete buy-in…We also *slow it down* enough to talk about it if there are questions. So I think…there have to be some rules, but there has to be a lot of *freedom* that goes with that. And I think this environment definitely provides that…It's basically about taking care of things that you're using and about not harming others, emotionally or physically. I would say that's the majority of them, safety and respect.

Terra's example offers insight into what happens when teachers involve children in the creation and follow-through of classroom rules. Within the Springhill community, the concept "rule" seems to diverge from a strictly conventional understanding of the word (e.g., hierarchical and non-negotiable) and takes on a more nuanced construction, in which "rules" serve as guidelines and/or expectations of living and working together as a community (e.g., respecting self, each other, materials, and the environment).

Rules or "conventions" are a necessary part of a democracy, because in a system *without* rules, the powerful are free to act with impunity, potentially to the detriment of others. Clearly by implication, rules in a democracy must benefit everyone, not just a few. So, to assure that *everyone* benefits, the responsibility for creating, sustaining, and (when necessary) changing rules must be shared by *all* members of the community. In the context of early childhood education, when children actively participate in collaborative problem-solving, shared decision-making, and care for the common good, they are developing the skills and mentality of citizenship, which is the essential foundation for a democratic disposition in adulthood.

A Culture of Collaborative Problem-Solving and Conflict Negotiation

As described on the Springhill website (2010), children will "acquire the habit of *social responsibility*, both as individuals who *respect others*, and as members of a *learning community*, who can negotiate, collaborate, and seek solutions collectively."

In this third section of the chapter, I show how the Springhill faculty provides opportunities to cultivate children's disposition to: 1) take responsibility for their classroom materials and the common good of the community, 2) view problems as opportunities, and 3) participate in problem solving and conflict negotiations, both with teacher support and independently. Finally, I provide an example of how the Springhill faculty intentionally creates opportunities for shared dialogue among all community members, highlighting the fundamental values undergirding Springhill's collaborative environment.

Children take responsibility for classroom materials: Duke and Matthew break and fix a block. The following vignette illustrates how a teacher can take a

classroom problem (in this case, a broken block) and skillfully use that incident to

support many areas of children's development, including collaboration, problem-solving,

language, literacy, and critical thinking. But perhaps most importantly, the story shows

how teachers can help children develop a sense of shared ownership and responsibility

for their classroom materials and environment:

November 12, 2009, Gardenia Room: After signing in for the morning, Matthew

walks to the large wooden table, which is abuzz with activity. The table has a large set of

wood-rimmed, transparent colored blocks on it, along with the Gardenia room "dolls."

The dolls were created by Sophie and Jess by gluing a laminated photo of each child to a

wooden block, which allows each child to be represented by a freestanding doll in their

micro-symbolic play.[113]

Zach has just finished building a large castle out of the blocks and is placing

several Gardenia room dolls in different parts of his castle. Meanwhile, Duke is in the

process of rebuilding his large block castle with Orson. They've been intermittently

knocking the castle down, while laughing and chanting silly words: "Crash attack!

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[113] Both the boys and girls have been drawn to these imaginative, gender-inclusive dolls, ever since they were put out by the teachers. (These dolls allow children to become the protagonists in their play rather than simply mimicking popular media icons). By providing boy dolls, along with the girl dolls, teachers intentionally challenge stereotypic thinking and provide *all* children with opportunities to participate in this type of play. Interesting to note, earlier in the year (October 20) when Matthew wanted to play with baby dolls, he tried taking one of Kate's dolls. She became upset and jumped up and down saying: "He poked my baby's bed!!" Sophie responds, "That sounds very frustrating." After a brief pause, Sophie continues: "Here's the problem. Matthew *really* wants to play with a baby." Kate: "Well he can have one of those babies." (Kate points to a baby doll left on the couch.) Matthew responds: "I don't want a *pink* one." As a young three-year-old boy, he decides to opt out of baby doll play rather than have to play with a baby doll dressed in *pink* clothing. Yet, when the teacher-created "dollies" reflect the boys' own identities, they are very drawn to using them [see chapter 10 for further discussion on challenging gender stereotypes].

Cracker Jack, Cracker Plack!" Matthew joins in the silly play by "crashing" and knocking over Duke's castle. This precipitates more, "creative destruction."

Duke says: "I built a castle that NOBODY can knock down." (Duke's statement seems to be a mutually-understood, implicit invitation for Matthew to try and knock down his castle.) Matthew knocks it down and they both laugh.

A few moments later, Matthew builds a large "slide" out of the blocks for his Matthew "dollie" and the "Evelyn dollie" to go "up, up, up" the slide and then "down, down" the other side. This up and down action gradually morphs into a sound resembling a space ship taking off and landing again. Matthew then picks up a red square block from a pile of blocks near Duke's broken-down castle, and begins moving it up and down with his arms, flying it through the air, pretending it's a "rocket ship" blasting off and landing several times. Duke notices that Matthew has taken one of his castle blocks and says to him: "NO! I had the red one first."

Matthew does not look up or respond to Duke and continues playing with the block. So Duke, looking at me says, "Matthew took it without asking." I respond, "Uh-oh," but keep videotaping the interaction.

So, Duke turns back to Matthew and says: "I had that one first and you took it without asking. Give it back to me, try…practice again."

Matthew responds softly: "Can I have it please?" (At the age of three, Duke and Matthew are already quite skillful at verbalizing their needs. These skills seem to be the result of repeated, daily practice that Springhill children have in resolving conflict. Some of the words and techniques that Duke and Matthew use in this conflict negotiation are ones that have been modeled by teachers during previous occasions.)

Duke says, "Um…No." But then, softening his stance a bit, adds, "after I'm done." He then leans over the table with his arm extended to retrieve the block from Matthew. As he does this, Matthew pulls the block further away from Duke. Matthew suddenly looks at the block and says, "Oh dear, I broke it. See, I broke it." Matthew holds the block out for me to look at.

I respond: "Did you break it? Uh-oh."

Matthew then immediately walks over to Sophie to show her, holding it up, saying, "I broke it."

Sophie in a very nonjudgmental voice says: "Oh dear. How did that happen Matthew? Hmmm." (Notice how Matthew is not afraid to show his mistake to the teacher. Instead he understands that he can safely go to Sophie for help without fear of shame or reprimand.)

"We were pulling on it," Matthew responds, as they walk back over to the block table where Duke is still working on his "castle."

Sophie still in a calm and inquiring voice says, "Oh, you were pulling on it?"

Matthew responds: "Yeah."

Sophie: "Oh."

Duke interjects: "No you pulled! Matthew pulled on it."

Sophie, nods her head, pauses, and then seeks clarification, "So, were you both pulling on it?"

Duke says to Sophie: "Yeah. I really wanted it…"

Matthew doesn't respond but gets distracted by another one of the colored blocks and starts pretending that it is a rocket ship blasting off into the air.

Sophie: "Well, actually I think what we need to do is take care of this." (Notice, Sophie's emphasis is on fixing the problem, not casting blame.)

Duke notices that Matthew's "rocket ship" is a blue block from his castle. So he says to Matthew, "I need that blue one!"

Sophie asks Matthew to put the blue block down. She reminds Duke and Matthew that before they continue playing they need to fix the broken red block.

Duke stands up holding the broken block with his hand, and with Matthew taking the other side of the block, they walk over to the art table together to repair it.

Sophie joins them at the table and tells them how last week Ethan helped Jess fix one of the transparent blocks. She suggests that they seek Ethan's help. They agree, so Sophie finds Ethan and asks if he is willing to help Matthew and Duke fix the block. Ethan says "yes," and Sophie facilitates a conversation between the boys by asking Ethan questions about how to fix the block. (Notice how Sophie invites Ethan into their problem-solving process, building an expectation that, "In our classroom community, we will help and support each other. We are not expected to solve problems alone.")

Sophie asks Ethan, "What did you use to fix it?" The question seems to help trigger Ethan's memory, and he tells Matthew and Duke that one of the things that he used was tape.

So Matthew and Duke get out some scotch tape and bring it over to the table. But Ethan explains that scotch tape is not the right kind of tape. At this point the conversation gets stuck until Sophie helps move it along by saying, "Not that tape okay. Can you show us?"

Ethan says "yes," and gets the colored masking tape from the shelf. (These types of materials are always available and easily accessible to the children).

Sophie asks Ethan, "Did you use anything else to make it stick?" Again, this question seems to help Ethan remember that they also used glue to fix the block.

After they discuss the process for another minute or so, Sophie reviews and clarifies with Matthew and Duke: "So, we're going to have to use some special glue and then after we use the glue we'll put some tape on it." They decide they'll repair the block tomorrow morning with Jess's and Ethan's support. After making their plan, Ethan resumes his play.

Duke then takes out a clipboard, pen and paper and says, "Listen to me. I have an idea."

As Sophie listens, Duke says, "I'm going to draw it on a piece of paper and put a Sophie symbol on it."

Sophie asks for clarification, "What are you going to draw on the piece of paper?"

Duke, points to the broken block: "That."

Sophie asks him why he's going to do the broken block and Duke responds: "So everybody knows what it looks like and how it broke."

Sophie: "Oh! So, well, did you want to show this at circle to show people how it got broken?"

Duke nods and starts working on his drawing.

Sophie then turns to Matthew and invites him to show the broken block in circle too, so that people could see how it got broken.

Matthew seems to also like this idea and shakes his head "yes."

Sophie: "I think that'd be a good idea and then people would remember to be careful with it."

She then tells Matthew and Duke she's going to get paper and would like to get the words they want to say about the broken block.

When she returns, Matthew says: "I have to draw a stop sign."

Sophie: "Okay."

Matthew sits down to work and starts drawing a stop sign for the broken block. He traces the block on the paper.

Matthew gets distracted by some clay on one of the tables. Sophie refocuses him by asking, "Matthew what words do you want to tell about this block?"

Matthew starts poking the block with his finger, making blasting sounds, as Sophie holds it up. Then, he says, "We made a hole in it."

She has Duke sit down and says: "So what do we want to tell about what happened? What happened to this block?"

Matthew says: "It broke in two."

Sophie says, "Okay, let me write this down." And as she writes says, "It broke in two."

Then Matthew adds: "A rocket shooted it."

Sophie repeats his words out loud, while writing them down: "A rocket shooted it."

Sophie then turns to Duke, with a slightly quizzical tone and says: "Is that how it broke Duke? How did this block get broken?"

Duke responds, "We pulled and we pulled hard."

Sophie responds, "Oh." And then she looks back at Matthew and asks him, "Is that what happened?"

Matthew agreeing says, "We pulled it really hard."[114]

Sophie writes down and repeating their words at the same time: "We pulled it REALLY hard."

Matthew sees a group of boys playing nearby and starts to join them. Sophie again tries to refocus him and gently says, "You can join them when we finish this. We need to finish this." Matthew continues to make blasting noises and Sophie invites him to sit in a chair to help him focus on the broken block. (It should be noted, a democratic classroom does not mean that children have unilateral choice or complete freedom to do whatever they want at all times. Teachers have an expectation that children, along with adults, are accountable for taking care of shared materials; and teachers support them in finding ways to take responsibility for their actions. This is true even when the path of least resistance for the child and perhaps the teacher, may be for the child to return to play and the teacher to fix the problem. In other words, shared power and control requires shared responsibility and participation.)

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[114] After reviewing my videotape, it wasn't clear if the block actually broke while he was pretending it was a rocket-ship, or when he was pulling it away from Duke. I think that it probably initially broke with the rocket ship play when it bumped the table, but then visibly became separated when he was pulling it away from Duke. (As a former teacher/director, I had a set of identical blocks and they were always coming undone, even with fairly gentle play.) Anyway, this may explain why Matthew was giving two explanations about how the block broke—they were "pulling on it" and the rocket ship "blastoff." Sophie's nonjudgmental, constructive approach works well in this situation. She doesn't deny either versions but just asked questions for clarification. (It seems that oftentimes children are making more sense than we think.) I imagine that some teachers may have said, "Tell the truth Matthew," or "Why are you lying? That's not what happened," when in fact Matthew seems to be explaining to the best of his ability his perceptions of what happened with the block.

Matthew continues: "We pulled it really hard and then it got really dead."

Sophie, "and then it got broken?"

He shakes his head yes.

Sophie: "What's a good way to take care of blocks?"

And then she rephrases: "So, let's think of some ways to take care of blocks."

Matthew says: "Hold them really carefully."

Sophie repeats his words aloud while writing them down: "Hold them really carefully."

Then Matthew says: "Don't step on them."

Sophie repeats and writes, "Don't step on them."

Matthew: "Don't hit on them."

Sophie says while writing. "Don't hit on them…That's three ideas."

Matthew continues: "Don't stomp on them." Sophie repeats and writes it down.

Matthew: "Or, don't bang them." Sophie again repeats his words while writing them down.

Matthew: "Don't put your teeth on them."

Sophie asks for clarification, "Don't bite them?"

Then, she corrects herself: "You said, 'Don't put your teeth on them.'" (She seems to want to write down the words in his own, authentic language and not change any words to produce an adult version of what he's trying to say.)

Matthew thinks for a moment longer and then says: "Hold them carefully."

(Notice throughout this exchange, how Sophie has enlisted the children to be active

participants in developing classroom guidelines and to feel a shared sense of responsibility for the classroom materials.)

Sophie writes this down and then reads the whole list back to him, as he looks at the list.

Sophie: "One, hold them really carefully. Two, don't step on them. Three, don't hit them. Four, don't stomp on them. Five, don't bang them. Six, don't put your teeth on them. So you have six ideas."

Matthew looks at the piece of paper and counts them: "One, two, three, four, five, six." And then says, "I'm all done." (Numeracy and literacy skills are developed through authentic, meaningful activities.) Sophie says "okay" and Matthew leaves the table to join a group playing with the large hollow blocks.

Duke says that he's not done. So Sophie says, "Duke, do you have any ideas of how to take care of them?" He doesn't immediately respond again, so she adds, "Do you want to hear Matthew's ideas of how to take care of blocks?" After hearing Sophie read Matthew's list, Duke thinks for a little while longer and adds a few more ideas to the list before going off to play again.

In circle, later that afternoon, Sophie tells the children that she wants to share something that happened earlier in the day. Sophie explains that "[Matthew] came right over to me, I was over there [she points to the large art table] and he came running over, and he said, 'OH. Look! Look what happened!'" As she says this, she picks up the block and points to the broken part for everyone to see, and she makes a sad face. She continues, "And he [Matthew] realized that it was broken and that we needed to fix it!

And then we said, 'well, how did it happen?'" And then she turns to Matthew, prompting him to continue the story, "And Matthew, how did it happen?"

Matthew responds, "We were pulling on it really hard."

With a brief pause, Sophie continues, while holding up the broken block, "Yeah, two kids were pulling on it really hard, someone was pulling it this way [she demonstrates with the block] and the other person wanted it, and they were pulling it and pulling it, and pulling and then look…look what happened." She continues to hold up the broken block. "And I was remembering that this did happen to…I think one of the blue blocks like this, last week, it got a little bit broken, and Ethan helped Jess fix it." Lila briefly interrupts with a story she is reminded of, "When I was a big girl I ran to mommy and I broke..." When Lila finishes her story, Sophie explains that "Jess knows how to put wood glue on it to fix it" and "tape to hold it tight." Tomorrow Duke and Matthew are going to work on fixing it with Jess. Then Sophie tells the group about the list of ways to take care of the blocks that Matthew and Duke made to share with the class. She turns to Matthew: "What do we need to remember about the blocks Matthew?" Matthew and Duke share their ideas and discuss them with the class for several minutes.

November 13, 2009, follow-through: The following morning, the broken block is set out for Matthew and Duke to fix. Jess and Ethan are there helping them. Ethan demonstrates for Duke and Matthew how to carefully use the brush to paint glue on the sides of the wood to stick to the plastic. Oscar comes over and asks them what they're doing. Ethan explains, "Somebody broke it and we're fixing it." (Notice how Ethan, the child who drew on the stool several weeks prior in this scenario is able to be the block expert in this scenario [see chapter 4, "I didn't do it"].)

And Matthew says to Oscar, "I broke it."

Ethan gives the glue to Matthew and then Duke. When they're finished gluing, Ethan (with the help of a prompting question from Jess) explains that they need to glue the pieces together and then tape it until the glue dries. Before they do this step, Jess shows them the wooden grooves and holes that need to fit together.

At one point Matthew wants to leave, but Jess softly reminds him that they need to finish fixing the block first. She helps him pull out some tape and has him cut it with the scissors.

After they finish, Jess tells them that they can remove the tape on Monday to see if the glue has dried.

This vignette serves as an example of the way in which the Springhill teachers support a collaborative ethos where children learn from each other (Ethan, as the expert block-fixer), share their ideas (circle time discussion), and become active members of the community. Establishing *trusting relationships* and having the freedom to *slow down* the learning process seem to be necessary prerequisites for teachers to be able to create this democratic type of learning environment. By slowing down the process and following the project through to completion, teachers help children feel the weight of the problem, take responsibility for working together towards a solution, and build a strong image of themselves as capable problem solvers.

It's also important to note how Matthew felt safe to tell Sophie right away what happened (a confession of sorts). This indicates a lot about the trusting community that Springhill and the Gardenia teachers have created.[115]

It should be noted that, when the respect of materials is regularly modeled and encouraged by teachers, children in turn begin to take initiative to respect and care for materials on their own. For example, during my observations, several children took a keen interest in trying out my cameras (both video and still). This was not surprising considering their daily exposure to my cameras and considering their year-long project centered on photography. I told the children the camera was breakable but let them experiment with it. It was quite remarkable how respectful these three year-olds were of my cameras. The children quickly learned how to cover the lens, put the safety strap around their necks, close the LCD screen, and handle the cameras carefully. Without adult prompting, they even taught their friends how to use and take care of my camera.

Viewing "obstacles as opportunities." With consistent practice, collaborative problem-solving becomes a shared cultural expectation and habitual way of looking at the world. Children at Springhill learn that they can count on each other to tackle tough problems (or "conundrums," as the children in the Rainbow room called them) and find creative solutions. In fact, the Springhill faculty views obstacles and problems as

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[115] Some alternative teacher responses might be to redirect the boys to another area until they can play nicely with the blocks, reprimand them for breaking the block, tell them they can't play with the blocks, or put the blocks away all together so none of the children can play with them. With any of these other scenarios, Matthew may have been fearful about telling the teacher about the block. Children who are punished for their honesty can easily take on the mentality of, "as long as nobody sees it, then it's okay to do it."

opportunities that can be the driving force or catalyst for various creative projects.

Sophie explains (personal communication, November 3, 2009):

> Something we really do try to do, and…something that I've been paying more attention to in recent years is seeing *obstacles as opportunities*. Because, there's always going to be obstacles. They're always going to come up and when you solve one, another one is going to come up and so you just have to realize that…I think we've become more aware of seeing *conflict as a creative force*, which I don't think you sort of typically think of that. I had a similar incident in this classroom two years ago when I had a very, very difficult group and three children who had very significant special needs and there was a lot of frustration(?) in the classroom and so we tried to figure out different things to do and that's when we really realized that density [amount of children in the classroom space] was a problem and so we started doing small groups and dividing them, a bit like we were doing today, but we did it on a regular basis, and I mean it was really just because it was so hard with these children and one of them in particular was very physical, and so we tried playing this no contact game where they can play fight but they don't actually contact. And then…we had some music in the classroom at that time which was "The Firebird" and it became this whole project about the firebird and Stravinsky's music and again it was *conflict* sparking this, something very *creative*. So that's something that I'm sort of interested in…What are the opportunities? When do they come up? How do we capture them?

Problems as creative forces driving curriculum. Viewing problems as opportunities is a shared perspective throughout the community. During my interview with Mary, the Early Childhood Education director, she shares another example of a creative project that emerged out of a conflict. Mary explains (personal communication, November 17, 2009):

We were sitting in a circle at the end of the day and a little boy just picked up a pair of scissors, I think that just hadn't been put away. And probably out of idleness, really, or curiosity at-- for something to do, he just started cutting on a little girl's skirt that was kind of a soft jersey fabric. And she was just sitting beside him. And when she realized it was happening, then she was outraged and so, we felt like that, as we do, with children, that they need to take responsibility for their behavior. And that is one of the major columns I think that upholds this kind of way of working-- that everybody needs to take responsibility. And so, we asked him then to, with our support, to write a letter to explain that circumstance to the little girl's mother and to her family. And so, then she wrote back…I mean she-- her child was five by then, so she had a sense of how it all worked, and so she was willing and she very magnanimously wrote back and said she accepted his apology and said, "If you would like to cut, I'll send in some fabric." And so he wrote and said, "Yes, please do." And so, anyway, it was a chance for literacy, it was a chance for bridge-building, it was a chance for many things. And then she did send in a couple of big bolts of fabric, and so the children were given an opportunity to just cut and cut and cut to their heart's delight on fabric. But then it became the basis of sewing. I thought, "Well, let's just go right into sewing

here." So we brought in hoops and needles and thread and set up an opportunity for them to test themselves on sewing. And so that comes and goes throughout the curriculum now. It sort of cycles in with teachers that are interested. And, [sewing] has been a vital part of the curriculum ever since. So, children have done some beautiful work.

Taking responsibility for one's actions and feeling responsibility towards others is the tenor of Springhill's program, modeled on all levels of the faculty.

Children help each other problem solve and negotiate conflicts. How do teachers support the collaborative problem solving process during conflict? The following vignette highlights both the ways in which children help each other resolve conflict in the classroom and how a teacher supports them in this process:

As I enter the Gardenia room one morning in May of 2010, Abigail and Stella are playing with each other in the pretend kitchen. Although Stella is engaged in this play, she doesn't quite seem to be herself this morning. As they play, a few small conflicts arise, but each time the girls are able to successfully work through the conflict without adult support.

Their first small conflict involves their mutual desire for an oven mitt. Abigail has been using it but Stella "needs" it to put her "food" in the oven.

Stella: "When you're finished can I have that, when you're finished?"

Abigail: "What?"

Stella clarifies: "Can I have that glove [pretend oven mitt] when you're finished?"

Abigail: "Yes."

Stella seems satisfied.

Later, Abigail drops her spoon, looks down at the floor, and asks: "Where's the spoon?"

Stella: "I can find it for you!" She crawls on the floor in search for the spoon, smiles and say: I'm a pretty good climber, because my mo[m]… my grandma calls me a monkey."

At this juncture the girls successfully figure out a solution without needing adult intervention.

A short while later, they gravitate towards the miniature "Gardenia room"[116] on the large wooden table for play. While there, Stella says to Abigail: "I'm going to have a sleep over at Grandpa's house!" She repeats this several times in a sing-songy voice that sounds a lot like a taunt or a tease. (Since Stella has been staying with her grandma and grandpa for the week because her parents are out of town, it's not surprising that she brings them up a lot in her play on this particular day.)

Stella: "I'm gonna have a sleep over at Grandpa's house."

Abigail: "Stella, I don't like it when you say that, that's like teasing. That's like teasing Stella."

Stella: "It's not teasing."

Abigail clarifies: "But it's not teasing, but it's *like* teasing."

Stella: "Teasing *is* nice."

Abigail: "Teasing is *not* nice."

Stella: "Teasing is nice to *me*."

Abigail: "Teasing is not nice to me. Teasing is not nice."

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[116] The miniature "Gardenia room" was created by the parents and displayed on the large wooden table (see "Pencil Night and Closing Circle," in chapter 6).

Stella: "But to *me*."

Abigail: "What?"

Stella: "To me. It's nice to me."

At this point, the girls seem to accept that teasing is nice to Stella but *not* to Abigail and they leave it at that. Once again, they resolve the issue themselves.

A third conflict negotiation comes about a short while later. Earlier that morning, when Stella and Abigail were in the dramatic play kitchen they discussed a plan to "make apples." Remembering this plan, Abigail brings it up to Stella.

Abigail: "But remember we're making apples, we're making apples and popsicles."

Stella: "No we're not."

Abigail: "Yes we are."

Stella: "No we're not."

Abigail: "Yes we are!"

Abigail: "I'm making apples and popsicles."

Stella: "No, I'm making apples!"

After a brief pause, "How 'bout we can BOTH make apples?"

Abigail: "and we can and I can make popsicles and apples, right?"

Stella: "Yeah!"

For a third time that morning, they resolve their issue themselves and resume their play. (With each negotiation, they come up with a different strategy to resolve the conflict. First, they decide each will get a turn with the mitt. Second, they decide it *is*

okay for them to each think differently about whether it was teasing. Three, they decide that they can *both* make apples.)

Abigail pulls out a large basket full of different colored cylindrical-shaped magnets and spherical plastic balls. There are two different lengths of the cylindrical magnets with the large magnets nearly double the length of the shorter magnets.

Abigail starts putting the magnets together to make the "legs" of an "octopus." At this point she has made three "legs," working carefully to make each of them nearly the same length. She has made two of the legs by connecting one large magnet and two small magnets together and another leg by connecting two large magnets together. There is a spherical piece on the bottom of each octopus leg.

As Abigail takes magnets out of the basket, she tries the end of each magnet to see if it will repel or attract the other magnets. She takes out a small blue magnet from the basket and tries to connect it to one of the magnets on her octopus legs. She demonstrates for Stella: "You see now?" The magnet repels. She tries again, "You see now?" It repels again. Smiling, Abigail shrugs her shoulders, and tosses the magnet back into the basket.

Stella, convinced that the magnets will connect, takes the small blue magnet back out of the bucket and says: "Let me show you. See?" But when Stella tries to connect the two magnets they repel once again.

Abigail says: "No. That's because that's the opposite way… It's opposite."

Stella stares at Abigail for a moment. She seems confused by what Abigail means by "opposite" and pauses to consider.

A moment later, Stella responds: "No. It's not opposite." (Note how new concepts and vocabulary are explored during open-ended play.)

Abigail: "It *is* opposite."

Stella tries to attach the magnet again, this time successfully, by turning the magnet 180 degrees and connecting the opposite poles together. She says: "See."

Abigail looks at it and then tries to take the magnet from Stella. Stella quickly pulls the magnet away, out of Abigail's reach. Abigail doesn't try to grab the magnet again, but holds out her hand towards Stella, and says: "No. Look it. Opposite. I'll show you."

Stella turns her body away from Abigail and says: "I had it in my hand first."

Abigail: "I'll show you. I'll show you. You see the other ones? They have to be the same. You see? Watch, Stella." Abigail takes out a different magnet to show Stella what she means.

Stella turns back around and watches Abigail. (Once again, a potential conflict is averted as they use language to explain what their intentions are.) Abigail takes a long blue magnet and tries to connect it to another long magnet on one of her octopus legs. The magnets repel and the "leg" moves by the opposing force, without being touched.

Excited about this discovery, Abigail turns to me and says: "Amy, this moves by itself!"

Amy: "Let's see. Ohh! You're making it move!"

Abigail shows me again. Then Stella smiles and tries to make it move again using the short blue magnet that she's still holding.

Abigail sees this and says: "It has to be the same size [size meaning length]. Stella. You see. It has to be the same size." (Abigail thinks that Stella is trying to add the small blue magnet to one of her completed octopus legs. So Abigail puts her octopus legs next to each other to show Stella that they're the same length and that adding a piece wouldn't work.)

Miscomprehending Abigail, Stella says: "This *is* [the same size]." (When Stella says "this is," she is referring to the size of her blue magnet in comparison with one of the small magnets that's part of the octopus leg. But Abigail hasn't yet figured out what she means and thinks she means the length of the octopus leg.)

Abigail: "No, that's not the same size!"

Stella: "This is." (Stella tries to put her small blue magnet on top of the other small magnet in the leg for Abigail to see but another magnet attracts it and it looks like Stella is trying to lengthen the leg again.)

Abigail says: "No it's not. You see. It's a little bit longer." (Abigail now uses the word "longer" instead of "size" to clarify her meaning. She holds it up towards the longer magnets.)

Stella: "Here. But this matches..? (This time Stella holds her small blue magnet directly next to a small magnet in one of the octopus legs for Abigail to see.)

With Stella's clarification, Abigail seems to realize what Stella meant by the same size. So, Abigail says: "It does match, but I'm not putting it on." (Although Abigail sees what Stella means, she is still concerned about Stella putting her small magnet on the end of the octopus leg since it will make it too long compared to the other legs.) Abigail takes the small blue magnet off the "leg."

Now empty-handed, Stella grabs a long blue magnet off a partially-built "octopus leg" next to Abigail on the floor.

Abigail shouts: "Hey Stella! I had that first!"

Stella: "No I had it first."

Abigail: "No I did."

Stella: "No I did."

Abigail: "I did!"

Stella: "I did!"

Abigail: "I did!"

Stella: "Did you see me?"

Abigail: "I had it first."

Stella: "No I did!"

Abigail: "No I did."

Stella: "No you didn't."

Abigail: "Yes I did."

Stella: "No you didn't."

This back and forth argument continues between the two girls for another minute or so with neither one willing to relent. Stella moves her whole body underneath the table with the magnet in her hand. Abigail continues building the legs of her octopus with the magnets. This time the girls are stuck in their conflict, and need some adult support to move forward.

Sophie walks over and Stella sticks her head out from under the table and says to Sophie: "I had this first and Abigail, she had it first."

Abigail: "But you give it to me."

Stella: "No I didn't."

Sophie: "Are you working on something together? Are you building something together?"

Stella: "No!"

Sophie: "Well what are you doing with that piece?"

Stella: "I'm doing nothing. I'm just playing with it."

Sophie: "Well did you want to play with Abigail?"

She mumbles: "No. (and she adds something inaudible-"because she doesn't---?.")

Sophie: "Abigail. What are you making?"

Abigail: "A squid."

Sophie: "a what?"

Abigail: "a squid."

Sophie: "A squid! Didn't you make an octopus the other day?"

Abigail: "I mean an octopus."

Sophie: "Oh, I thought you were making a squid."

Turning to Stella, Sophie: "So, Stella what did you want to make?"

Abigail to Stella: "It will sting you!"

Sophie: "Oh. Hmmm. Is it okay if an octopus stings?"

Stella to Sophie: "I just want to make something."

Sophie to Stella: "Oh. You want to make something? Well you would need to come out from there. But I did hear Abigail say it stings. Would it be okay if the octopus stings you?"

Stella shakes her head no.

Sophie: "No."

Sophie turns back to Abigail: "No. It wouldn't be okay if the octopus stings. So I'm going to put my hand right here so the octopus doesn't sting her." (Sophie puts her hand on the carpet as a barrier between the "octopus" and Stella's body.

Abigail mumbles: "It can go through you."

Sophie ignores this comment and asks: "So girls how can we work out this problem? With this piece?" (Notice how Sophie chooses to ignore Abigail's comment avoiding a power struggle and focusing on collaborative problem-solving.)

Stella: "I had it first."

Abigail: "No I did."

Grace walks over to them.

Sophie: "What will we do? Anybody have any ideas? Grace do you have any ideas? What can you do if somebody wants something?"

Grace: "Just make another one."

Sophie clarifying: "Abigail could get another piece?"

Abigail: "No. I need the same size."

Sophie: "Oh. It has to be that size? What is that size? Stella, can you show us?"

Stella holds out the long blue magnet to show them the size Abigail needs.

Following Grace's suggestion, Sophie points to the basket and says to Abigail: "Can you get one that's the same size?"

Abigail says "Look," as she holds up a long red magnet. (There are no more long blue magnets in the basket.)

Sophie: "Ohhh. So did you want a *blue* piece that's that size?"

Abigail shakes her head yes.

Sophie: Hmmm. (Sophie waits to give them time to think about possible solutions to the problem.)

Grace undeterred says: "Hmmm. Well…I'll find one!" She looks through the box of magnets and pulls out a *short* blue magnet and holds it out towards Abigail.

Abigail doesn't verbally respond but shakes her head "no."

Sophie asks: "Is that the same size? Let's measure it. Can we measure it Grace?" Grace hands Sophie the small blue magnet. (Notice how Sophie doesn't tell Grace that it is the wrong size. She let's Grace figure it out by measuring it.)

Sophie to Stella: "Can we see if this is the same size?" (Sophie shows respect by asking Stella who is still under the table.)

Stella shakes her head yes and extends her large blue magnet out from under the table. Sophie puts it next to the small blue magnet to compare sizes. Sophie: "Is that the same size? Nope, nope. It's not the same size."

Grace: "Hmmm. Let me see. Hmmmm." She resumes a basket search and pulls out a long yellow magnet the same size as Stella's large blue magnet that Abigail wants. Grace: "I can't find any more [long blue magnets]. I only could find it this size. The

yellow size." [meaning she could only find the long size in the color yellow]. Grace holds up the yellow magnet for them to see.

Abigail: "No I need blue."

Sophie: "Maybe Stella wants to make an octopus as well."

Abigail gives a slight smile and nod of the head yes.

Grace continues to think about a solution for their "problem" as she rummages through the basket pulling out different magnets. When she takes out two large pieces, they accidentally connect end to end with each other. This "accident" seems to trigger a new idea for Grace--that by connecting two pieces together she can make a new size. She explains: "Well you could have…make it like this." As Grace holds up the connected pieces, she notices that they're too long to make the right size for Abigail. "Hmmm," she says as she continues to work out this problem. This time she takes out two of the shorter magnets (a red and a blue one) and connects them together. With growing excitement, she announces, "You could make it like this, with this. You could make it with this. Out of this, out of this!" Grace holds the connected red and blue magnets out for everybody to see.

Sophie: "Use two pieces?"

Grace: "To make the same size!"

Sophie: "Oh that's a good idea! So if you stick two little ones together it makes the same size?

Grace holds it in front of Abigail. Abigail: "I need two blues, I need the same color."

Sophie: "Oh you want them to be the same color?"

Grace: "Okay then I'll get blue." She takes out another short blue magnet and replaces the red magnet with it.

Sophie: "Grace has a lot of ways to figure out this problem."

Grace: "Here."

Grace hands Sophie the magnets for comparison with Stella's long blue magnet: "Can we measure that now? Let's see."

Grace repeats: "Let's see."

Sophie doesn't announce the answer but says: "Let's see. Is that the same size Stella? Hmmm. Is that the same size?" Sophie holds up the magnets next to each other for the girls to compare. All three girls look at the magnets for a moment.

Grace replies: "Nah."

Sophie: "No. It's a little bit bigger. Hmmm."

Grace: "Hmmm. Now how can we figure out this problem?"

Abigail quietly says that she's making an octopus for Stella. Sophie hears her and asks: "Are you making one for Stella?" Abigail doesn't respond to Sophie's question and so Sophie repeats it, "Abigail, did you say that you're making one for Stella?"

This time Abigail shakes her head yes.

Sophie: "Oh! Hey Stella, she said she's making an octopus for you."

Stella replies: "I want to make my own!"

In a conciliatory tone, Abigail says: "You don't know *how* to make one, 'cause that's why I was making you one."

Stella: "I know how to make octopuses!"

Grace: "But I'll show how."

Stella: "No, I know how to do it all by myself!!"

Stella still lying under the table starts rubbing her eyes. Then she holds up her fingers to Sophie and says: "Uh-no. Look."

Sophie: "Do you have a boo-boo?"

Stella: "I got another boo-boo. I got hurt. I think I need another band-aid."

Sophie: "You need another band-aid? Yeah. (This is her second band-aid of the day, there does not seem to be any visible "boo-boos" on Stella's fingers. She seems to need some extra TLC from the teachers on this day.)

Sophie: "You look like you're feeling a bit tired because you're lying down. Are you feeling tired?"

Stella shakes her head "yes" and climbs out from underneath the table. Sophie gently rubs her back.

Sophie turning to Abigail: "Did you know that Stella's parents are out of town…for one week?" (Sophie is attuned to significant events in Stella's life and responsive to her feelings of separation. Note how she also lets Abigail become aware of the situation. Recognition of her feelings of tiredness and mention of her parents seems to perk Stella back up.)

Abigail shakes her head no and looks at Stella.

Abigail says: "I'm tired."

Sophie: "You're tired too?"

Grace: "But I *really* want to go to New York City but my mom keeps saying 'no.'"

Sophie: "Oh. Yeah. Were you hoping you might see Walter if you went to New York City?" (Again, we see Sophie attuned and responsive to significant events in children's lives.)

Grace: "Mmm-hmm."

Sophie: "Stella I'm wondering if you're parents will see an octopus on their [Australia?] trip."

Stella smiles and shakes her head no.

Sophie: "You're dad said he was going to go fishing."

Abigail: "I want to clean up. I want to go to [the studio?]"

Sophie: "Okay."

Sophie: "Do you want to get a band-aid?" Stella shakes her head yes.

Grace heads to the studio. Stella and Sophie go to the other part of the room to get a band-aid.

In this vignette, Stella and Abigail successfully work through their social conflict several times before they eventually need assistance from Sophie. Grace and Sophie both offer support as Abigail and Stella process strong feelings and resolve the issue to everyone's satisfaction. In this case, resolution for Stella is some much needed extra attention, care, and validation to help cope with her parents being out of town. For Abigail, resolution involves help in understanding Stella's unusual behavior, support from Grace in trying to figure out how to make the octopus legs the same size, and teacher recognition that she too is tired from this challenging process of negotiating conflict. As an added benefit, Grace hones her problem-solving skills and builds her identity as a person who actively helps others.

Children view themselves as powerful and capable thinkers: Kate and Oscar negotiate independently. Just as Springhill teachers view children as capable problem-solvers, so it seems that the children begin to internalize and claim this identity for themselves. The following vignette illustrates children's skillful ability to negotiate conflict creatively and peacefully:

One October morning, Oscar and Kate begin to play with the pretend "computers," which are actually foldable rulers in various colors. Oscar plays with the yellow and orange rulers but really wants the purple one that Kate is playing with. Oscar asks Kate for her purple ruler.

Kate slowly moves her finger across the purple ruler's surface pretending to read the words, as she explains to Oscar, "This, says, 'Kate Smith,' so this is mine."

Without missing a beat, Oscar holding the yellow ruler in his hands also pretends to read off of it and responds: "No. *This* says 'Kate Smith.' That's yours." He unsuccessfully tries to pass it to her.

While looking at the purple ruler, Kate clarifies, "No. This is mine." She adds: "And that's yours. You can use that one," pointing to the yellow ruler in Oscar's hand. Then looking back at the purple ruler in her hand, Kate reiterates: "This [the purple ruler] says 'Kate Smith' and that [the yellow ruler] says 'Kate, Oscar.'" (Interesting to note, she includes her name on the yellow ruler this time.)

Oscar doesn't say anything for a few seconds, perhaps thinking about what to say next while Kate resumes her play. After a few moments, Oscar walks back up to her, points to the purple ruler and says, "That says 'Oscar Franken, and (pointing to the yellow computer) this says, 'Kate Smith.'"

Pointing towards the yellow computer, Kate retorts, "No, that's Kate, Oscar."

Oscar tries a new strategy. He holds up the yellow computer and asks Kate, "Is this your favorite color?"

"No. THIS is my favorite color," Kate responds, holding up her purple one.

Oscar points to it and says, "This is purple."

Kate replies, "Yeah, purple's my favorite color."

Oscar explains, "Well, that's my favorite color too."

At this point, Lila comes over to retrieve Kate for their picnic and the conversation between Kate and Oscar ends.

I think this passage highlights the tremendous creativity children have in their ability to negotiate with one another. As the vignette illustrates, both Kate and Oscar make the connection, "If my name is on something, it belongs to me." In their negotiation, they use their shared understanding of two socially-constructed concepts, *individual ownership* and *the power of written words*, as tools for their negotiation. Notice also how Oscar uses his knowledge that people have attachments to certain colors and that this preference can affect their desire for some objects over others.[117]

The large amounts of time, freedom, and practice children have at Springhill to play and be in conversation with each other (and adults) provides them with critical opportunities to try out their negotiation skills and explore their burgeoning understandings of how the world works in a safe and meaningful context. Consider too,

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[117] This ruler negotiation happened on the same morning that Kate told Oscar he couldn't have a "pink cupcake" because "pink is a girl's color" [see chapter 10, "Gender Categorization and Exclusion" section for this exchange]. As I watched Kate and Oscar's encounter unfold, I wondered if Kate was going to argue that "purple is a girl's color" as one strategy in their ruler negotiations. However, Kate doesn't seem (to be socialized) to think of purple as a girl's color in the way that she does with the color pink.

in more structured and regimented preschool environments, children do not have the same daily opportunities to practice their negotiation and conflict resolution skills. In a school without a strong culture of negotiation, it would have been all too likely that Oscar would have resorted to aggression to get the ruler (e.g., grabbed it from Kate's hand or hit her). Or, he could have gone to the teacher and said, "Kate isn't sharing!," expecting a teacher to solve the problem for him (e.g., "Kate, you need to share, Oscar gets a turn in five minutes.") How do these differences in school cultures shift the potentialities for learning and relationship-building?

A collaborative ethos: Does competition fit in a collaborative environment?

As discussed in chapter 2, one of the essential qualities of a democratic environment is a collaborative ethos. Kohn (1992, 1996), Roseth, Johnson and Johnson (2008), and Smyth (2000) suggest that there are benefits of collaborative environments and negative consequences for competitive ones. As seen in the previous vignettes throughout this chapter, the Springhill community has developed a strong collaborative ethos among all members of the school. Throughout my time at Springhill, I saw virtually no competitive types of activities set up by teachers *or* competitive types of play between the children.

The following "Games" documentation, created by Nanette (the Magnolia room teacher) in November 2009, highlights the non-competitive nature of games that were invented by the children in her classroom. This documentation was sent out to the Springhill faculty and parents and sparked much discussion about the topic.[118]

Games

Part of our intentions this year is to try to make our process more apparent. So here is an example of how we try to be alert and responsive to what is happening with the children.

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[118] I have omitted some photos from the original documentation.

Back in September Lizzy wanted to make a game because she had played *Hi Ho Cheerio* on a play date. So we invited her to make a plan as we often do and formed a small group which included Sam and Mel.

In the small group room they worked on their games. (Inventing games with strategies and rules involves more skills than we can name here since that's not really the focus of this blog.)

A few more times we got the group together and they continued to develop and carry out their plans.

Lizzy finished her game just the other day with Adam's help. Then Mel, Stella and Adam all played it with her. The game included trees of different fruits (banana, pink lemonade, orange), and one toy-bearing tree which were represented by beads set into small indentations she made with scissors in the cardboard game-board.

Meanwhile in the classroom, lots of other things had been going on including pretend play, block building and making nests with our pillows. Part of what we do as teachers is look for ways to extend the children's skills and challenge their thinking. We follow their interests and at the same time, use those interests to encourage them to take on challenges—to stretch beyond their comfort zone. Alice noticed that some of the children had become very comfortable on the active side of our room, to the point that they were neither exploring other media nor confronting new challenges with the familiar materials. It was time for a provocation.

So, we took the pillows out of the room, put a stop sign on the blocks and took the idea of games into large scale, to re-program that side of the room. (In Reggio, they say that the environment is the third teacher.) We placed carpet squares in the form of a checker board along with various possible game pieces: rocks, dice, plastic rings, balls and two hollow log sections.

Abel, Lila, and Jamie each created games, Lizzy and Madison collaborated together on one as did Adam and Harry. Jamie's game physically challenged the player depending on the roll of the die. Abel's game "checkers" involved moving rings to empty squares and then moving your body to the newly empty space. It reminded us of those sliding puzzles where you have to rearrange tiles within a frame to make the picture correct.

Lila's game was a sequence of follow-the-leader actions: "follow the puck." Harry and Adam put the rings around their necks and tried to toss them from their bodies onto the carpet squares without using their hands. Madison and Lizzy seemed drawn to a hop-scotch type system but they still have some details to work out. We played some of these games in circle.

Questions and observations:

Inventing games and making rules come up a lot at this age. Are they trying to impose a sense of order and logic?

When a child invents a game, they are taking on the role of leader, inventor. In a world where rules are constantly handed down, how refreshing that must feel.

One of the most interesting things we noticed is that none of the games were designed so that there was a "winner." Some were physical challenges, some you just played as long as you wanted.

Sally noted that it was more about "play my game, play with me" than winning. In that way, it is similar to what we call "special time" where you play with a child and completely follow their lead.

We wondered if having that control, designing the game and setting the rules was satisfying enough so that "winning" wasn't even part of [the] equation. Do we miss the point with most games? The thrill for them was in making the rules and sharing their own invention with others.

After receiving this "Games" documentation, several parents and faculty

commented. Here are a few of the responses:

Parent response:

Hi Nanette and Sally Jo, Thanks for the thoughtful summary of the game action

that I was lucky enough to participate in today. Funny how one of my questions

to Jamie as he worked out his game was about winning or not. And with clear

intention and no afterthought he said there was no winner needed and that that

wasn't the point! Interesting how programmed I am to think of gaming differently

than he does…and yet his game came out a rich hodgepodge of complicated rules

and physical actions without any end in sight. I left wondering at its

randomness—shouldn't the project have more structure? Later when I shared that

I loved playing his game, he proudly proclaimed how complicated it was. Thank

you for illuminating this project and helping me understand his and his classmates

thought toward game invention. I look forward to more gaming at home.

Reply from Nanette:

Thanks for your comments, Mary, they continued inventing games on Friday and

again, there was no mention of winning, only playing. I talked with Kathy

[another Springhill teacher] after school and she said that the Forest Room

[mostly young 3-year-olds] children have also been inventing games (very simple

ones) and they have no system of winning either. It just doesn't seem to be about

competition. I wonder when that concept comes in and where it comes from— us?"

Continued dialogue with another parent response:

Ashley [Magnolia Room student] was describing the different games and Eva (8-year-old) asked her, "But, how do you win?" [Eva is Ashley's older sister. She did not attend Springhill preschool as her family was living in a different city at the time.] And Ashley said, "it wasn't a winning game"—maybe there are different kinds of games you play for different reasons. When my girls are in the midst of a 'game' they have made up, it is usually a pretend game with roles and scenarios—not one you could 'win' and though Eva plays those kinds of games all the time with Ashley, she still had the winning question. I wonder if it has something to do with pieces and rules—versus roles? Most games in our family that have pieces to them have rules for winning.

Nanette's "Games" documentation and the ensuing dialogue highlights some of the possibilities that can emerge from a collaborative games project undertaken under the auspices of a democratic pedagogy:

- when creating games, children are active producers rather than merely passive consumers of prefabricated, store-bought games;

- children's games are centered around creativity, invention, and connecting with others, rather than winning and losing;

- children's game-making is a collaborative process;

- the game-making process allows children to feel powerful as they create their own rules and share their ideas;

- the learning environment is set up to allow children flexibility, access to open-ended materials, and freedom to decide how to use their classroom space for optimal creativity as they design their games.

As the Springhill teachers share their ongoing documentation with faculty and parents, the community as a whole benefits. For example, the "Games" documentation:

- features children as the protagonists of their learning and projects a strong image of children as inventive and collaborative;

- helps make the teacher's "intentions," thought processes, and questions visible to the broader community;

- serves as a catalyst for parent/teacher dialogue around the non-competitive nature of these children's games;

- brings about collaborative adult discussions, pushes the group's thinking forward, and brings about more nuanced and shared understandings;

- provides a different kind of parental participation and assessment of children (information beyond a deficit-based report of skills mastered, or developmental checklist of ways a 5-year-old child "measures up" against other 5-year-old children);

- challenges the culture-wide assumption that "competition" is an inescapable part of human nature.

A Comparison of Democratic and Nondemocratic Approaches to Social Responsibility

As discussed throughout this chapter, democratic environments require that all community members act from a high level of concern, care, and sense of responsibility

for the common good. By contrast, nondemocratic communities typically are built upon a "contingent" type of care, that is, care or cooperation performed in anticipation of extrinsic motivators such as a reward (e.g., "if you're nice to Mark, then you can have dessert;" "if you behave at school today, then we can go to the park in the afternoon;" or "you're such a good girl when you share! Now, other people will want to play with you."), or punishment (e.g., "if you do not share with Mark, you will lose your television privileges tonight"). When adults give children these types of extrinsic motivators for acts of kindness, it becomes more about adults *controlling* children's behaviors than about cultivating children's natural disposition to act altruistically.[119]

In order to demonstrate how different educational approaches can either support or subvert people's ability to feel a sense of responsibility for the well-being of others and a concern for the common good, I will provide a theoretical comparison of four different approaches a teacher could take to a child's behavior and the different ways it may shape children's thinking in the following hypothetical vignette:

A teacher announces that it's time to go outside to the playground. Excited, Maya (a 3-year-old) takes off in a sprint towards the shelf to put her Legos away. On the way, her foot gets caught on the carpet and she accidentally spills the Legos all over the floor.

First, let's say the teacher is anxious to get out to the playground and assumes that the other children will not want to help Maya clean-up. The teacher therefore decides to offer an incentive to get children to help Maya clean-up and says: "If you help Maya clean up the mess, I'll give you a sticker." This approach would shift the children's thinking towards, "What's in it for *me*?" and "I better help Maya clean up so *I* can have a

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[119] Altruism here means an unselfish concern for the welfare of others.

sticker." In other words, this rewards-based approach would prevent children from looking at the situation from the other child's point of view and push children towards a more selfish perspective. In fact, Kohn (1990, 1993) suggests that, over time, this type of extrinsic reward would gradually *decrease* children's motivations to act altruistically under similar circumstances in the future.

A rewards-based approach also reflects a deficit model of children, an image of the child as disinclined toward helping others without some sort of incentive (an implicit message children will begin to internalize with repeated use of this teaching practice).

Second, the teacher could take a more competitive type of approach. The teacher may announce: "Whoever cleans up the most pieces gets to be the line leader." This sends the message: "For me to have success, others have to fail. I'm helping so that I can win, not so that Maya is able to go outside too." Research suggests that children raised in competitive environments are less empathic (Kohn 1992, 1990).

Third, the teacher could take a discipline-based approach. For example, the teacher may use the situation to reinforce classroom rules: "Do we run in the classroom? No! Therefore, Maya needs to clean up the Legos all by herself so she'll understand the consequences of her actions." Then turning to Maya, the teacher may say: "You may join us outside when you finish cleaning up all the pieces, so maybe next time, you'll remember that we don't run in the classroom." The message being sent is, "You broke the rules and therefore are not worthy of support from your classmates or teacher. When you make mistakes you deserve to be excluded from the group." The teacher's message also implies malicious intent—as if Maya was consciously aware that she was breaking

the rules as she ran with excitement. Punishment, the flip side of rewards, also works against children's disposition to help and care for others.

Finally, from a democratic and caring perspective (much like what I observed at Springhill), the teacher may respond: "Oh dear. You must have been *really* excited about going outside. I wonder if anyone could help Maya pick up the Legos; she must be feeling really overwhelmed about cleaning them up again." The teacher herself could even walk over and help clean up the spill. When finished, the teacher may add: "I bet that made Maya feel really good when we helped her clean-up." There are many powerful messages being sent to children in this approach: "We look out for each other as fellow human beings. We are all equally valuable members of the class. Let's consider the situation from Maya's perspective. Maya was feeling so excited about going outside that she made a mistake. As a community we will help her."

As discussed in this chapter, Springhill teachers create a collaborative environment that supports children's sense of responsibility and care for the common good. Their approach sits in sharp contrast to schools that create more individualistic, competitive, retributive, or behavior-based environments that may inadvertently subvert children's intrinsic motivations to help.

In situating this type of democratic approach and sense of social responsibility for the common good in our current society, consider two recent media events that received coverage in national publications. According to a New York Times article (Feuer, 2010), "a judge has ruled that a young girl accused of running down an elderly woman while racing a bicycle with training wheels on a Manhattan sidewalk two years ago can be sued for negligence" (para. 1). This young girl was four years old at the time and under her

mother's supervision. Yet the judge "concluded that there was no evidence of Juliet's [the four-year-old girl] 'lack of intelligence or maturity' or anything to 'indicate that another child of similar age and capacity under the circumstances could not have reasonably appreciated the danger of riding a bicycle into an elderly woman' " (para. 11).

Another recent news story entitled, "No pay, no spray: Firefighters let home burn" (msnbc.com, 2011), tells the story about a man in a rural Tennessee town whose house burned to the ground with all of his possessions, including three dogs and a cat, as firefighters stood by and did nothing. As the article reports, "Cranick, who lives outside the city limits, admits he 'forgot' to pay the annual $75 fee. The county does not have a county-wide firefighting service, but South Fulton offers fire coverage to rural residents for a fee. Cranick says he told the operator he would pay whatever is necessary to have the fire put out" (para. 11). However, the fire fighters still refused to take any action since he hadn't paid the $75.00 fee in advance and therefore was not on their "list." The South Fulton mayor defended their position by stating: "The fire department can't let homeowners pay the fee on the spot, because the only people who would pay would be those whose homes are on fire" (para. 15). Based on the comments responding to the article, it seems that the consensus was: "This man got what he had coming to him." In addition, the related articles made no mention of how the animals and grandchildren (who owned the pets) were also "punished" for his actions.

What accounts for such strong cultural expressions of judgment and retribution (in the first case, holding a 4-year-old legally "negligent" for riding on a Manhattan sidewalk and accidentally injuring an elderly woman; and in the second example, punishing a homeowner guilty of a delinquent $75.00 fee with the destruction of his

house, life's possessions, and animals)? One hopes that these are extreme cases, although

the public blog comments made in response to these stories largely condoned the official

actions taken in both cases. But also consider that we are the only industrialized country

that does not guarantee access to health care as a right of citizenship and the only country

of the United Nations, besides Somalia, that has refused to ratify the "Convention on the

Rights of the Child" international treaty, which was instituted as international law in 1990

(UNICEF, "Convention on the Rights of the Child," 2006).

In contrast to these examples of non-empathic adult behavior, several researchers

and a growing body of evidence (De Waal, 2009; Kohn, 1990; Sunderland, 2006;

Szalavitz & Perry, 2010), suggest that infants and toddlers have a natural, instinctual

predisposition and born capacity to care and connect with those around them. In fact,

several studies have found that infants have adverse physiological responses to other

people's distress (Dondi, Simion, & Caltran, 1999; Sagi & Hoffman, 1976). For

example, one study (Simner, 1971) found that when infants hear and see other children

crying or showing signs of distress, they often start to cry too.

How were the firefighters able to stand idly by, letting someone's home and the

animals inside burn to the ground? What type of culture and environments are we

constructing when children's and adult's natural desire to help each other and care for the

common good is suppressed and instead a sense of individualism and judgment outside

an ethic of care is fostered?

In "Unbowed: A Memoir" (2007) Wangaari Maathai (the first African woman to

win the Nobel Peace Prize) describes the community where she grew up and how it was

unthinkable to let anyone go without having a place to live. Maathai (p. 62) explains, "In

Kikuyu culture, everybody had a right to shelter and space: People who had land were expected to share with people who did not, who became like squatters, and were allowed to stay while they tried to purchase their own land." She describes the sharply contrasting Western-European attitudes towards homeless people and land ownership. Why do some communities as a whole feel a sense of social responsibility to their fellow citizens, when other communities focus on protecting individual (and corporate) rights to the exclusion of helping others?

Perhaps cultivating a democratic disposition toward care and responsibility during children's formative years could serve as an antidote to the overemphasis on competitive, individualistic, and retributive factors that seem to be influencing our current society. As Lickona (1992) explains:

Democracy is government by the people; the people themselves are responsible for ensuring a free and just society…They must understand and be committed to the moral foundations of democracy; respect for the rights of individuals, regard for the law, voluntary participation in public life, and concern for the common good. Loyalty to these democratic virtues, Thomas Jefferson argued, must be instilled at an early age. (p. 6)

Creating a preschool community based on a foundation of respect and responsibility, especially during the early years, may be a critical way to instill these essential democratic virtues in children and sustain our democratic society. Certainly, the Springhill community offers many powerful illustrations of the democratic possibilities that can arise in a preschool environment where respect and responsibility are practiced, emphasized, and shared among all community members, including the most powerless.

Conclusion

As discussed throughout this chapter, children's democratic disposition to feel a sense of social responsibility, care, and concern for the common good was supported within the Springhill community in three primary ways:

One, Springhill faculty supported children's democratic disposition to feel a sense of social responsibility, care, and concern for the common good by cultivating a culture of care, kindness, and respect for fellow human beings and their environment. In order to cultivate this type of school culture, teachers took children's ideas and pursuits seriously; teachers respected children's feelings and provided support as children processed strong emotions; teachers provided children many opportunities to help one another; teachers served as role models as they practiced acts of kindness, empathy, respect and care throughout the day; and teachers paid attention to children's pro-social relationships and made these strong images of children visible to the entire Springhill community.

Two, Springhill faculty cultivated children's democratic disposition to feel a sense of social responsibility, care, and concern for the common good by creating a non-hierarchical network of community support and shared decision-making by all community members. This was accomplished in the following ways: faculty created a network of support, respect and care for one another both inside and outside of the school; teachers provided non-hierarchical support for children's growing sense of the interdependence of self and others; teachers and children shared responsibility in taking care of both their indoor and outdoor spaces; teachers supported children's respect, care, and shared responsibility for classroom materials; teachers modeled and cultivated

children's care for the natural environment and outside community; teachers shared decision-making and control with all community members, particularly children.

Three, Springhill faculty cultivated a democratic disposition to feel a sense of social responsibility, care, and concern for the common good by creating a culture of collaborative problem-solving and conflict negotiation in the following two ways: teachers viewed obstacles as opportunities; and teachers created opportunities for problem-solving and group solidarity.

Pateman (1970), Goodman (1992), and Parker (1996) suggest that, without early initiation and repeated practice using citizenship skills, children will lack the essential foundation for carrying a democratic disposition into adulthood. When Springhill children participated in care for the common good of all community members, shared decision-making and collaborative problem-solving and negotiating, they were developing the skills and mentality of active democratic citizenship.

CHAPTER 9

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS AND RELATIONSHIPS IN DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITIES

As researchers and theorists suggest (Apple & Beane, 2007; Goodnam, 1992; Putnam, 1993 & 2000; Rinaldi, 2006), authentic relationships are at the heart of a democratic environment; at the same time, relationships do not often happen spontaneously or without conflict. Instead, relationships require hard work, a great deal of open dialogue, a processing of strong feelings, and repeated interactions within a safe and supportive environment. Springhill at Stonewood Preschool serves as a powerful example of both the possibilities and challenges that arise in a school culture that is built on a foundation of relationships.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss how teachers support children's budding friendships and connections. Next, I highlight the characteristics of Springhill's relationship-based school culture, distinguishing it from a discipline-based one. In the final section of the chapter, as an example of how relationships among *all* stakeholders in the Springhill community are sustained and deepened, I examine in detail the process of bringing a child with special challenges into the social life of the school.

The Challenges and Joys of Friendships

During my field observations, I encountered many occasions when the Springhill teachers provided support for children as they built relationships and resolved conflict

with other community members, putting relationship work at the forefront of their practice.

Intentionally challenging assumptions and deconstructing hard feelings.
Often during closing circle in the Gardenia room, I watched Sophie (the teacher) as she shared with the children observations of particular events during the day that she felt warranted reflection time with the children. Sophie seemed to give particular emphasis to emerging relationship-building issues, both in the classroom and across the school community. The following story is one such example of a circle-time discussion:

Following their mid-morning snack, several children from the Gardenia room are playing outdoors in the labyrinth when Ellen, a four-year-old from the Rainbow Room, comes to join their play. Sophie observes this exchange and brings the scenario back to closing circle for discussion later that day.

Sophie starts the circle conversation by telling the class that while she was outside she saw something happen with Ellen and some other children that she thought was important to share. In a concerned and empathetic voice, Sophie explains that she had overheard some children saying, "Ellen is MEAN!" As Sophie describes the situation, she does not put a value judgment on what she is reporting, or speak angrily, shaming the children. Rather, she speaks in a calm but serious voice that seems to be indicating, "This is something worth looking at here and thinking about further."

After some of the children acknowledge Sophie's basic account of what happened, she responds, "Hmmm. That's funny…I don't think she's mean." And after a brief pause, she adds, "Have you ever played with Ellen?'

Several children respond, "No," they've never played with her. (In fact, Ellen was not at Springhill last year so many of the children don't have as deep of a connection with her, compared to some of the other children in the school.)

"Hmmm…" Sophie continues, "How do you know if she's mean if you've never played with her?" Sophie pauses again to allow time for children to ponder this question. After a few moments with no response, Sophie then asks, "Do you want to play with her?"

The children respond in unison: "Yes."

At this point, Larry interjects, "Yeah. Ellen is nice. She's fun to play with."

Sophie follows Larry's comment up with a question for the group, "What would you do if you wanted to play with someone? What words would you say?"

Kate responds, "That's good."

Following this seemingly non sequitur response, Sophie looks at Kate and rephrases the question (trusting that Kate is capable of answering it with a little more time and clarification): "How could you invite someone to play with you?" (Perhaps, Kate's first response was an attempt at a quick 'right' answer that she thinks Sophie will want to hear. Or perhaps, Kate is just coming up with *something nice to say* in some quickly imagined encounter with Ellen.)

On her second attempt, Kate replies, "You could ask them."

And Sophie responds, "Yes, and *then* you could find out if they're nice."

This seems to trigger Kate's memory about an experience that she also had with Ellen on the playground. Kate explains to the class, "Oh, one time we [meaning herself, Grace, and Lila] invited Ellen over and ROARED at her...and she was mean."

Grace confirming this says, "Yeah, we roared at her."

Sophie: "Ohhh…Do you think she liked it when you roared?" (Pause) "Would you like it if someone roared at you?" The children sit quietly as they seem to contemplate this question and then indicate that they don't like being roared at.

With the mention of roaring, several children start to make growling noises and this sparks a contagion of roaring and laughter around the circle. Recognizing the intense pleasure the children are taking in sharing this expression of social cohesion (and resisting the temptation to call a stop to the tumult), Sophie joins their play, turning their growling noises into a silly, made-up, "ROAR" song.[120] Eventually, when the children have finished with their communal "roaring," Sophie transitions into a reading of *The Three Billy Goats Gruff.*

As human beings, we are genetically predisposed to be prosocial, not antisocial beings (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000; De Waal, 2009; Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009; Kohn, 1990; Siegel, 1999; Sunderland, 2006; Svalavitz & Perry, 2010). When a child is doing something perceived as "mean" or when hurtful acts occur, some sort of history is nearly always involved, either directly and/or indirectly. And yet, from a traditional, non-democratic approach, this conversation with children may have played out very differently, with the teacher asserting her authority, establishing for the children clear guidelines of what is "right" and "wrong" behavior, and providing "natural consequences" ("You can't play in the labyrinth when you say hurtful things"). For instance, Sophie could have started the conversation by saying, "We don't call other

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[120] In "Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society," De Waal (2009) discusses his primate research, including the importance of synchrony, mimicry, and imitation in fostering social connections.

children mean," a judgmental approach that may have prevented any chance of having a genuine dialogue with the children.

Instead, we see her taking a more democratic approach; Sophie uses the children's playground experience as a real-life opportunity to help them see different perspectives on social conflict. In circle, Sophie's calm approach bears no trace of anxiety (e.g., "I HAVE to make them see their behavior was inappropriate!"). Instead, she lets the conversation flow naturally, showing perhaps an underlying belief that, all things being equal, children's innate sociality will help them benefit from such discourse, provided that those discussions genuinely help them make better sense of their social experiences. In this case, Sophie helps by suggesting to the children why Ellen may have appeared to be mean ("Was she perhaps scared by the roaring?"), and by gently helping Kate and Grace see the situation from Ellen's perspective ("Hmmm. I wonder how that [roaring] made Ellen feel?") Again, as reflected in this vignette, Sophie seems to have optimistic assumptions about children—that children are capable problem solvers, and are born with a strong desire to establish and maintain relationships with each other.

Through dialogue in circle, Sophie effectively brings a difficult social situation, which might easily have gone unnoted, out of the periphery and into the center of the conversation. As Sophie offers gentle and consistent support, children are able to shift their thinking and begin to see the perspectives of their peers. Taking the time to look deeper at these types of situations and to search for shared understandings, along with children, is a powerful way to create a culture of care and is an essential method for sustaining a democratic preschool environment.

This example also demonstrates the importance of *slowing down* children's processing of social experiences, and of modeling for them the careful interpretation of (what are sometimes) the obscure motivations behind social behavior.

Friendships and play dates in the Rainbow room.

"The mind is born out of struggle not out of tranquility." (Rodari, 1973/1996, p. 12)

Several weeks after Sophie's conversation in circle, I interviewed Alice, the studio teacher at Springhill. During our discussion, Alice shared a story with me about friendship in the Rainbow Room, which, coincidentally, again involves Ellen. Below is a paraphrased version of Alice's account of what happened.

One day in early December, Alice hears Ellen say to Celia (another child in the Rainbow Room) that she doesn't like her. Alice responds by telling Ellen not to say that and that it isn't nice to say. At this point, there's no further discussion between Ellen and Alice about her comment.

But as Alice explains, a short time later the issue reemerges. Both of the regular classroom teachers were sick on that day so Alice is overseeing the Rainbow Room. This time, Ellen tells Alice that she doesn't like Celia. Alice decides to probe a little further and asks Ellen, "Why are you saying that? Tell me more about that."

Ellen responds, "Well, actually I don't know Celia, that's why I said that."

With Celia stationed nearby, Alice responds, "Well, let me introduce you," at which point she begins to tell Ellen a little bit about Celia's family. Then, in reciprocal fashion, Alice tells Celia about Ellen's family. These "introductions" quickly catch the attention and interest of other children in the classroom. As Alice explains in the interview (personal communication, December 16, 2009):

It turned into this nice interaction with different kids doing that with each other and then they started saying, "We need more play dates! We should have play dates with different people." It's like, YAY! So four-year-olds, you know, that's where they are, they're just figuring out friendship, they're just out of parallel play. So then, we all, the children and I wrote a note that said, "Dear families, we would like more play dates with more people." And a bunch of them wrote their names on the piece of paper. And I sent those [notes] home and then I sent a note that…[explained] what [had] happened."

Alice's story illustrates how the Springhill children and teachers influence and build relationships, not only inside the school, but in the larger community of families. It should be noted that, at the end of the year, Ellen's dad sent out an email to all the Rainbow room families inviting them for play dates. He wrote (personal communication, June 6, 2010, email excerpt):

Hello, I hope you all are enjoying the summer. This summer Ellen and I are going to have a play date at our house every Tuesday from 10:30am till 1:00pm (unless we are out of town). We are going to open up the backyard with the sandbox, kiddie pool, water hose, pond, and sprinkler...kids bring your bathing suits and lunch, plus we will make PB&J's, too.

Although I did not interview this parent about how he decided to have these play dates, his email suggests that these activities at school may have played at least a small role in the decision.

Once again, this story illustrates how Springhill teachers focus their work on building positive relationships among children. The challenging work of building

friendships was not squashed for the sake of a prescribed curriculum (e.g., learning a color or letter of the week), or shuffled to secondary status (e.g., having to fit it into a rigid, static schedule), but rather was at the center of their emergent curriculum. Starting where each child is, teachers take the children's work seriously, follow their lead, slow down the process of building relationships, make that process visible to the community, and thereby keep relationships at the heart of the Springhill community.

In another point of interest, it is important to notice the difference in outcomes between the two ways Alice handles this situation with the children. Initially, when she simply tells Ellen, "don't say that" and "it's not nice," we see how Ellen's feelings go unresolved and her behavior remains unaffected (as we see that behavior come back again). By contrast, in the second incident, Alice deals with the conflict in a way more consistent with Springhill faculty values. She starts the process with a nonjudgmental opening ("tell me more about that") and, through dialogue, continues to help the children clarify their misunderstandings, and find a solution to bring everyone closer together (e.g., letter requesting more play dates). When children get to know each other through conversations and play dates, they are far less likely to default to negative social assessments based merely upon their unfamiliarity with one another.

In sum, this story illustrates the importance of helping children to process and deal with their feelings. Research shows (Brazelton & Greenspan, 2000; Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009; Miller, 1997 & 1983, Solter, May 1992; Szalavitz & Perry, 2010) that, when people repress or otherwise fail to process their feelings, those feelings do not just disappear, rather they continue to manifest themselves in various ways. For example, negative feelings may simply resurface as they did in this case; they may be transmuted

into some form of shameful thinking, (e.g., "I must not be nice since I don't like Celia"); or, they may be re-channeled into anger or aggressive behavior directed toward less powerful others (such as a younger sibling.) Springhill teachers seem to understand that authentic relationship work takes time and patience, and that there are rarely quick-fix solutions. From this point of view, any attempt to simply impose an adult idea of how children should feel and behave doesn't carry much potential for helping children to grow into emotionally intelligent citizens.

It should be pointed out that children's outward, surface behavior upon first glance may look like "bullying," meanness, and/or "hurtful" behavior. (Not to mention, it can evoke strong emotions from our own childhood experiences.) However, research (Corsaro, 2003; Kohn, 1996 & 1990; Hatch, 2003; Thompson & O'Neill Grace, 2001) suggests that merely labeling and prohibiting the behaviors does not help children work through their strong feelings or help them to construct more positive approaches to their social interactions. The fact is, there are myriad reasons why children behave in these ways and we probably won't ever know all the factors from which such behavior stems.

For example, in this story, we might wonder if Ellen's treatment of Celia is connected to other feelings she has of being excluded from the Gardenia Room children, perhaps giving her an unconscious pretext for perpetrating *horizontal violence* against Celia.[121] Or, from our earlier story, we might also wonder if Kate and Grace's growling at Ellen was actually a strategy they used to solidify their own, sometimes tenuous,

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[121] I use the term h*orizontal violence* to refer to acts of aggression or hurtful behaviors perpetrated on less powerful others as a response to some sort of vertical oppression done unto them by a more powerful actor against whom they are unable to defend themselves or a situation which they are unable to control.

friendship.[122] Such possibilities prevent us from making any straight-forward

assumptions about the motivations behind children's behavior.[123] Children are constantly

experimenting with different ideas, imitations, and behaviors, and developing different

strategies both to feel powerful and to connect with friends.

It is also noteworthy that teachers at Springhill readily involve communications

with parents in their efforts to involve all stakeholders in issues of social connections (as

with Alice's note to parents explaining what happened). Looking at these issues from a

relationship-based perspective (of children as fellow human beings learning how to get

along with each other in their social world), offers an alternative way to frame our

communications with parents about children. From the perspective of democratic

practice, relationship-building can be a challenging issue, but is still critically important

to address. As demonstrated at Springhill, teachers are encouraged to confront hard

issues, and are tasked with the job of actively supporting the development of children's

relationships.

For example, after sending home the children's letters requesting more play dates

and the corresponding note explaining how the letter came about (including Ellen's initial

comment to Celia), Alice receives an email response from Celia's mom, which she

describes to me during our interview:

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[122] Similarly, Corsaro's (2003) research suggests that preschoolers "want to gain control of their lives and share that sense of control with each other" (p. ix). As active agents of their own socialization process, children sometimes develop solidarity tactics that may inadvertently create exclusions of others.

[123] It should be noted that, after reviewing my fieldnotes and videoclips, I discovered several instances of children roaring at each other. For example, on Nov.18, Stella and Lila (5 year-olds from the Magnolia room) growl at Kate to the point where she begins to cry. Roaring seems to be a shared language of Springhill children signifying power.

Celia's mom wrote and said, "this really makes me upset and I don't think you should have named names, I just think that that other child was being mean." She did say, "I just have to get this off my chest. It's really upsetting to me right now." So, I know that she does just need to get that off her chest, I know it's a very sensitive thing, because I have two children, so when something like that happens to your kid, you remember all the times that your feelings were hurt in that way, and so I didn't even respond to the mom yet, because I feel like, I think she was telling me she was just venting and I think she was just venting. We'll talk about it later…but when I sent out the email, I didn't think about it, but I really made the choice to tell the true story and to say the names because I think it's important for parents of four year-olds to know that this stuff is right out there, you know, it doesn't mean that much to them, although they can come home and cry about it every day, but really their crying about it, is processing it…I do try to kind of keep that up on the top, so people are really seeing it and know that it's normal and also that those hard things are really so crucial for them to deal with.

In the story, we also see that Celia's mom was upset and felt the other child was just "being mean." Alice recognizes that adults, as well as children, need to process hard feelings. Alice empathizes and validates Celia's mom's feeling, and recognizes, as she mentions in the interview, that these situations often trigger our own memories and feelings from childhood. Yet, Alice realizes that she can't simply avoid addressing these conflicts because they're challenging or uncomfortable. Dialogue led to greater communication and understanding, a deepening of relationships, and positive outcomes for the children. However, perhaps a level of anonymity in the public sharing of this story

would have been more appropriate. I'm not sure anyone benefitted from using the children's names. Also, using their names may have unnecessarily upset both Ellen's and Celia's parents, potentially putting a rift in their relationship. Transparency is an essential part of democracy. However, when does too much transparency instead infringe on individual's rights and unintentionally shame and/or alienate people? Certainly, this is one of the challenges of supporting a democratic community.

Building friendships is hard work: The story of Kate, Lila, and Grace.
Towards the end of the year, during my field observations, I noticed that Grace, Kate and Lila (three-year-olds in the Gardenia room) were making many attempts to connect and deepen their friendship with each other, but it didn't happen without bumps along the way. There were power struggles, hurt feelings, and exclusions that arose as they negotiated the space of their relationships with one another. Throughout the process, Sophie and Jess were available to support the three girls as they worked out their issues, while at the same time providing space and freedom for them to work things out for themselves.

Some contextual information. During my visits in October and November 2009 at Springhill, I observed Grace playing easily with various children throughout the day, including Lila and Kate, but her primary relationship seemed to be with a boy named Walter. However, Walter had frequent absences and ended up moving later that school year to New York. Sophie seemed to be much attuned to the impact this change had on Grace. For example, in May 2010, when Sophie mentions that Stella's parents are out of town, Grace chimes in, "I really want to go to New York City, but my mom keeps saying, 'no.'" Right away, Sophie makes the connection to Walter and responds, "Were you

hoping that you might see Walter if you went to New York City?" Grace says, "Mmm-hmm." And yet, alongside her sadness over Walter's departure, Grace was investing in new relationships with Kate and Lila.

Kate had some changes going on in her life as well. In the previous year, Kate's mom had given birth to a new baby and Kate was no longer an only child. In dramatic play, I observed Kate many times using a baby doll in punitive scenarios, such as putting the doll in "jail" (Oct. 19, 2009), pretending to be "mean doctors" hitting the babies (Oct. 22) and "mean mommies" who would capture the babies, and bang the baby's heads on the floor, chanting "Bad babies! Bad babies!" Once I observed Kate squeeze the baby doll and say, "you have to squeeze them [the babies] away" (Nov. 3). It seems that with a new family dynamic at home, Kate may have been feeling powerless over the situation; her aggressive actions toward the baby doll were perhaps ways to regain feelings of control over her family circumstances.[124]

I started observing this threesome's power struggles, attempts at inclusion and exclusion, and desire for closeness with each other during my return visit in May.[125] On May 10, 2010, Lila and Kate sit down at the writing table after cleaning up the kitchen and work on gluing cut-out letters to notes they are making. "We're going to have *more* than Grace," Kate tells Lila. "We're going to get the *biggest* ones," replies Lila. At that moment, Grace happens to walk by them towards the snack table and overhears them.

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[124] It is interesting to note that the children who joined Kate in this baby play were the other children with baby sisters and brothers.

[125] From the beginning of the year, Lila and Kate played with many children, but their primary relationship was with one another, quite often with Lila following Kate's lead. As Grace started joining their play more regularly and worked to find her place in the group, a shifting power dynamic seemed to occur, understandably causing tension (e.g., Lila seemed to gain more confidence in making her voice heard, while Kate was adjusting to what seemed to be a slight diminution of her power).

She responds, "That's *not* nice," but continues eating her snack, seeming to be relatively unbothered by their comments. A moment later, Lila says, "I need a glue stick." Kate responds, "How about we share?" Kate then goes to the art shelf and brings Lila some glue and Lila thanks her.

As highlighted in this brief exchange, Kate and Lila seem to use two strategies for fostering their feelings of closeness for one another, and solidifying their friendship. One, the two girls exclude other children from their group, and two, they do nice things for each other. The excluded person seems to vary, from one situation to the next. In this example, we see Grace being excluded.

In the vignette below, I will highlight the strategies Kate, Lila, and Grace use to connect with each other (some constructive and some hurtful) as they negotiate the boundaries of their burgeoning friendships. At the same time, I will highlight how Sophie (the teacher), uses a relationship-focused (as opposed to behavior-focused) approach to support all three girls throughout the process, as they develop more constructive strategies for building their friendships with one another.

By mid-May, Lila, Kate and Grace seem to be growing more and more inseparable. On this particular morning, all three girls work at the art table, making "thank-you" gifts to give to Helen (the older sister of another Gardenia room child) for bringing in and sharing her microscope with the class the previous week. While they draw with colored-pastels, the three girls begin a conversation:

Lila says, "I'll do it with pink."

Grace takes the pink pastel from her and says, "No, I'm doing it with pink, you can do it with purple."

Lila replies, "I don't like purple."

Grace responds in a concerned voice, "But you HAVE to like purple, because WE like beautiful." (The colors pink and purple seem to fall under the girl's culturally-mediated definition of beautiful. Notice how Grace seems to use these colors and the concept of beauty as a concrete way to bind their friendship together.)

Kate says, "No, we like yucky."

Grace corrects, "No we like beautiful."

Then Lila says to Grace, "Can you get some ribbon for me?"

Grace agrees happily, gets up from the table, goes to the open shelf and retrieves ribbon for Lila. She comes back over to Lila and says, "I got a blue and green ribbon for you!"

Lila then sees that I'm videotaping their work and says to me, "We're making presents for Orson's big sister when she let us look at the microphone [meaning microscope]."

Grace goes to the shelf again and comes back to the table with more ribbon. "Look! It's beautiful! And, I got this for Lila too," Grace explains, as she hands Lila another ribbon. "But it's BEAUTIFUL and it's going to be beautiful on top of this," she adds, as she glues it onto her paper.

Once they finish their presents for Helen, the girls continue to work at the art table. Lila makes a typewriter out of cardboard and pretends to type. Grace takes it from her and starts to type. Lila tells her she wants it back. To solve the problem, they decide to type together. While Lila and Grace pretend to type, Kate leans close to them and in a sweet voice tells them, "I'm making a butterfly house for you guys." Both Lila and

Grace get excited about this and share their delight at discovering that Kate's butterfly house will have pink and purple on it.

As we can see in this conversation at the art table, Grace, Lila, and Kate each demonstrate acts of kindness toward each other. However, sometimes as these friendships develop, children have conflicting perspectives and need adult support to help get through those situations.

For example, later this day, the three girls go onto the playground and start to put on a dance show with silk scarves. After a few minutes of dancing and singing, several distractions interrupt their performance. First, several children discover a live rabbit near the swings, so Kate, Grace, and Lila tiptoe over to watch the rabbit until it hops back under the fence. Then while over near the swings, another child discovers a dead squirrel. This sustains the girls' curiosity and they watch as Sophie removes the squirrel. Finally, as the three girls are heading back to their dancing circle, a group of boys on the opposite side of the playground think they've spotted the Springhill dragon. So, once again, Kate, Grace, and Lila get distracted from their dance play and run over to join the other children on the climber to see if the Springhill dragon has actually come into view. Unfortunately, all these distractions leave little time for the girls to put on their show before clean-up and closing circle.

At this point, Lila and Grace's interest in continuing the play wanes and they decide they should continue their performance tomorrow. However, Kate wants to continue their dance and starts to cry when the other girls refuse to join her. Sophie comes over and empathizes with Kate, suggesting that the girls make a plan to continue the dance tomorrow when they have more time. Lila and Grace come back over and give

Kate a hug. Kate stops crying and starts to stomp her feet around the playground,

announcing that she is "stomping out her mad feelings." This catches on with the other

children, who turn it into a game of sorts, stomping around the playground. Matthew

(one of the other children) makes pretend squealing sounds as he marches around the

playground, laughing and telling Sophie that he's "doing baby feelings." Sophie laughs

along with the children and the issue seems to be resolved. However, a few minutes later

in circle, the feelings resurface, with Kate holding onto her resentment, and Lila and

Grace responding to Kate by making hurtful comments towards her.

Closing circle conflict, "I don't think they want to play with me." As children

begin sitting down for closing circle, Grace and Lila sit down opposite of Kate and Lila

shouts, "No more Kate!"

Sophie hears this and says, "Grace and Lila, I think this is something we'll need to talk

about tomorrow, but I'm wondering if Kate's [feeling let down]."

Sophie then turns to Kate, and Kate, in a sad voice, responds, "I don't think they

want to play with me."

Sophie turns and looks at Grace and Lila for confirmation. Grace in a resigned

sort of tone says, "We will play with you." Lila confirms, "We will."

But then Lila turns to Grace and says, "No more play dates!" Grace smiles and,

in solidarity with Lila, says, "No more play dates!" This causes Kate to start crying.

Lila says, "No Kate!"

Sophie turns to Lila and says, "That's making Kate feel very sad." As it seems

there is no abatement in sight, Sophie tells Jess and Nicole (the other two teachers in

circle) that she's going to take the girls out to the hallway so they can talk about this

problem. In the hallway, Sophie sits intentionally between Grace and Lila, while Kate sits opposite Sophie, the group roughly forming a circle.

As they sit down, Sophie says in a calm voice, "So, I'm confused because you're saying, 'you will play with Kate', but then you keep on saying, 'no more playdates.' So I'm not quite sure what you…"

Grace, looking at Kate, interjects, "We will play with you at play dates!"

Sophie in a hopeful voice, "You will play with her at play dates?"

Grace: "Mmm-hmmm."

Kate then responds, "But, if you don't let me do that, then I won't let you have any play dates at my house!"

Grace, in a placating tone, "I'll have a play date at your house. I PROMISE!"

Lila, looking at Kate, then adds, "I promise I will invite you for my birthday party when I turn five."

Kate shouts, "NO!"

Sophie then says, "I'm going to stop you for a second because…." (At this point, the Magnolia room children walk through the hallway. Sophie waits until they go inside their classroom before continuing the conversation.)

Lila then says, in a matter of fact tone, "I think I'm *not* going to let Kate come to my house."

Sophie responds softly, "Hmmm...But I thought you said she could have a play date?"

Lila contemplates, "Well, she could…well, I said she would come for my birthday party. I said I would invite her for my birthday party."

Sophie, clarifying, "You said you'd invite her to your birthday party…Well, what about play dates?"

Kate (possibly not wanting to allow Lila the chance to respond with another rejection) angrily says, "No!"

Grace says in a soothing tone: "I would invite you to my birthday party."
Kate again says: "No!"

This seems to offend Lila. In a spiteful sounding voice, she replies: "Then we are not inviting you again!"

Sophie calmly interjects, "Well, hang on a second, wait a minute Lila, let's find out from Kate…[she looks over to Kate]…Kate, you look like you're still feeling kind of mad, are you feeling kind of mad?" (Notice how Sophie continues to help connect children's behaviors with feelings.)

Kate responds, "because first they wouldn't let me and now I'm NEVER going to let them come and when they want to be in my hou[se] and they knock, I will NOT answer the door and I will NOT let them in!"

Sophie validates Kate's feelings again, "You are feeling VERY mad about this Kate, I can tell."

Lila, "Well, we need to come into school every day!"

Sophie refocuses the conversation on Kate's feelings, "Yeah, but I can tell that Kate's still feeling really mad. Hmmm…" (Notice how Sophie helps keep each child's perspective visible.)

Kate repeats, "When you knock on the door at my house, I will not let you in!"

Sophie questioningly responds, "So you wouldn't want them to play at your house? Is that what you're saying? Hmmm..."

Lila, "Well I'm going to tell my mom!"

Grace tries a new strategy: "But we will be nice to you."

Sophie repeats this comment, "Grace says that she will be nice to you."

Kate considers: "Well…"

Sophie turns to Lila and says: "What about you Lila, will you be nice to Kate?"

Lila: "Yes. Well I…"

Kate then turns her back on the other girls, forcing Sophie to interrupt and say, "But I see that Kate is turning her back…so I'm wondering if she is still feeling sad. I know you guys were giving her hugs to make her feel better on the playground…" Sophie now speaking in a whisper: "How could we make Kate feel better?"

Grace temporarily gets distracted by a rock on the floor, picks it up, and says, "This is a smooth one." Sophie doesn't comment on the rock, but gestures with her hand towards Kate to help Grace refocus.

Lila in an excited tone says, "How about giving her kisses?"

When Kate hears this she makes an angry grunt (presumably to let them know she's still angry), but at the same time scoots her body a little closer to them.

Grace in a sweet voice says, "How about giving her fashion treasures, pink and purple fashion treasures?" (Here it seems Grace is using "pink and purple fashion treasures" as social currency to try and win back Kate's affection.)

Kate responds, "No!"

Lila seems to get upset that Kate is not accepting their offerings and says, "You don't want NOTHING then! Then, we won't let you in the school!"

Sophie interrupts Lila gently and says (while softly rubbing her face and shoulders), "Well, Lila let's see…let's keeping thinking about what might work. It sounds like kisses don't work…or treasures…"

Grace cuts in, "How about we could get you a doll? Your doll!?!"

Kate doesn't respond yet, and seems to be contemplating whether or not this will make her feel better.

Sophie responds: "A doll?"

Grace says directly to Kate: "Yeah. Your doll. A little doll."

Sophie: "A little doll that you play with…would that help you Kate?

Kate has now turned her body towards them but is still covering her ears. In order to answer the question, she folds her arms together in an angry posture and says, "Mmmm…Unn-uhhhh. I only want nothing."

Sophie repeats, "Nothing. I'm wondering what WOULD make you feel better Kate?"

Kate responds, but with less intensity, "Nothing."

Sophie: "Nothing…Are you still feeling really disappointed that you didn't get to do the show?" (Notice how Sophie hypothesizes about the possible underlying reasons behind Kate's feelings of disappointment.)

At this comment, Kate shakes her head yes. (Sophie's question seems to allow Kate to reflect on her feelings and connect them with what happened earlier on the playground, thereby moving the process of reconciliation forward.)

Sophie confirming and validating her feelings, says in a sympathetic tone: "Yeah."

In the background you can hear the Gardenia Room singing the "Hello Song" in circle. Lila hears it and says, "Oh no! The circle started without us."

Sophie confirms, "It did, because we had this *big* problem that we needed to talk about. So…Kate, what would make you feel better?"[126] (As Sophie continues to refocus the conversation on feelings, the conflict begins to shift away from a lingering power struggle, towards a growing awareness of each other's perspectives, and closer to the construction of a shared understanding.)

At this point, Kate appears to be less in a defensive posture, and more in a thinking posture. Her arms are no longer tightly folded.

As Kate seems to be thinking about how to respond, Grace chimes in: "Ice cream?"

Kate: "No."

Grace: "Popsicles?"

Kate: "Nothing."

Grace: "A dress? A fashion dress?"

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[126] Springhill faculty's use of "big" or "knotty problems" as a starting point to engage and stretch children's thinking is a concept borrowed from Reggio educators. As described by Edwards (1998, p.187), "Any problem that stops the children and blocks their action is a kind of cognitive knot. It may be caused by a conflict of wills or lack of information or skills to proceed. Such knots should be thought of as more than moments of cognitive disequilibrium, containing positive possibilities for regrouping, hypothesis testing, and intellectual comparison of ideas. They can produce interactions that are constructive not only for socializing but also for constructing new knowledge. The teacher's task is to notice those knots and help bring them to center stage for further attention-launching points for future activities" (see "Springhill's Relationship-Based Culture; A director's perspective," for more discussion on this concept).

Kate, with less resolve, repeats: "Nothing."

Sophie, in a concerned voice, joins in, "Nothing would help you? Hmmm…"

Lila: "Some sparkly shoes?"

After a brief pause, Kate says, "Yeah!" and starts to smile. (Interesting to note, that Grace and Lila both have sparkly shoes, however Kate has just regular shoes. Does Kate feel "sparkly shoes" will help solidify her membership into the group?)

Sophie says: "OH, sparkly shoes?"

Grace responds to Kate: "Yeah, like pink and purple sparkly shoes?"

Kate excitedly adds: "Mmm-hmm! With silver sparkles!"

Lila: "Okay."

Sophie: "Well where would we get those?"

Lila considers, "Hmmm…maybe at the shoe store."

Sophie: "Hmmm."

Kate who's now smiling, adds, "At the kids shoe store!"

Sophie asks, "At the kids shoe store?"

Lila: "Yeah!"

Sophie: "Hmm. But how would we get there?"

Grace: "We could get in our cars!"

Sophie: "Can you drive your cars?"

Grace: "Yeah!"

Lila confirms, "I can drive."

Sophie: "You can drive?"

Kate joins in, "I can drive too."

Lila begins a story, "One day I was driving my car and my mom was sitting in the back and…" and then starts laughing. (Note how Sophie does not rush the resolution process, making room for children's levity.)

Sophie: "Well how will we get sparkly shoes for Kate?"

Grace: "We could drive there."

Kate speaking in a fast and excited tone: "We can drive to the… we could go….we can…I saw a store that has kid's jam shoes."

Sophie: "Jam shoes? But you want sparkly ones, that have sparkles, that are shiny?"

Kate: "Uh-huh."

Lila pointing to her feet, "Look, I have sparkly shoes!"

Grace adds, "Me too! They're pink sparkly shoes."

Kate says, "Look at mine. They only light up! I want sparkly shoes, that are pink and purple that have sparkles, that can light up."

Sophie: "Hmmm…"

Grace: "Well these can light up. See? It turns into light pink." (Grace's shoes aren't actually the kind that light up, however they do have glitter on them.)

Sophie looking at Grace's shoes says, "It does look like it has glitter on it. Very shiny."

Grace's imagination and desire for light-up shoes seem to trump reality at this point, as she says, "Well it used to light up with like…light pink. So these light up sparkly." Kate scoots closer to Grace and Lila and feels Grace's shoes.

Refocusing on the girls, Sophie says, "Hmmm. But how will we get Kate some light up sparkly shoes?"

There is a brief pause as the girls think about this question. Lila then moves over to sit next to Kate.

Grace says, "Hmmm. How about if we… these are good tap dancing shoes…so how about we'll get her sparkly, tap dancing shoes?"

Sophie asks, "So she could tap dance? Do you like that idea Kate?"

Kate responds, "Mmmm-huh. And I want sparkly, I want those, I want pink and purple shoes with sparkly, with silver sparkles that light up AND I want a fashion dress."

Sophie: "and a fashion dress?"

Grace answers for Kate, "a pink AND purple fashion dress!"

Kate adds, "that has golden sparkles!"

Grace: "Okay, and I want those dresses too. I want that dress too."

Lila joins in, "I want a pink dress with lots…with lots of sparkly…with lots of sparkly shoes and princess tiaras!" While Lila is talking, Grace leans over and gives Kate a hug. And then, Kate hugs Grace back.

Kate: "I want a golden princess tiara with sparkles that can shine and light up by the time I dump my head."

Sophie: "So do you think we could maybe, is this the kind of thing that you would like to have for your show?"

"Yeah!" all three girls say in response.

"So, what should we do for tomorrow?" Sophie asks them.

Grace replies, "Hmmm. We should go and get them and not have school. When we're done getting them we can have school."

Sophie: "But we have to go to school because we only have 4…3 more days of school."

Lila: "But that's a lot. I'll just tell my mom I don't want to go to school."

Grace: "That's three more days."

Kate explains, "And then it will be summer and then we'll move to Stonewood [meaning Springhill's other campus where they relocated for the 2010-2011 year]. And then we'll be in the Magnolia room [the 5-year-old classroom] and then we'll be at kindergarten and then we'll be at college and then we'll be a grown up and then…uh…"

Sophie: "Mmmm-hmmm, life goes by SO fast."

Grace: "Yeah. And then, and then, and then we'll be in middle school! And then we'll see each other!"

Lila: "Yeah!"

Grace in a sweet, sing-songy voice says, "I'll see you!" as she hugs Lila.

Then Grace says to Kate, "I'll see you!" At this point Lila starts to hug Kate and then Grace joins in the hug.

They all hug each other with big smiles on their face as they start repeating, "I'll see you!"

Sophie seems to realize that the conflict is resolved and feelings have been worked through so she says, "Well girls, are we ready to go back into circle?"

The girls say, "Yeah."

As they stand up, Sophie tells them in a whisper, "Let's go in very quietly so we don't disturb them. Okay? Shhh." They tiptoe back inside. This time in circle, the three of them sit together (instead of away from Kate) and join in the circle conversation.

During my field work at Springhill, I had never (to this point) seen Sophie leave circle. This incident suggests just how seriously Sophie takes children's feelings of exclusion, and how aware she is of the social complexities of the children's budding relationships. The incident also serves as an example of how Sophie supports the girls through respectful dialogue, allowing plenty of time for children to process strong feelings, with a commitment and trust that with this type of repeated practice they will become capable of entertaining multiple perspectives when faced with social conflicts. Sophie sends a powerful message to the children: "We'll work through this tough situation, no matter how long it takes, until there is a positive solution for all."

In this story, we see the importance of an adult being with the children, taking the conflict seriously, and helping to make a difference in the resolution. The conflict could have turned into an either/or scenario where one side of the conflict was forced to give up power. Instead, Sophie rides the wave along with the children, doesn't bail, all the way to end; clearly she has tremendous confidence and trust that with time and support the children will eventually work it out.

Another point of interest, Lila, Kate, and Grace seem to use sparkly shoes and beautiful dresses as a form of social currency for controlling access (inclusion/exclusion) into the group. It serves as an example of how popular culture commodities are being used by children, as referents to negotiate status within the group. They use a concrete reference, not abstract ideas or concepts, to anchor their conversations and negotiations,

and use the reference (e.g., sparkly shoes) to creatively work through feelings (see chapter 10, "Reconstruction of Powerful Popular Culture Icons and Images" section, for further discussion of consumer culture's influence on children).

As highlighted in the vignette below, Sophie also seems to be aware that being in relationships with others requires *ongoing work* and lots of practice during real-life situations of conflict.

Puzzle negotiations: "We're both more of a mom!" The following day, Sophie seems to intentionally stay in close proximity to the three girls, continuing to monitor their budding yet, somewhat fragile alliance. Sophie is also aware of the girls' mutual interest in dance and make-believe play, and therefore provides materials to extend this interest, while simultaneously creating an opportunity to deepen their social connection and friendship.

After mid-morning snack, Lila and Kate begin to dance on the wooden platform and sing the "Doe-a-Deer" song from *The Sound of Music*. To extend this play, Sophie asks the girls if they'd like to get the long extension cord and take the CD player to the stage outside for their dance performance. Kate and Lila like this idea, so they go with Sophie into the hallway to ask Adam's mom, the star parent for that day (see chapter 6, "Star Parents," for more on this volunteer role) if she can go into the "stinky closet" and retrieve the extension cord for them.

Back in the room, while waiting for the extension cord, Lila and Kate start to work on a puzzle together. Shortly thereafter, a conflict arises. Sophie soon joins the two girls at the table. The following example, an exchange lasting almost 10-minutes, makes visible the powerful results that can occur when teachers trust children as capable

problem solvers, provide children with emotional support, and remain alongside them throughout the conflict, no matter how long it takes.

In the back of the room, on a small, two-person table, Kate and Lila sit down to work on an 8-piece puzzle together. As they start trying to figure out where the puzzle pieces go, Kate says to Lila, "This is kind of difficult."

Lila (without looking up): "I know how to do puzzles like this one… So, I have to put the tree one… Let's see this is part of the tree, the tree stump…"

Kate holds up a piece she's working on and says, "Where does this go Lila?"

Concentrating on her own pieces, Lila ignores Kate's question. Undeterred, Kate repeats the question two more times.

Then Lila figures out where to put the piece she's working on and says, "Here," as she places it on the puzzle board.

Kate asks Lila once more about her piece, "Where does this go?"

This time Lila takes the puzzle piece from Kate, turns to me, holds it up, and asks, "Where does this go?" I make a perplexed facial expression and continue to videotape. At the same time, Sophie, with the CD player in hand, walks over to join the girls.

Standing over the puzzle, Sophie points out some details on the puzzle board to scaffold their thinking, "It looks like the green part is up here, the green tree, do you have green tree parts? Or do you have…?"

In response to Sophie's questions, Lila and Kate both immediately look at the table and hone in on the same puzzle piece—the piece covered with the most green. Kate reaches over to try and pick it up but Lila gets to it first. "I have this one!" shouts Lila, as she holds the puzzle piece away from Kate.

Sophie tries to continue, "Do you have any blue water?" But at this point both girls are focused on the green puzzle piece and Kate moves over to Lila's part of the table and tries to grab the green tree piece from her hand. With the puzzle piece out of her reach, Kate asks Lila, "Can I put it in?"

Firmly gripping the piece, Lila responds "I had it. I have it!" Kate continues to try and grab the piece but Lila holds on to it, saying with more conviction, "I had it!"

Sophie softly says, "Kate I'm going to ask you to not grab it from her hands. You can ask her."

So Kate tries this approach again, "Can I please have it?"

Lila replies, "No."

Kate: "But I wanted to put it in!"

Lila, trying to appease Kate, finds another piece with green tree and says, "HERE, this has tree parts!"

Kate responds, "But I wanted one with SO MUCH tree part."

And then Lila explains, "I want the tree part because I want to be a mom."

After a brief pause, Sophie asks, "So how can we fix this, work this out?"

Kate makes an angry grunt while looking in the adjacent mirror and Lila follows suit. Sophie, connecting words to their feelings says, "Hmmm…you girls are both gonna get mad?"

While they continue to make angry grunt noises, Kate suddenly punches Lila in the arm. (Without using much force, Kate's hitting doesn't seem to be an impulsive move but more of an intentional gesture to show Lila and Sophie how angry she is.) At this point, Sophie puts the CD player on the floor and sits down in a nearby chair, gently

pulling Kate, out of Lila's reach, and over to her. In a calm but concerned and serious voice, Sophie says, "Oh my, but you couldn't hit her, you couldn't hit her. Kate I'm going to ask you to stay over here because it's not okay to hurt Lila."

Kate in a sad voice says, "But I want the piece with SO much trees!"

Sophie shaking her head yes and validating Kate's feelings responds, "You wanted the one with a lot of tree in it. But it's not okay to hit her. So I'd like you to check-in with her."

Kate with her head down and in a near whisper asks, "Are you okay Lila? Are you okay Lila?"

Lila responds: "I'm okay."

Sophie, in an understanding tone, says to Kate, "Yeah, I know sometimes you get really mad at people, but it's not okay to hit them."

Kate responds, "But I want that piece..."

Sophie expounding says, "Yeah, you wanted that piece, you wanted it SO much that you were going to hurt Lila. Yeah..."

Kate murmurs, "Mmm-hmm."

Sophie asks, "I thought you were doing this together?"

Kate replies, "Mmm-hmmm, but I want the piece with SO MUCH tree."

"Mmm-Hmmm," Sophie responds, as she points to a different piece that Kate is looking at, "And Lila gave you this piece that has some tree and a swing on it."

Kate takes the piece, with some tree and a swing on it, and starts to put it in the puzzle, while saying, "I want to put this one, THEN put that one" while gesturing towards the piece with "SO much tree."

Lila suddenly says in an excited tone, "I know!"

Sophie mirroring her excitement asks, "You have an idea Lila?"

Before Lila has a chance to share her idea, Kate, sees that Lila is trying to put the tree piece in the wrong place and says to her, "But that's not how you put it. No, you put it over here," as she points to the place Lila's piece needs to go.

Lila listening to Kate moves the puzzle piece ("with so much tree") into the correct position and says with satisfaction, "There!"

Immediately following, Kate pulls the puzzle over to her, dumps the pieces out, and says, "I want to take it out." Lila responds with an angry grunt.

Sophie slides the puzzle board away from Kate and says, "It looks like you're getting really frustrated. And now, you know what, I think that hurt Lila's feelings. So I'm going to hold on to this for a second so you can figure this out…"

With the pieces dumped on the table, Kate grabs the piece ("with so much tree") and says, "Now I got this piece!"

Sophie responds with a pondering, "Hmmmm..."

And Lila says, "I want that piece now."

Kate retorts, "Now, I got it now."

Sophie adds, "You're both kinda mad."

Lila says, "I want a piece that has SO MUCH tree, but not this piece," as she moves a different piece with trees away from her.

Kate now trying to placate Lila, hands her a different piece with some trees and asks her, "This piece?"

Lila moves the piece away and says, "No."

Kate hands the same piece back to Lila and says, "This piece has lots of trees."

Unsatisfied, Lila says, "It doesn't."

Kate pointing to the puzzle piece, continues to try and convince Lila: "It does. See…tree, tree, tree, tree, tree."

As they seem to be stuck going back and forth, Sophie adds, "It has a tree on it. And it has birds on it. But you want this corner piece," looking at Lila and pointing to the SO MUCH tree piece in Kate's hand.

Lila responds, "I want it!"

Sophie says to Kate, as she gestures towards Lila, "Yeah. And Lila did put it in there and then you turned the puzzle over and that kind of wrecked it. I bet that made Lila…look, she's looking pretty frustrated."

Lila makes an angry grunt. And then pounds her fists on the table. Kate smiles but then mimics Lila's actions. Sophie doesn't intervene but after several seconds tries to validate their feelings and says, "You're getting really mad." They grunt some more and then they both start yelling back and forth. With each grunt and shout, the anger seems to be evolving into silliness. Sophie waits and allows them to scream until they're ready to stop. When they stop she asks, "That made you feel better?"

Kate replies with a smile, "That made me feel better."

Sophie responds in a happy tone, "That made you feel better!" Kate shakes her head yes. Sophie continues, "What about Lila? Did that make you feel better? A big scream like that, getting your mad feelings out?" Lila starts grinning and giggling as she looks at herself in the mirror. Kate joins in and starts laughing too.

Sophie says in a teasing voice, "Uh-oh, now we've got silly feelings." With that said, they all three have a good laugh. (Again, we see levity used, not to avoid dealing with the conflict, but to diffuse some of the angry feelings.)

After a brief pause, Sophie asks them, "Okay. So, how are we going to fix this problem? What do we do?"

At this point, Kate shares her idea: "Let's press this piece in and then this piece and then…" and at the same time starts putting different puzzle pieces in the board, including the coveted 'SO much tree' piece.

Sophie asks: "But what will Lila do?"

Lila chimes in, "I want a big piece of tree."

Kate, with her index finger on the 'SO much tree' piece, responds to Lila, "Well you can do all…Well, I…but don't take this piece out. Okay? Don't take that piece out. Don't take this piece."

Sophie puts her hand over the puzzle board and gently says, "Well I'm going to stop you for a second. What can Lila do, if you're doing this together?"

Kate replies, "She can help me with the top."

"Well which pieces can she help you with?" asks Sophie.

Lila adds, "I want to do a LOT of tree."

Kate, as she continues to put the remaining puzzle pieces on the board, responds, "You can help me with these two pieces. She can put in…"

Kate is still holding them, so Sophie reminds her, "Well you have to give them to her to do it."

"Here Lila," says Kate as she hands the pieces to Lila.

Lila looks at the pieces and says, "I want a lot of tree. This is not a lot of tree."

Kate, obviously worried that Lila is going to remove the 'so much tree' piece from the board, taps it with her finger, and says, "But don't take this out okay?" And then adds, "Because I want to be more of a mom."

Lila starts to place the pieces Kate handed her onto the board. She starts to say something, "Well I think if I'm…"

But Sophie at the same time asks, "Oh so wait a minute, when you put this piece in here that makes you more of a mom?"

Kate replies, "Mmmm-hmmm."

For further clarification, Sophie asks, "Is that why you wanted this piece?"

Kate shakes her head yes and replies again, "Mmm-hmmm."

"Oh, so if Lila doesn't get to do this piece does that mean she can't be more of a mom?" inquires Sophie.

Kate contemplates and then responds, "She can be more of a mom if she puts THIS piece correctly," as she hands Lila a different puzzle piece to put in. Then Kate turns directly to Lila and asks, "How about if you put this piece correctly?" Lila puts in the piece, which is the last piece needed to complete the puzzle and Kate says to her, "Now, you're more of a mom Lila!"

While Lila complies with Kate's plan to make her "more of a mom," Sophie seems to recognize that Lila is not content with this solution and asks her, "Hmmm, is that okay with you Lila?"

Lila in a sad, and near defeated, tone says, "Yeah. But I just want…" and then she pauses.

Kate begins to dump out the puzzle again, but Sophie, turning Kate's attention back to Lila, says, "Wait a second. I want to hear. Let's listen to Lila's words."

Lila continues, "but I just want to…but I just want to… not help her with NOTHING." At this point, Lila gets up from her chair and walks over to the adjacent block area.

Still seated at the puzzle table, Sophie asks Lila, "You don't want to do it anymore?"

Lila, in a frustrated tone, says, "No. I'm going to help her with nothing."

Lila pulls some blocks out and says: "I like it when Kate helps me with nothing."

Sophie in a gentle voice says, "Do you want Kate to help you?"

Lila responds, "No!"

"No?" Sophie repeats.

Then Kate joins in, "No! I don't want to do anything."

Sophie pointing to the 'so much tree' piece, in a near whisper says to Kate, "Well, I'm wondering if Lila's still a little upset that she didn't get to do this piece." (Note how Sophie consistently helps children consider other peoples' perspectives while problem-solving.)

Kate in an animated voice says loudly, "We can do it again! And then, she can get this piece!!"

Sophie mirroring her excitement, suggests, "Oh! Why don't you go over and ask her if that will work for her? Or you could even take that piece to her. Or, I don't know, or you could take the puzzle to her."

Listening to this exchange from the block area, Lila asks, "What do you have to tell me?" (Here we see that, while Lila has expressed her frustration by physically walking away from the table and saying she wants "nothing," she is still open to coming back. Note how Sophie does not focus on these surface behaviors. Instead, she stays attuned to Lila's feelings, and puts the emphasis on the girls' underlying desires to resolve the conflict.)

"Kate has another idea," explains Sophie.

But Kate immediately distracts herself by dumping the puzzle on to the table and starting to work on it again. Kate: "Okay. And now I need to put this piece…"

Sophie gently refocuses her, "Wait, wait, wait, wait a second, you said, what could Lila do?" At the same time Lila walks back over to the puzzle table.

Kate explains her idea, "Umm. First I'm going to put this [so much tree] piece in, and then take it out, and THEN, give it to her, and then SHE can put it in!"

"Okay!" Lila excitedly responds.

Kate takes the corner piece, with 'so much tree,' puts it in the puzzle, and then right away, takes it out and hands it to Lila.

"Thank you!" Lila says to Kate as she puts the 'so much tree' piece in the puzzle.

Kate responds enthusiastically, "Now we're both more of a mom!! Now, we can ALL do it [meaning the remainder of the puzzle]…TOGETHER!" They both seem authentically satisfied with this solution.[127]

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[127] Notice how Sophie doesn't impose an adult solution to their conflict. Instead, Sophie supports the girls as they process strong emotions, helps them make connections between their feelings and behaviors, assists them as they try to interpret each other's actions, and helps them negotiate a satisfactory resolution. *Satisfactory resolution* meaning a resolution from each child's perspective and not necessarily from an adult perspective

They peacefully work on the rest of the puzzle together. Lila asks, "Now, where does this piece go Sophie?"

Sophie drawing Lila's attention to the details in the puzzle, asks, "Well, if you look Lila, does it have tree or does it have water? Because the water pieces go down here, and the tree and sky pieces go…"

Lila chimes in, "It has tree and a piece with cow."

"Does it have some sky?" asks Sophie.

Lila says, "Yeah."

Sophie continues, "The sky and the tree pieces go up at the top. So, see if that would fit." Lila puts the piece in correctly. Sophie continues to offer support as they work on the puzzle, "Oh. And I think that big bit of tree fits on to that big bit of tree. That's it. So now we need another sky piece. It looks like there's a sky piece missing. Lila, do you have any more sky pieces?"

Kate comments, "I have a water piece. Where do you think my water piece goes?

Sophie replies, "Well let's look, there's two more pieces left." Kate figures it out and places her piece.

As Lila works on the last piece of puzzle, she says, "I have a fence piece, it goes right here, I know." As she places it in the correct position she adds, "There! We finished it! Now we're more of a mom!!"

Sophie agrees, "You're both more of a mom!"

Kate gleefully responds while jumping up and down, "Yay!!"

(standing in moral judgment, about what the "right" outcome "should" be). In this way, conflict is handled within a democratic, egalitarian frame rather than a more traditional, hierarchical frame.

"Now, let's go play together!!" adds Lila.

"Yep, well I've got the CD player," Sophie says, as they stand up from the puzzle table and begin to head outdoors.

Kate: "Yeah, so we can do mommy dancing! Yay, yay, yay!"

"Well, let's go find the scarves" Sophie says as they leave the room to find the scarves and begin their dancing show outside.

Outside, Sophie helps Kate and Lila wrap the silks around their heads and bodies. Grace arrives on the playground and announces: "I'm back!" Kate replies: "Grace we were just about to start our show. You're welcome to come." They end up playing and dancing together for over an hour.

When teachers start from the assumptions that (1) children have an innate desire to connect with other human beings, and (2) children are competent problem solvers, we can see how an altogether different image of the child emerges, necessitating a decisive shift away from traditional behavioral models of pedagogy.

In the above example, we can see just what that shift looks like for teachers. Notice how Sophie slows down the learning process, validates children's feelings, refrains from imposing her sense of justice, and provides support until the conflict is resolved. Benefiting from this relationship-based, democratic pedagogical approach, Kate and Lila learn many valuable skills (e.g., perspective-taking, problem solving, negotiating, and communicating skills) as they work through their conflict and, at the same time, begin to develop more positive, nuanced approaches for navigating their social relationships. Demonstrably, these are the essential skills that make democratic citizenship a possibility at Springhill.

Interpreting these vignettes, there are several additional things to note. First, not once during my observations at Springhill did I see teachers praise children for being nice to each other (e.g., "you're such a good girl") or shame children when they were hurtful. Instead, teachers use dialogue to help work through conflicts. As described in Noddings (2005, p. 23), dialogue is "a common search for understanding, empathy, or appreciation. It can be playful or serious, logical or imaginative, goal or process oriented, but it is always a genuine quest for something undetermined at the beginning." Further, dialogue "connects us together and helps us to maintain caring relations."

Second, regarding the Lila and Kate story, while it is true that these girls had lots of conflict at school, their teachers never separated them into different groups or projects as a behavior-management strategy. Instead, the teachers validated the girls' desire to be together and focused on supporting the process of building their friendships. Sophie seems to understand that being in caring relationships with others takes lots of practice.

Third, teachers do not aim simply to prevent conflict between the children, but rather they see conflict as an opportunity to develop social skills and creative problem-solving. As Noddings explains, problem solving "is preceded by a moment of receptivity—one in which the full humanity of both parties is recognized—and it is followed by a return to the human other in all his or her fullness" (p. 24).

Fourth, it is important to note that Sophie seems to be very aware that the girls are at an important stage in figuring out the boundaries of friendship and she seems to intentionally stay in close proximity ready to step in and support when needed, but also giving them space and freedom to work things out independently as much as they can.

Relationship-Based versus Behavior-Based School Cultures

In contrast to more behavior-based approaches, Springhill's relationship-based school culture suggests an alternative possibility for working with children with challenging behaviors. In the previous vignettes with Lila, Grace, and Kate, the important point is that teachers do not give up on the children who are working through conflict. Instead, they act upon the assumption that children have a powerful desire to connect with one another, and, when provided sufficient support and time, they are able to resolve their social issues.

As discussed in chapter 2, several researchers have shown the critical importance of developing a school based on responsive, nurturing care rather than discipline-based behavior management (i.e., Carlson, 2006; Siegel, 1999; Shonkoff, et al., 2004; Kohn 1990 & 1996; Noddings, 2005). Yet, throughout my career in various school settings, I have observed discipline-based behavior management as the predominant method used. Conceivably, there are a variety of factors that contribute to teachers focusing on *behavior-based* rather than *relationship-based* practice: a deficiency in appropriate role models and mentors, conflicting mandated school rules and regulations, lack of time within a rigid schedule, too high student/teacher ratios, childhood experiences that create a different philosophical belief system, a prescribed curriculum that doesn't allow for relationship-based practice, and an absence of leadership committed to such practices.[128]

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[128] Gerhardt (2004) explains in "Why Love Matters: How Affection Shapes a Baby's Brain," that children need consistent trusting and responsive connections and interactions in order to develop as emotionally and socially healthy human beings. Repeated experiences of caring, attuned adults, helping children process strong feelings and dealing with conflict in appropriate ways supports the hard-wiring and pattern structures in the prefrontal cortex of the brain, a necessity for well-functioning human beings. Yet, when reactions towards children are consistently punitive, inconsistent, and non-responsive, the healthy pattern structures will be disrupted and children are more likely to struggle with

Personal reflections: The prevalence of behavior-based perspectives. In my previous experience in a variety of school settings, I rarely observed teachers move beyond the surface level of conflict; but rather, teachers seem to primarily focus on the children's outward "misbehaviors." Merely controlling children's behaviors with rewards (e.g., praise, goodies) and punishments (e.g., reprimands, loss of privileges, time-out, shaming) seems to be the default mechanism for many teachers and administrators.[129]

For example, as director of a preschool, I had parents of a 2-year-old girl, Samantha, request that her daughter be moved into a different classroom because of conflict she was having with another 2-year-old in her class. To help make an informed decision, I spent several days observing the two girls. What I documented was that the two little girls, in fact, had a very rich relationship and were virtually inseparable as they played with each other throughout the day. Inevitably, the girls sometimes would get angry with each other and, in the ensuing conflict, one of the children would get bitten by the other. Both of the teachers, agreeing with the parents, supported the idea of separating these two girls into different classrooms and thought it would help make "managing their classroom" easier.

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self-regulation and impulse control. Presumably, this results in the kind of situations where teachers feel "behaviors" need to be "managed."

[129] There seems to be an ever-growing cultural acceptance in the U.S. of behavior-based practices, which, arguably, are counter to research findings on best practices (see chapters 1 and 2 for further discussion). Considering the current media discourse on bullying (with a push for harsher penalties) and the increasing pressure for school programs to use behavior-based approaches to control children (e.g., federal mandates, incentive programs, private and publicly-funded schools, such as the "School of Shock," Gonnerman, 2007, that punishes children with autism and children with intellectual disabilities with painful electric shocks), it seems that a more democratic, relationship-based counterbalance is needed.

As a school director and early childhood education trainer, I found this approach among teachers to be the default way of dealing with similar types of situations in the classroom. Of course, for many toddlers, the first impulse in times of frustration is to bite; as a result, the more intense a friendship between two toddlers, the greater the likelihood of biting. Understandably, seeing your child come home with bite marks can be emotionally difficult. And teachers have many other issues to take care of in their classroom. But what if, instead, teachers choose to stick by children, such as these two girls, trusting that they could be helped to eventually work out their conflict in healthier ways? What might their friendship have become? What message does it send to the children to merely separate them?

Later when I resigned as school director to finish my doctoral studies, my replacement implemented a new policy for handling discipline issues. The policy was, if a child repeatedly "misbehaved," the parents would have to pick up their child from school and sign a contract that if the child misbehaved on two more occasions, that child would be expelled from the school.

Springhill's relationship-based culture: a director's perspective. For the purposes of contrast, consider the response I received from Mary, Springhill's Director of Early Childhood Education, when I asked her to talk about classroom and behavior management at Springhill (personal communication, November 17, 2009, lines 257-303):

"[W]e talk a lot about developing social responsibility. And so, it's really a process of helping children find a way of being in the world. We theoretically believe that children are good, that they want to be a part of the milieu without harming or hurting anyone. That they want to be a vital part of what's going on

and that they have trouble figuring it out sometimes. But that often their intentions just to be a part of it go awry, so that you see really young children grabbing a big kid as they go by, or hitting at them with a stick. And having this perspective, we can say, "Are you trying to play with Jack? Are you trying to ask him to play?" and, usually, the answer is, "Yeah. I mean that's what I'm trying to do." So we try to anticipate what might happen. But, we also project for children and kind of guess and give them the benefit of the doubt. So it all stems from that place where we believe that children have their ideas about being in the world and that at the heart of it, they're good and that they are-- that they have good intentions. And so, we try to support them in that way. So there are a lot of strategies that we use. We-- one of the major things you'll hear us talk about is inviting children to do things and we gesture to kind of include children and direct them. We don't try to-- I mean we may try to redirect, but we-- at the basis of it, we try to help them figure out how to learn to use language or learn to use signs or learn to use your body language and-- or any other part of the environment to communicate what they really want to communicate. And so, it's a process of learning how to communicate and we realize-- we feel like that's job one for us. *That's really the major reason that we're there, is to help them develop a relationship*. And so, we work at that. I mean, that undergirds everything that we do and we really feel like the learning that they do there is primary and that every opportunity that they provide us, we try to make use of. You know if they're grabbing or if they're-- you know, it's just an opportunity. *We don't see it as a problem, we see it as an opportunity.* And *we see it in their terms* as a problem

that we try to help them solve. And sometimes we help them-- I mean we let them feel how big that problem is. That's one of those phrases that we got from Reggio, is that teachers try to help to let the child feel how big their problem is, not by way of having anybody get hurt but just letting them see how much of it they can manage themselves. We intervene quickly if anybody is-- try to anticipate and intervene if we see something that is about to be harmful or hurtful and we consider words as hurtful as anything else, too. So, but we try to read the intentions and that works.

As exemplified in both Mary's words and the following vignettes, Springhill's philosophy and practice of relationship-based education seem to be closely intertwined throughout the school community.

The Intentional Process of Bringing Children Into the Social Life of the Community: Zach's Story

As discussed previously in this chapter, research strongly suggests (Fosha, Siegel, Solomon, 2009; Kohn, 1990) that people are genetically predisposed to connect with their fellow human beings. And yet, as suggested by the examples above, it takes appropriate adult nurture and support to turn this basic predisposition into a concrete set of social skills for children. Considering the variations across children and circumstances, it is inevitable that some children (and adults) present special challenges and atypical behaviors that add yet another layer of complexity to the process of building positive social relationships. In this section of the chapter, I use the story of Zach, a 3-year-old boy in the Gardenia room, to highlight how Springhill community members support every individual's *unique* journey in making social connections, regardless of whatever

obstacles may present themselves along the way. I also highlight the effects this approach has on *all* participants in this social process of bringing children--who may not come equipped with shared expressive "languages"[130] and abilities--into the life of the community.

While Zach faces several challenges in developing positive social experiences at Springhill, the teachers are committed to an intentional, ongoing process of helping to bring him into the social community of the classroom. Throughout the year, Zach showed difficulty with transitions, preferring to stay inside and draw for most of the day. He oftentimes pushed his head and body into other children's bodies, usually following a revving-up type of noise that he liked to make (almost like the sound of a car or train engine). Several times I observed Zach poking or pushing children, with no readily apparent reason and seemingly unprovoked. He did not regularly display the "typical" behaviors exhibited by 3-year-olds, such as frequently engaging other children in play, making eye contact, or seeking nurturance from adults. During my observations in the beginning of the school year, I watched Zach spend the majority of his school day repetitively drawing pictures of his favorite characters (trains) from the "Thomas and Friends" children's TV series.[131] When asked about his drawings, he tended to get stuck retelling the same script over and over again.

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[130] I use the term "languages" as described in chapter two. The expression "100 languages of children" (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1998) developed by Loris Malaguzzi refers to the idea that children are equipped with a virtually unlimited number of different expressive, communicative, and cognitive modalities, and that any truly emancipatory learning context should provide a space for these modalities to be explored.
[131] It may also be important to consider the influence that Thomas the Train has on Zach's thinking. According to research by Shauna Wilton, a professor of political sciences at the University of Alberta (as cited in Aislinn Laing, 2009), *Thomas the Tank Engine* "represents a conservative political ideology that punishes individual initiative,

Intentional teacher support. From the beginning of the year, I observed Gardenia room teachers intentionally work to engage Zach in a variety of social interactions, such as conversations, storytelling, play, and project work. Throughout the process, the teachers and children consistently treated Zach with respect, patience and compassion, regardless of some of the "challenging" behaviors he exhibited. Teachers were flexible and creative in their approaches to help Zach verbalize his feelings, express himself, and develop positive social relationships. Sometimes these efforts were successful and sometimes not. Gradually throughout the year, Zach seemed to show progress in making social connections and expressing himself in more constructive ways.

Stretching Zach's narratives. Sophie (the teacher) regularly initiated conversations with Zach around his train pictures, with the apparent strategy of helping Zach stretch his thinking beyond a repetitive retelling of the same television-generated stories. The following conversation from the early part of the year (October 21, 2009) is one such example (as previously discussed in chapter 4):

Sophie sits with Zach at the art table and asks him about the train pictures he's making. She asks him what's happening in his picture and connects it to the drawings he did yesterday. Sophie asks: "Is he going to go down the sewer again?"

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opposes critique and change, and relegates females to supportive roles…Any change is seen as disrupting the natural order of things" (para. 11). During her analysis of 23 episodes, she found that out of the 49 characters featured in Thomas the Engine, only 8 out of 49 were female. In fact, the females that *were* featured were portrayed both more negatively and in more secondary roles compared to the male characters. As Wilton reminds us, "Eventually these children will attain full political citizenship, and the opinions and world outlook they develop now, partially influenced by shows like Thomas, are part of that process" (para. 16). [See chapter 10, for further discussion on gender stereotyping and influence of popular culture on children's thinking.]

Zach shows her, "Look, James is in the sewer. He's all grubby in the sewer. Look his funnel got bent and his whistle is hanging back."

Sophie asks, "So did it get broken? Poor, poor James! How's he going to get out of trouble?"

Zach: "I don't know." After a few moments pause, Zach adds: "His driver is going to spray water all over him."

Sophie asks, "To get him clean?" They discuss his picture for several more minutes until he heads to the snack table.

Sophie regularly engaged Zach in conversations about his drawings and used his work as a starting point to build his own narratives *and* make connections with other children and adults.

Storytelling as a shared social experience. Sophie also provided Zach with opportunities where his drawing and storytelling could become part of a shared social experience and not just an isolated activity, as described in the following example. One morning in the fall, (as discussed in chapter 4), several children invite me to hear their "Dance of the Pants" story. After the children have shared their stories, Sophie invites Zach and Duke to tell their versions of the "Dance of the Pants" story. Sophie seems to understand that Zach was not yet ready to initiate the telling of his story on his own, as the other children did, but, would, in fact, be able to share his story with a little scaffolding from her. Zach and Duke went on to tell their version of the dance of the pants story.

Shared community rituals: avenues for creating social connections. Sophie also uses child-created rituals to help bridge connections between Zach and the other

Gardenia room children. The following documentation that Sophie sent out to parents, entitled, "Chamomile Tea; Rituals and Relationships" (see Appendix H for the entire piece of documentation), serves as an example of her use of classroom rituals to support relationships in the classroom. As she explains in her documentation,

> Small rituals…play an important part in creating a community. Another ritual emerged during the phase-in period—towards the end of his first morning of school, Zach picked up two tiny pieces of pine bark mulch, he tapped them together and softly sand "ding, ding, ding." He was anticipating the ringing of the chimes, which indicate that it is time to return to our classroom for closing circle. During circle time we invited Zach to show his "chimes" to everyone. At our next circle two other children, in addition to Zach, announced that they had mulch chimes—the children retrieved miniscule pieces of mulch from their pockets and then tapped in rhythm as we sang the "Hello" song.
>
> We knew from the Forest Room teachers (the children's teachers from the previous year) that music had been an important part of both classrooms last year and so it was not entirely surprising that the children from those classrooms were using music as a way to connect with each other. However, children who did not attend our school last year were also producing mulch from their pockets. The mulch chimes had become an important way for the children in our classroom to create a common bond. Clearly, the desire to connect is apparent even from our very first encounters.

Understanding the children's desire to connect, Sophie uses the "mulch chimes" idea as a catalyst for creating a new shared classroom ritual, which enriches the experience of

social solidarity in the classroom community. By specifically offering an invitation to Zach to share his "chimes," Sophie has *created* a positive way for him to contribute to, and be part of, the social group, an opportunity which may have not been possible without this type of intentional teacher support.

Using individual strengths to foster social engagement. Springhill teachers work hard to understand each child's unique strengths and abilities, which they carefully support and make visible for the entire community to appreciate. One of Zach's particular strengths that he enjoys and excels at is his skill in writing numbers, letters, and words. Sophie and Jess are aware of these skills, and they encourage Zach to help other children as they develop their writing skills too. Not only does this strategy support the co-construction of knowledge in the classroom, but it also contributes to the creation of a classroom culture of mutual support and care.

Several times I observed Zach helping his classmates with writing tasks. For instance, in October (as previously mentioned in chapter 4), Zach helps Oscar sign-in to the classroom with the pastel crayons when Oscar doesn't want to touch them with his fingers. In that case, Zach needed just a little prompting from Sophie before agreeing to help Oscar. In another situation, Duke is drawing a picture for his mom but doesn't know how to write the word "mommy." Sophie once again solicits Zach's help, and Zach agrees to write the word "mommy" on a piece of paper for Duke to use as a reference.

In both of these cases, when Zach finishes helping, he immediately resumes his own drawing. However, in the next several examples, we see how Sophie continues to entice Zach away from his independent drawing and into a more sustained engagement with other children.

In early November, Walter and Zach are drawing with markers next to one another. Sophie is sitting with them. As Walter draws, he gets stuck, because he doesn't know how to draw the number "6." Sophie asks Zach to show Walter. Zach agrees and draws a "6" on Walter's paper, but there still isn't any verbal exchange, as both children go back to drawing their individual pictures.

Pointing to his picture, Walter says to Sophie: "This is the door and this is the house."

Working to bring Zach into the conversation, Sophie recalls a picture Zach drew earlier that morning and says to Walter: "Zach did a picture of the door of *his* house today too!"

Walter responds by holding up his picture in front of Zach and saying: "Look! Like you did."

Zach does not look up or respond. After a brief pause, Sophie gently taps Zach's arm and points to Walter's paper, which he is still holding up for Zach to see, and says: "Look, Walter drew a picture of the door of his house, just like you did in your first picture."

This time Zach looks briefly at Walter's picture but doesn't verbally respond. Then pointing to his own drawing he says: "Look, look, those are all the cars on the choo-choo train and there's the caboose." (Again, we see "Thomas and Friends" trains as a primary feature in his drawings.)

At this point Walter finishes his picture and leaves to put it in the work basket.

This vignette serves as another example of Springhill teachers using Zach's strengths as a bridge for helping him make successful connections with other children. In

this case, Zach's response to Sophie's invitation is perhaps lukewarm, but progress comes in small steps.

As the year moves forward, Zach seems to show more satisfaction in helping his classmates, an important part of his continuing social development in the classroom. For instance, one morning, Sophie, Jess and several children are sitting at the large white art table making pictures.

Duke tries to remove the lid off the glue stick but is unable to. He holds out the glue stick in front of Jess and says, "I can't pull the top off!"

Jess replies: "That one again! It's really hard to get off. Can you help him with that glue?" [I believe Jess is directing the question to Sophie.]

Sophie gestures over to Zach: "Let's see…you could see if Zach could…"

Jess at the same time: "Oh. Zach might be able to get it off."

Sophie asks: "Zach, are you good at opening glue sticks?"

At this point, Duke hands the glue stick to Zach. Zach pulls the lid and after a few moments is able to get it off.

Jess: "It worked! It worked!"

Sophie: "He did it!"

Duke excitedly: "Zach helped!!"

Jess: "Yay Zach!"

Sophie suggests to Duke: "You could say, 'thanks Zach.'"

Duke turns to Zach: "Thanks Zach!"

Zach smiling but not looking up says: "You're welcome Duke." (This is one of the first signs of recognition from Zach that I observed where he really seemed to show satisfaction in helping another child.)

As the year progresses, Zach seems to be more responsive in these types of situations. In mid-November, I teach the class a song entitled, "Little Dolphin." Initially, I sing the song for Zach because at that point he is talking and drawing a lot of pictures about "Dolph," his stuffed dolphin from home. When the rest of the children hear me singing the song to Zach, they ask me to sing it several more times. Sophie then asks for a copy of the song's words, which I provide. When Sophie tells the children in circle that she now has a copy of the "Dolphin song," the children respond by asking for a copy for themselves. In fact, the next day, Oscar decides to make a "Dolphin Song" chart. His plan is to make a "yes" list of children that want a copy of the song, and a "no" list of children who do not want a copy. As he begins to work on his "yes" checklist, he has trouble remembering how to write some of the numbers. So Sophie invites Zach to help show Oscar how to write the different numbers on his list. Zach helps Oscar write the numbers but then quickly resumes drawing his stuffed animal picture.

With Oscar still facing the task of completing the dolphin song chart, Sophie again invites Zach to help Oscar make the "no" list. This time when she asks Zach, he doesn't verbally respond, but instead immediately jumps up to get a new piece of paper, and moves over to the seat next to Oscar. The two boys work side-by-side for several minutes, until Oscar shouts, "Raise your hand if you want a copy of the dolphin song!" Sophie then suggests that, instead of shouting, Oscar and Zach go around the room to ask their friends, which they proceed to do.

Once again, we see Sophie intentionally fostering Zach's social relationships, starting with his strengths (number and letter writing) and interests (love of stuffed animals and dolphins). Although many of these social connections were not sustained for long periods of time, they seem to help both his classmates develop a positive image of Zach and help Zach develop his social skills in an emotionally-safe way.

In the beginning of the year, teachers nearly always had to initiate Zach's experiences with helping other children. However, over time I observed several occasions where Zach independently helped his friends. For instance, one morning Zach and Abigail are sitting next to each other drawing. Abigail starts looking through the container of markers but can't find a pink one. So Zach, on his own, stops drawing his picture for a moment and helps her find a pink marker.

Collaborating around shared interests. As the school year progresses, Sophie and Jess continue to provide Zach opportunities for positive social experiences. For instance, in mid-November, Sophie takes advantage of Zach and Oscar's mutual interest in musical instruments, to build a connection between the two boys. Sophie begins by inviting the two boys over to the computer to watch a short video of a symphony orchestra playing classical music. As they watch the video, Sophie and the boys talk about the different instruments, and the soft and loud passages in the music. The discussion includes talk about Zach's stuffed animals becoming an orchestra, and a perusal of the encyclopedia to look at musical instruments. The turn in the conversation toward Zach's stuffed animals demonstrates again how Sophie uses her knowledge of Zach's interests as a bridge to bring him into the conversation and support a connection with Oscar.

Helping children verbalize their feelings and take appropriate actions.

Springhill teachers focus on children's strengths, and they work from a strong image of each child in the classroom. Yet, inevitably there are times when children engage in hurtful behaviors and teachers must address those issues directly. As Sophie explains in her interview, separating the *behavior* from the *person* is an important aspect of her approach in dealing with conflict resolution:

> I just think children need very, very clear limits, guidelines and you know sort of making them understand that you know separating...the behavior from the person. So, they're not a bad person, their behavior was not something that other people appreciated but they're not a bad person and just conveying that message I think is very important. (Interview transcription, November 3, 2009, lines 176-180)

She continues to describe her approach in handling conflict:

> I think…observing first and trying to sort of understand what the situation is and then trying to figure out what the conflict is and a way to get them to, I mean sometimes if there's emotion involved, it's really getting them to be able to relax so that they can you know properly because when they're flooded they can't think properly. So it's getting them to a point where they can pay attention to what's happened to the other person. So *slowing them down* and then getting them to *take another perspective* which is very hard at this age, you know, that's something that they're all really working on. And, also just trying to get to a point where both parties are satisfied with the outcome, sort of making harmony out of disharmony. (Lines 187-195, italicized emphasis mine)

Returning to the example of Zach, whenever Zach pokes, head-butts, or launches his body into other children, Sophie works to help him develop appropriate ways to express his feelings, communicate effectively, and negotiate conflict in ways that prevent his alienation from the community. She also aims to slow down the process, so that each child is able to take on the perspectives of the other children involved and find some resolution to the conflict. An example of this process is described below.

Prior to snack time one morning, Zach brings over a stack of drawings to show Sophie, with several blank sheets of paper mixed in with the drawings. When she is finished looking at Zach's work, Sophie asks Zach to return the unused sheets of paper to the art shelf. As Zach walks to the art shelf, he passes by Ethan and, without discernible provocation, pokes Ethan with his finger.

Ethan shouts: "Stop Zach!"

Sophie comes over and whispers: "He's asking you to stop Zach. So I need you to stop and check-in with him." ("Checking-in" is a classroom ritual that the children practice and understand well.)

As Sophie gently holds Zach and prevents him from leaving the area, Zach tries to push his body against Sophie in an attempt to exit the situation. After about 10 seconds, Zach stops pushing Sophie and walks back over to Ethan. Zach asks: "Are you okay Ethan?" Ethan does a slight nod of the head yes.

Zach then turns to Sophie and says: "He said he's okay, so I'm going to go and wash my hands and have snack."

But Ethan interjects: "But, but when he does that every [time], I don't want him to do that every day to me, I don't want him to do that to me."

Zach doesn't respond. Sophie says to Zach: "He doesn't want you to do that to him every day." Zach still doesn't respond.

With a brief pause, Sophie asks Zach, "Are you wanting to play with Ethan?" (Sophie attempting to help Zach verbalize possible motivations behind his behavior.)

Zach: "No."

Sophie continues to try and figure out why Zach felt motivated to poke Ethan, but Zach responds: "I just am."

Once Ethan expresses that he doesn't want Zach to poke him "every day," he seems satisfied and returns to his art project.

It is hard to figure out what motivates some of Zach's behaviors. And often it doesn't seem as if Zach himself knows what compels him to act in anti-social ways. Did he poke Ethan to try and get his attention for play? Or, was Zach frustrated because Ethan was blocking his full access to the art shelf? Perhaps he was overwhelmed by too many people in his space. Or maybe he was angry with Sophie for asking him to return the sheets of the paper to the art shelf, and Ethan was just a convenient target for the expression of that anger. It is important to note that Sophie begins her conversation with Zach (e.g., "Are you wanting to play with Ethan?) by ascribing to his behavior "the best possible motive consonant with reality" (Noddings, 2005, p. 26).[132] This is the approach Springhill faculty consistently uses during conflict resolution with children in the

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[132] From an ethic of care perspective, Noddings (2005) points out that "because the carer…must know the cared-for well enough to be able to identify motives consonant with reality," (p. 26) the process requires significant trust and continuity between teacher and child. This relationship-based approach calls for teachers to remain connected with the child, as opposed to "standing in moral judgment" against them, offering a sharp contrast with traditionally hierarchical, behavior-based approaches. This process can be especially challenging with children such as Zach, who have difficulty verbally expressing their intentions and motivations.

classroom. (For further examples, see the "Closing Circle Conflict" and "Puzzle Negotiations" vignettes, described earlier in this chapter.)

Aside from the question of getting closer to understanding Zach's true motivations, it is important to point out that children's conflicts often do not get resolved in neat, easy, and clear-cut ways. Notice though that the "check-in" policy Sophie uses with Zach (and all Gardenia Room children) offers three valuable opportunities for the children involved: 1) Ethan gets practice in expressing his feelings; 2) Zach is helped to see the situation from another child's perspective; and 3) both children benefit from the clear message that, in the Gardenia Room, children are expected to care for their fellow classmates.

Providing individualized support during play. As the year progresses, Zach begins to have more sustained engagement in play, both one-on-one with teachers and with other children in small groups. As mentioned earlier, the resource teacher, Nicole spends several hours each week with individual classrooms. Understanding Zach's need for extra social support, Sophie, Jess and Nicole decide that part of Nicole's time in the classroom will be used to free up one of them to give Zach teacher-facilitated "floortime." *Floortime* (The Interdisciplinary Council on Developmental and Learning Disorders, n.d.) has been defined as "a specific technique to both follow the child's natural emotional interests (lead) and at the same time challenge the child towards greater and greater mastery of the social, emotional and intellectual capacities" (para. 5).

The following examples highlight Sophie's instrumental role in the process of following children's lead and supporting sustained play:

In mid-December, Sophie sits with Zach at the two-person table, which is set-up with play-dough. She is working one-on-one with Zach and following his lead in play. Zach makes Sophie "french fries" and a "hamburger." While Sophie pretends to eat the play-dough foods, Ethan comes over with several "restaurant menus" that he and Larry have created using markers on construction paper. Inviting Zach and Sophie into their play scenario, Ethan tries to hand a menu to Zach. Without looking up at Ethan, Zach continues to sculpt his play-dough and does not take the menu.

A brief moment later, Ethan, points to the scribbles on his menu, looks at Sophie and says: "This says Zach." Zach hears this and looks up at Ethan but still doesn't verbally respond.

Sophie: "It says, 'Zach? Hmmm."

Ethan says, "yes" and again tries to give the menu to Zach, holding it out towards Zach and asking what he would like to order. Zach responds "nothing," still not looking at Ethan or taking the menu. Ethan continues to hold it near Zach, inching it closer to his face. This time Sophie takes the menu (perhaps anticipating an angry reaction from Zach) and, smiling at Ethan, suggests, "How about we put it right here to look at?" She then places the menu on the table, next to Zach, but positioned so as to allow him plenty of space to continue using his play-dough. This way, Zach is still included in the restaurant play, and both Ethan and Zach seem satisfied with this solution. Then Ethan hands Sophie her menu: "This says 'Sophie.'"

Sophie: "Oh that must be mine! Thank you." She takes it.

Larry comes over and says, "Well, this is your ice cream," and hands her some pretend ice cream. Then, he takes her menu and heads back towards the play kitchen.

Ethan stops him and says: "That says Sophie!"

Sophie: So do I need to have that over here?

Larry says, "yeah" and brings the menu back over and says, "This is your…that says, 'Sophie's menu.'"

Ethan and Larry proceed to take her order. Ethan asks: "What do you want today?" Sophie asks if they have any soup. Ethan says "yes." She asks Ethan what kind and he says "we have chicken soup." She asks him if they have vegetable soup and he says "Yes. We have chicken soup and vegetable soup."

Sophie responds: "I would like vegetable soup."

As Larry and Ethan prepare the food, Sophie says to Zach: "They have chicken and vegetable soup."

They bring her food and she "pays" for it. Sophie then prompts Ethan and Larry further with questions and makes requests as the restaurant patron, extending their play scenario. At this point, Zach isn't too involved in the restaurant play, but seems to be listening. Then, during their play, after Ethan and Larry bring Sophie her soup, Zach comments: "This is fun."

Sophie, making sure that Ethan and Larry know what Zach said, shares: "Hey Ethan and Larry, Zach just said, 'This is fun.' We're having a good time at this restaurant."

Larry decides he wants to switch roles with Sophie. So, Larry sits in Sophie's chair, across from Zach, at "the restaurant," and Sophie, following their lead, gets a clipboard and pretends to be the waitress. She takes their orders.

Larry tells Sophie that he would like "peanut butter and jelly, Pirate soup, pirate noodles, and mouse ice cream."

Sophie, in feigned bewilderment, turns to Zach and asks: "Mouse ice cream. Have you ever had mouse ice cream?"

Zach: "No."

Larry in a silly voice: "You can't get beer or sprite at this restaurant."

Ethan with a piece of silky fabric covering his body starts to crawl under the table where Larry is seated.

Sophie with pretend concern: "We don't want any ghosts scaring the customers away because then they may not eat their food."

Larry: "and then they might…This ghost is grabbing my feet. Ahhh!"

Sophie: "Ghost, ghost, you have to come out."

Larry laughing: "It's Ethan! It's Ethan!"

Sophie: "I've never been to a restaurant that has ghost." And then, bringing Zach into the conversation again, asks him, "Have you ever been to a restaurant that has ghosts?"

Zach: "Nooo."

Sophie and Zach laugh together.

Sophie: "Okay, so that's going to be Larry's order."

Larry to Zach: "What's your order?"

This time Zach responds: "Mouse ice cream. Bah-ru-la."

Sophie repeats: "Mouse ice cream, bah-ru-la."

Zach laughing: "Yeah."

Sophie starts to write his order down and says: "A special sundae, bah-ru-la."

Zach: "Yeah."

Sophie asks Ethan: "Have you ever had mouse ice cream?"

Ethan: "Huh?"

Zach starts laughing.

Sophie laughing: "I think this is the silliest restaurant I've ever been to."

Larry: "No. This restaurant is not silly."

Sophie following Larry's lead: "It's not silly. Okay."

Larry explains: "Mouse ice cream is not a *real* mouse. It's *pretend* mouse ice cream and you can eat it."

Sophie: "Okay. And the bu-ru-lah."

Larry: "yeah."

Sophie turning to Zach: "Anything else?"

Zach does not respond (focusing back on his play dough) and Sophie repeats the question: "Anything else for your order?"

Larry, also waiting for Zach to respond, says to him: "You [we] have noodles."

Zach does not respond, and continues to hum and play with his play-dough.

Sophie gently puts her hand on Zach's back to get his attention: "Do you think you might like noodles?"

Zach still looking at his play-dough answers: "No."

Larry to Zach: "Is that all?"

Zach glances at Larry but doesn't verbally respond.

Sophie adds: "Just ice cream?"

Zach continuing to look at his play-dough says: "Yeah."

Following Zach's response, Larry points to the pretend kitchen and informs Sophie: "Here's the kitchen."

Sophie stands up and heads over to the play kitchen to get their food: "I better go get it, it's a big order."

Sophie returns with each of the children's orders, passes them out, and gives them a pretend "present" along with their orders.

Sophie hands Larry some "noodles." Larry takes them, passes them to Zach, and says: "This is noodles for him."

Sophie: "Oh, I'm sorry."

Zach seems to be back to thinking about train engines. He comments: "A big ball crashed into the engine crashed."

Sophie repeats: "A big ball crashed into the engine?"

Zach holding up his play-dough responds: "Look how big the ball is."

Zach's comment seems to trigger Larry's memory of "asteroids" in "Star Wars" and he and Ethan start having a conversation about spaceships.

We see in this vignette how Sophie skillfully brings Zach into the restaurant play and scaffolds his sustained engagement by respectfully slipping her social invitations to him into her naturalistic interactions with the Larry and Ethan. In other words, *there is nothing in the way she engages Zach that gives away the fact that she is working hard to involve him*. As a result, the stakes for Zach and the other children are lowered, and Zach is free to engage or not, on his own terms.

Supporting Zach in group play. In mid-December, a group of children are working together preparing for train play. They've used hollow blocks to build the exterior of the train, put out chairs for the passenger seats, and made train tickets. Zach is attaching the "train" sign he made. As he tapes it on, Larry comes up to Zach and asks him: "Where are you going?

Zach doesn't respond, so Larry leans in a bit closer, puts his hand gently on his back, and repeats the question: "Where are you going Zach?" (This seems to mirror Sophie's approach that she often uses to help engage Zach. Perhaps, the gentle approach Sophie has modeled is now being adapted and used by the children.)

Zach without looking up says: "I don't know."

Larry gestures towards one of the "passenger seats" and says: "Well you can sit here Zach." Zach looks over to the chair but then continues taping his sign.

Larry, the train conductor, sits down on the first chair, with Ethan, Walter and Matthew sitting down with their tickets behind him.

At this point Zach heads to the other part of the classroom to return the tape to the art shelf.

Ethan and the other passengers prepare for the train to leave the station. Larry shouts: "Choo-choo."

Sophie, aware that Zach has not returned yet, and making sure to include him in the group play, says: "Wait. Wait. Stop you're missing one of your passengers." (Note here how Sophie makes sure Zach is included in the play, by seamlessly incorporating her request into their train scenario. Out of respect for the children, she avoids needlessly interrupting their play.)

As Zach returns, Sophie continues: "The last passenger is coming aboard."

By now all the seats are filled, so Zach brings a chair over to put at the back of the train. One of the children reminds Sophie to get on the train too. So she grabs a ticket and puts her chair on the train next to Zach's chair. (Note how Sophie intentionally stays in close proximity to Zach during this play.)

As the train starts leaving the station, Zach starts making a revving engine sound and moves his arms in circular motion like the wheels of a train.

Ethan hears this, turns around and shouts at Zach: "No. I don't like that Zach! I don't like that Zach!" (Ethan seems to recognize that this revving sound and motion that Zach is making often precipitates his pushing and head-butting behaviors.)

Sophie, in a calm voice, asks Ethan: "What don't you like?"

Ethan doesn't respond, so Sophie inquires further: "Is it the noise Ethan?"

He still doesn't say anything so she says: "I think it sounds a bit like a train noise."

Sophie to Zach: "Can you tell us what this noise is?"

Zach doesn't respond.

Sophie asks: "Is it the train wheel going around?"

Zach does a slight nod of the head and resumes making a circular motion with his hand (presumably to indicate "yes" that is what he is doing).

Matthew starts making this same train motion with his arms and answers "yes" aloud for Zach. (We see Zach able to incorporate his revving engine in an appropriate way, creating a new narrative for interactive play.)

Ethan's fears seem to be assuaged and he turns back around. As a group, they all begin to make train noises as the train "leaves the station."

The children start to discuss where they are going.

Walter: "I'm going to Copenhagen."

Ethan: "I'm going to school."

Walter adds: "I'm going to Copenhagen to pick up my daddy."

Sophie sits on the train next to Zach and asks him where he's going.

Zach says to Sophie: "I'm going to [CVS].

Larry asks Matthew where he's going.

Matthew: "To grandma's in the mountains."

They pretend to ride the train for several minutes.

At their first stop ("Copenhagen," to "drop off Walter") Zach facing Sophie, starts making chomping gestures with his arms. He's pretending to be a shark biting her, but without actual physical contact. Matthew joins in.

Sophie: "Well, I don't want the shark to eat the passengers."

Ethan: "That doesn't make sense."

Sophie: "Well guys, are sharks allowed on this train?" (Note how Sophie creates a shared decision-making process to decide whether or not sharks are appropriate for their train play.)

Ethan: "No."

Sophie: "No? Sharks are not allowed on the train because they may bite passengers."

Matthew (who has a keen interest in sharks) comments: "Sharks only eat meat pies."

Sophie: "Oh. Sharks only eat meat pies. What do you think about that? Could we have sharks that [eat meat pies] on the train?"

Matthew: "Yeah."

Ethan repeats: "That doesn't make sense."

Larry explains to Ethan: "They *have* to have meat sauce."

This explanation seems to satisfy Ethan and they resume riding the train. Ethan shouts: "Start the engines! We're going to Copenhagen." Walter picks up his daddy from Copenhagen.

They take the passengers to their various stops. At one point in the play, Ethan announces that he is "dead," so they take him to the hospital. They give him a shot. And he announces: "I'm okay!"

But then several other passengers die too, lying on the floor next to Ethan. With all these patients the hospital runs out of medicine and shots.

Sophie, connecting the children's play scenario with Zach's desire to go to CVS, says: "We've got to go to CVS and get more medicine!"

As they "ride in the train," Zach shouts several times: "Watch out for the boulders!" (A scenario he's picked up from the "Thomas and Friends" series.)

When the train stops, Larry walks over to Lila, who's playing in the pretend kitchen and asks her: "Can I please have some more medicine for the dead guys?"

Lila: "Okay" She hands him some pretend medicine.

A few moments later, Zach says: "Oh no! One of the passengers fell," as he intentionally "falls" out of his chair and lies on the floor next to the other "dead guys."

Sophie: "Oh no! One of the passengers fell. Help! Help." Sophie joins them in the hospital and covers them all up with blankets and the play continues for several more minutes with Zach successfully integrated into the group with Sophie's support.

It seems as though this train play could have evolved into an exclusion of, or conflict with, Zach. Instead, by having teacher support, this train play scenario developed into an inclusive, engaging and complex group activity.

Network of support. A common feature of non-democratic preschool environments is the professional isolation of teachers, where teachers in separate classrooms are unable to collaborate with other teachers in the school. By contrast, at Springhill I observed several examples of ways in which the entire faculty provided a network of support for both Zach and his classroom teachers. There seems to be a shared sense of responsibility among teachers for *all* children in the school, and not just the children assigned to their classroom.

For instance, on several occasions I observed teachers from other classrooms working to integrate Zach into play. One day, Gina (a Rainbow Room teacher) was sitting with children in one of the playground's sandboxes. Timmy and Ryan were playing in the sand building a "muck machine" that makes "muck." Zach was in the sand box too but he was making volcanoes and not interacting with other children. Gina worked on integrating Zach into Ryan and Timmy's play with the "muck machine."

In another example of teachers working together, one day Nicole was sitting with the Gardenia Room class during closing circle while the class sang the "My Friends are

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Your Friends" song. Sophie noticed Zach exhibiting some behaviors towards Kate that often precipitate a conflict. So, Sophie quickly moved over to Zach, putting him in her lap, and giving him a deep massage. In tandem with Sophie, and without necessitating any verbal communication, Nicole quickly assumed Sophie's previous spot in the circle, preventing any unnecessary disruption of circle activities. Springhill teachers often seem to be in concert with one another, offering support in subtle ways throughout the day.

Not only are teachers helped by their colleagues working directly with Zach, but they're also supported in "thinking together" about classroom issues during daily informal discussions with their co-teachers, pod meetings, and weekly faculty meetings. Teachers are not expected to figure out problems by themselves.[133]

During one faculty meeting in Fall 2009, Sophie shared video clips of children's work related to the "Dance of the Pants" project. After Sophie shows a video of the children playing a xylophone to accompany the telling of their Dance of the Pants story, one teacher comments that Zach "seemed to be observing other children first with a flat affect but then seemed to wake up while he was performing." In response to this observation, Sophie explains that, on the first day the class did this activity, Zach wasn't interested in participating. But on the second day, after putting his entire body on the xylophone to indicate his desire to play it, Zach goes on to create a story about his friends Nathan [a child from the Rainbow Room who is also his neighbor] and Adam [a

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[133] As discussed in chapter 2, unlike traditional child care centers, where planning is typically an isolated event that happens at most once a week, in a democratic early care and education environment, teachers are continually involved in collaborative planning with their co-teacher (as well as with children, parents, and administrators as much as possible). As research suggests (Achinstein & Athanases, 2006; Mullen, 2005; Portner, 2005), creating this type of democratic, participatory and collaborative framework, with multiple layers of support, reduces stress and increases the contentment and retention of teachers.

Magnolia room child]. At that point in the faculty meeting, one of the Magnolia room teachers suggests "maybe one child could play and another child could dictate a story," or maybe they could "do [the xylophone activity] with a multi-age group" to help bridge connections for Zach and other children. Clearly, the entire faculty supports and recognizes the importance of relationship work.

On November 9, 2009, during another faculty meeting, Sophie shares a few examples of Zach's difficulty with transitions, so that the rest of the faculty will be aware of issues that may come up when they encounter Zach in the common spaces of the school. In the ensuing discussion, different child-centered strategies are proposed to help prevent problematic situations from escalating. What stands out in such discussions is the faculty's agreement that no teacher should be expected to meet the needs of a child with social challenges alone, and that it is the responsibility of the entire teaching and administrative staff to support teachers who have difficult situations in their classrooms.

A significant part of Springhill faculty meetings are dedicated to discussing and sharing ongoing classroom work and participating in collaborative inquiries around these relevant topics. In May 2010, during one faculty meeting, the specific topic of inquiry was centered on the value of small group work. In their discussion, Sophie shares a story about a small group experience that was created around Zach's interest in "Dead Kitty" play:

Nicole (the resource teacher): "Zach's group was playing this kitty game. That came from *him*, right?"

Sophie: "Yeah. Yeah, and at first, it was just Zach, and two other children, that I thought would work pretty well with him. And, it tended to be…the same script over and

over. And we would try and add to it [the script] and sort of push things a little bit. And… my hope was that he would bring that play into the classroom…because he wasn't really participating in the classroom. And he didn't [participate] for a very long time and he would, we would do the dead kitty play, and then we would go back into the classroom, and he would go straight back to the table and draw and just shut everyone out. And then, about six weeks ago, he really wanted to do the dead kitty play and it was the week that Nicole hadn't been able to be with us, and so he suggested that we did the dead kitty play in the classroom, and we did that, and *lots* of other children who had never seen it, then wanted to join in. So…it was a *bridge* for him…to be part of the group."

This is a powerful illustration of how a small group is authentically formed around a child's interest. And, by starting with Zach's interests, Sophie is also able to move her goal forward (her goal of connecting Zach to other children and expanding his play scripts).

Transition from intentional small group play to independently initiated play. The kitty play started sometime in April in my absence. However, on May 26, 2009 as described in the following exchange, we see how the kitty play continues. Outside, Zach pretends to be a cat along with Jess and Grace. They are all sitting in a little "kitty house" they created out of 3 foot-tall plastic building pieces. As they make meowing noises and pretend to lick their paws, Lila and Kate come over to see what they're doing.

Zach explains: "We made a kitty house."

Then after a brief pause adds, "You guys may come in if you're a kitty."

Kate and Grace decline the offer (they explain that they are "a butterfly" and "unicorn" respectively). This was the first time I witnessed Zach invite other children into play. This may seem like a small step; however for Zack it seems to be a significant moment in his developing social life.

Bridging Zach's drawing and storytelling to social play. Taking clues from Zach's drawings and conversations, Sophie recognizes the significant value that Zach's stuffed animals have for him and the possibilities they offer for his imaginative thinking. With this knowledge, she helps Zach construct play scenarios with small groups of children, around the stuffed animal characters. In the following vignette, Zach is drawing his stuffed animal Tubby. As the conversation unfolds, we see a glimpse of how Zach's stuffed animals have become part of a shared, meaningful experience within the classroom community.

Zach is drawing a picture and tells me that it is of "Tubby." As he shows me his drawing, a conversation develops:

Amy: "Is Tubby from a cartoon? I don't know Tubby?"

Zach: "Tubby's one of my stuffed animals."

Duke also looking at Zach's drawing clarifies: "Actually his *mom's* stuffed animals." (Note how well children know about each other's lives.)

Zach: "and they're both brothers. Tubby and Arfie. Arfie has a skateboard, and he's one of my stuffed animals too. Actually Tubby's one of my mommy's bears, but I can still play with it."

Amy: "She lets you play with it? Awww."

Duke: "My dad has, has…my mom has her own stuffed animals, dog stuffed animals."

Amy: "Oh. Do they have names?"

Duke: "Yeah. They have names. Yeah and they're from when she was little."

Amy: "Oh, she kept them all this time?"

Duke: "Yeah. And I have different dog stuffed animals. I named mine after real dogs."

Amy: "Oh. You did? What are some of their names?"

Duke: "Actually, the three ones I have are Vinny, Diesel, and Max."

Amy: "Oh. And do your stuffed animals play with Zach's stuffed animals sometimes?"

Duke: "Actually, Zach plays he's one of his stuffed animals and I play one of my stuffed animals. I'm 'Scat' and Zach plays he's 'Arfie.' Arfie's a dog. And Scat's a cat."

Amy: "and so you pretend to be Scat the cat and Zach pretends to be Arfie the dog?"

Duke: "Un-huh.

Matthew from the snack table overhears our conversation and says: "And Amy, Amy, and I'm Tubby."

Amy: "Oh so you pretend to be Tubby?"

Matthew: "I'm Tubby."

Amy: "Oh so you pretend to be Tubby."

Matthew: "Uh-huh. Tubby the bear."

Sophie and the teachers understand Zach's affinity for stuffed animals and drawing, and use these interests, as well as others, to help support and extend Zach's social and play experiences with friends.

I observe several occasions where Sophie helps initiate "Arfie" and "Scat" play and invites him to play with "Scat" (Duke). By the end of the year, I observed Zach begin to initiate some of the play.

On May 10, outside on the playground Zach pretends to be "Arfie." He explains with excitement: "This is a café. I'm Arfie. And I also like eating with my friend Scat." Zach shows his "dog bone" and bowl of sauce [a handful of pine needles and mulch]." He pretends to eat, looks at me and says, "Ummm. That's good!"

Evelyn hears Zach talking with me and tells him she wants some food. Zach responds: "Okay, you can have some of my food. I'll give you some spaghetti and some bone. Here." He hands over some "food," a handful of mulch and pine needles.

Zach is sitting on a plastic pipe shaped in a large circle (about 20 feet wide). Evelyn asks me to help her balance on the pipe as she walks around the circle. I take her hand and she starts to walk. As Evelyn moves further away from Zach, he says to her: "I'll give you some more when you come around here. Goodbye."

When she arrives back around the circle, Zach says to her: "Here's some spaghetti and a bone!"

Evelyn takes it and pretends to eat it.

Then Zach gives me some pretend food: "Here's some spaghetti for you. And try a bone it has a little stick on it."

I pretend to eat it and say: "Delicious! Thank you!"

Evelyn asks me to hold her hand while she balances on a piece of pipe on the playground. "Can you hold my hand again Amy? You're hand must be worn out. You can use the other hand if you'd like." (Note Evelyn's ability to take on others perspectives--considering my feelings of being "worn out," and coming up with a solution. This is just another example of how children develop empathy in a community of care.)

Amy: Okay.

Evelyn: Thanks.

Working out the challenge of friendships through drawing and storytelling.
It's May 25, 2010 and Zach and several other children are in the studio working on various projects: Fiona's creating a decorative "birthday box;" Jamie is trying to figure out how to attach together pieces of his "robot' made out of cut-out cardboard pieces; and Zach is using a marker to draw a picture of "Arfie [a dog], Scat [a cat], and Tubby [a teddy bear]." Over the last few weeks he and his friends have been pretending to be these characters, with Zach always pretending to be "Arfie" and Duke pretending to be Scat. For his drawing, Zach is using special paper Alice has provided. The top half of the paper is blank for illustrations and the bottom half is lined for writing words. Several minutes prior, Zach had pushed several children on the playground and was redirected into the studio.

I sit down next to Zach and watch him work. He's finished drawing his picture on the blank, top-half of his paper and is now writing corresponding words on the first line, sounding them out as he phonetically writes them. He reads the words he's written

so far: "Tubby and Arfie are vacuuming." After reading this first part aloud, he adds the words, "the floor."

Zach glances over at me and explains: "It says, 'Tubby and Arfie are vacuuming the floor.'" He then looks at me for recognition and quickly adds: "You can take a picture." (Zach oftentimes does not want anyone to take photographs of him or his work. Throughout the year, he has slowly become more comfortable with being photographed and now, when he's done something that he seems to be especially proud of, he'll tell me that I can take a picture of his work.)

I respond, "Okay, thank you," and take a picture.

Zach re-reads the line over again.

Alice pointing to the blank second line on his paper asks Zach: "What can you do on this line for the next part of the story?" (Zach sometimes gets stuck retelling the same story over and over. I believe Alice is using questions to stretch his storyline.)

Zach doesn't respond.

So Alice points to part of his picture and asks him: "Is this the lawn mower?"

Zach: "No, no, no, it's the vacuum cleaner."

Alice pointing to another part of Zach's picture: "Is this a vacuum cleaner too?"

Zach: "That's Scat's [vacuum]."

Alice: "Is that Scat's, and they [meaning Scat and Arfie] each have their own vacuum cleaner?"

Zach: "Yes. Mine [referring to Arfie] has, mine has, mine has, mine has a little crack in it but that's all. So…" With this bit of prompting he adds a "crack" on "Arfie's" vacuum with his marker, presumably to distinguish his vacuum from Scat's.

Zach re-reads his sentence aloud to himself, "Tubby and Arfie are vacuuming the floor."

Alice points to all the blank lines on his paper and says: "Zach, did you know that this is called story paper because you can write a whole story down here and put the picture up here, and all these lines are for parts of the story. So I wonder if you have any more parts that you could put on?"

He doesn't verbally reply or show any nonverbal recognition such as eye contact, but seems to be absorbing what she's saying. He starts sounding out and writing letters on the second line of the story paper, saying aloud slowly, "Ar-fie… and…Tu-bby's…St-or-y." As he continues to write his story, he seems to tire from sounding out each word and transitions into scribbling pretend words instead of actually writing each letter. When he reaches the end of the line he rereads his work aloud, "Tubby and Arfie are best friends. And they are nice. So that's the story!"

He seems quite proud of what he's "written" and glances over at both Alice and I, so I ask him: "Could you read it to me Zach?"

Zach agrees: "Toby and Arfie went to the park. They're together. They swing on the swing and go on the slide and they're best friends."

I say: "Awww. That's fun."

He responds: "That *is* fun."

Amy: "I like that story."

Zach runs his finger across the 3rd line of the story paper and says: "I know. I'm gonna write *all this* story."

Amy: "Okay."

He continues to work on his story: "So. Tubby and Arfie love to play at the park because they're best friends and they *love* each other and everybody loves them. They're friends and they're brothers and sisters and going along and playing. They love to spend some time with everybody because they're best friends." (At this point I wonder if his story, in part, represents his desire to connect with other children, in particular on the playground where he has been pushing and having conflict with children. It seems like through the story he is working out the desired scenario that is so difficult for him to achieve during actual play with real children.)

An adult visitor in the room hears Zach tell me the story and asks: "What do they like to do together?"

Zach doesn't look up but responds, pointing to his drawing: "I'm going to do it up here."

Zach continues a few minutes later: "So Tubby and Arfie love to play at the park, They love to, they like to, they like to, they love to, because they're best friends, they love each other and they like to swing on the swings, and slide down the slides, and they like to build things out of pieces of wood."

Zach, with what seems like pride, asks me: "What do you think of that story?" (Earlier in the year, Zach would spend the majority of the time at school drawing pictures without seeking input or initiating conversations from others. Seeking my thoughts seems to be a significant leap from what I had observed earlier in the year.)

Amy: "I like it. I'm learning a lot about Tubby and Arf..."

Zach cuts in: "And Arfie and Tubby and Scat and Bobcat and Field Mouse and every creature that Scat likes. They're his friends."

Amy: "OH."

Zach: "They love to play at the park and each other, they like to hug each other and do anything they want, they like to do anything, they like to swing on the swing, they like to swing on the slide, and they like to go around and hide with wood."

Sophie walks into the studio to pick-up Zach for closing circle. He says to her: "I'm writing a nice story about Arfie."

Sophie responds: "and Tubby?" (Again, we see how Sophie pays attention and is attuned to each child's interests and uses their interests as sources of engagement.)

Zach: "yeah…and Scat and…" He finishes telling Sophie about his story and they head to the Gardenia room for circle.

In this previous vignette we see an example of how, within the safe confines of the studio, Zach uses drawing as an outlet to work out some of the challenges of making friends and his desire to connect with other children and as an outlet for him to express various ideas or feelings. By creating a story about "Arfie," a character role Zach often likes to play, he seems to be able to try out various scenarios of being best friends, playing, and hugging, that he isn't yet quite able to initiate with his Gardenia room friends.

For Zach, drawing stories seems to help him work through issues of play and friendship. He seems to express more easily his desire to make friendships through his stories and drawing, something he is not yet fully proficient at with real children in play scenarios.

Zach initiates silliness. In mid-May, one morning Zach sits at the manipulatives table and builds with different colored "bear blocks." Ethan is sitting next to Zach

making shapes with rubber bands on a nail board. When Zach is at a stopping point of building, I observe him make several attempts to gain Ethan's attention.

At first, Zach picks up a block from the basket and pulls his arm back, appearing as if his initial inclination is to throw it at Ethan. But instead, he takes the bear and starts banging his head with it, and says: "Look Ethan. Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!"

 Ethan's first reaction is to back away from Zach, seemingly nervous that Zach is going to try and hit him with the block. But, when he sees what Zach is doing he starts to smile at him. Zach starts to laugh.

Then, Zach starts banging the table, instead of his head, with the bear block and again says: "Ow! Ow! Ow! Ow!" He looks at Ethan (presumably waiting for a reaction from Ethan). Ethan glances over and smiles again, but quickly resumes his own work.

At this point, Evelyn walks up and leans over the table to take some bear blocks out of the basket, saying to Zach: "Can I have some of these?"

Zach says: "No!" as he throws them at her.

Although the reason is unclear, it seems Zach sometimes feels compelled to throw objects at his classmates. However, we see that Zach initially resists this temptation with Ethan and instead attempts to initiate a connection with Ethan using a more positive approach. This was the first time I observed Zach both, 1) self-regulate his compulsion to throw; and 2) initiate a silly exchange with another child. Later Evelyn's question seems to trigger his default mechanism to throw. This seems to suggest that progress is not linear. With Zach there seems to be several steps forward and some steps back. Not understanding Zach's history, this may appear as frustrating, "misbehavior," but in

considering the larger context (initiating silliness with Ethan), this is a leap forward in his social development.

Respectful, flexible and individualized teacher support. With an awareness and close attention to children's personalities, deep respect for children's feelings, and ability to see beyond the behaviors of a child, Springhill teachers find opportunities to make sure all children feel like valuable members of the classroom community. The examples described below highlight the ways in which teachers are creative, flexible, and respectful in their interactions with Zach.

For instance, Sophie seems to understand that Zach often has some sort of compulsion to push, especially on the playground. So she helps him "get his pushes out" on the brick wall outside. Sophie and Zach both push against the brick wall together as hard as they can. The activity is quite contagious and several other children join in the fun. Again, Sophie doesn't shame Zach for his need to push but tries to find outlets that are acceptable.

Zach's social conflicts often arise during closing circle time. So to help Zach stay focused and refrain from hurting others during circle, Sophie gives him a small amount of play-dough each day to manipulate during closing circle. One day, Zach uses his play-dough as a wind chime, and Sophie invites him to share his idea with the class. (The play-dough could have stigmatized Zach, yet instead served as a catalyst for the community to celebrate his creative invention.)

As discussed in previous chapters, photographing and documenting children's work is part of the daily life of the school. And for the most part children seem to appreciate having their work photographed. However, Zach, on certain occasions, does

not like having his picture taken. Aware and respectful of this, Sophie would regularly ask Zach, "May I take a picture?"

Jess is also respectful in her interactions. On one particular day (Nov. 10), Zach was drawing pictures of race cars. He calls over Jess and says, "Look at all the race cars."

He continues to tell her about his drawing. Jess listens and starts to write down his words on the paper.

Zach says to her: "I didn't want you to write that."

Jess right away apologizes and asks: "Okay do you want me to cross it out?"

Teachers are very sensitive and respectful towards children's different needs. For example, Nicole, aware of Zach's difficulty with transitions on the playground, often provided extra support to help him. I observed her, on several occasions, giving Zach a heads-up (e.g., "a two minute warning") that clean-up time was coming.

Within this model of respect, Springhill teachers seem to understand the importance of both: 1) building trust and following-through on commitments with children; and 2) allowing children the freedom to choose which interests they will pursue. The practices are evident in the following two examples.

Teachers build trust with Zach: The importance of respectful interactions and follow-through. Early in May, Sophie helps a group prepare to go outside on a "detective adventure" with clipboards, pens, paper and binoculars. The children are gathered outside the door ready to go, but Sophie knows that Zach wants to play Arfie and Scat with Duke on the playground. To support Zach and Duke's communications,

Sophie asks whether before they head out if Duke can let Zach know that he will play Scat and Arfie with him when the playground opens later that morning.

Sophie: Can you just tell him that you'll play with him when the playground is open?

Duke agrees and goes back in the classroom to let Zach know. He walks over to Zach who is sitting at the large round table. Duke gently puts his hand on Zach's back and says: "I'm going to play with you when the playground is open Zach." Duke looks at Zach and waits for a response.

Zach doesn't look up or respond. He continues to play with his rubber band.

Sophie joins them. Sophie: "Zach, Duke wants to tell you something."

Duke puts his hand on Zach's back again and says: "Um, um, I'm going to play with you when the playground is open."

Duke waits for a response. Zach still doesn't respond or look up.

Sophie: "Did you hear that Zach?"

Duke leans in even closer and says again: "Zach, I'm going to play with you when the playground is open."

Zach starts to push his head into Duke's body and says: "No you're not!"

Duke takes several steps back. Sophie says to Zach: "He'll play Arfie and Scat when the playground is open."

Zach glances up at Sophie and says: "It's time to play Arfie and Scat now."

Sophie responds in a gentle tone: "No, when the playground is open. That's when it will be time."

Zach: "It's time to play Arfie and Scat now!"

Sophie validates his feelings and explains again: "I know you would like to do that now, but it will be when the playground is open."

At around 10:30 a.m., Duke is finishing up work on his mouse x-ray drawing. Zach in the adjacent room is drawing and starting to make loud revving noises. Sophie notices that it is nearing the time when Nicole opens the playground and follows-up with their earlier conversation. She says to Duke, I'm wondering if we should check-in with Zach to see if he's ready to play Arfie and Scat. (Again, we see how Sophie takes Zach's earlier feeling seriously and makes sure to follow-through on her earlier assertions.)

Duke asks Sophie: "But is it outside time?"

Sophie looks at the clock and replies: "I'm looking at the clock and it looks like it's about time to go out."

Duke and Sophie head over to the other room and ask Zach about going to the playground.

Zach explains to Sophie and Duke that he is going to eat his snack and *then* go to the playground to play Arfie and Scat with Duke. Sophie agrees that this sounds like a great plan. After he finishes snack, he heads to the playground and plays with Duke.

Respecting individual rights: Allowing children freedom to choose participation in small group work. The following example, excerpted from my field notes, highlights the respectful interactions that teachers have with Zach:

Nicole is in the room and tells several children that they are in her small group going outside today (a group formation which the teachers have intentionally put together based on their observations of children). Zach is one of the children on the list but says he does not want to go outside. Instead, he wants to continue to work on his "Arfie"

pictures in the classroom. Although this was not the teachers' plan, Sophie and Nicole are flexible and respect Zach's desire to stay inside.

About a half hour later, Zach is still working on his "Arfie" pictures when Jess starts to gather a small group to go outside to work on their sun-prints. Zach, Kate, Lila, and Ethan are the remaining children that need to complete this project. When Jess asks Zach to join the group, he at first hesitates, but this time agrees to come along. Teachers were very respectful of Zach's feelings throughout the process: Sophie assures him that she'll have his work in safe-keeping while he's outside and will return it to him when he comes back to the classroom. Jess tells him that it doesn't take very long to complete the project. Zach does a nice job with the transition as they go out to the meadow to create their sun-prints. (In my field notes, I contemplated the following questions: Does it help that Zach was allowed to stay in earlier—does this make going outside later less of a power struggle issue? And build trust between him and the teachers? What would have happened if earlier in the day they *required* Zach to join the small group? Would he have been even more resistant to join the group?)

When they return, Sophie offers Zach his drawing paper but he decides to have snack instead. Oftentimes, children will forget or lose interest in something that was important to them just a short time before. Regardless, Sophie makes sure to follow-up with Zach, showing her deep respect for his feelings. From an adult's perspective, this act may seem quite insignificant, but it sends two powerful messages to children 1) that their ideas and feelings are valued, 2) that adults can be trusted.

This deep level of respect, acceptance, and care of Zach, consistently modeled by Springhill faculty throughout the year, sends a powerful message not only to Zach but to the rest of the class as well.[134]

Conflicts as opportunities. In turn, children accept Zach's unique behaviors and are able to develop effective strategies in dealing with his hurtful behaviors. Here are some examples of the ways Zach's classmates both support and respect him, *and* develop healthy coping strategies when he engages in hurtful behaviors.

In the latter part of May, while sitting in circle next to each other, Zach leans his body into Grace's body. Grace immediately scoots over and announces, "Tomorrow I'm going to write a note to Zach and it's gonna say, 'Zach please don't bump into me Zach."

Sophie hears this and clarifies, "You're going to write a note to Zach about bumping into you, because you don't want him to do that."

Zach hears this and responds: "I have to [bump into her.]" (Again, on certain occasions, Zach seems to have a compulsion to put his body onto others. It seems to be a dysfunctional strategy he uses to try and connect and/or communicate with other children.)

Sophie turns to Zach and in a calm and gentle voice says: "Grace was asking you not to bump into her."

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[134] The ways in which Springhill teachers model acceptance and care for Zach, helps shape, not only the way Zach sees himself, but also shapes the way his fellow classmates perceive and interact with him. In this type of caring approach (Noddings, 2005, p. 22), teachers "are not trying to teach students principles and ways of applying them to problems through chains of mathematical reasoning." Instead, teachers model "how to care in [their] own relations with cared-fors." In other words, Noddings (p. 22) explains, "we do not tell our students to care; we show them how to care by creating caring relations with them." Further, she explains, "the capacity to care may be dependent on adequate experience in being cared for" (p. 22).

Zach doesn't respond. After a few moments, Sophie asks, "Did you check-in with her?"[135]

Zach says, "Yeah." And the issue seems to be resolved. Considering the alternative approaches in handling this situation, waiting for teacher intervention, crying, retaliating, shaming, Grace finds a positive solution (or healthy coping strategy) from a skill set fostered by the Springhill teachers.

Grace and the other children are often the targets of Zach's physical aggression. However, the other children still accept Zach as a valuable member of the community, treating him with kindness and respect. They do not shy away from dealing with his hurtful behaviors, but instead make use of teacher support to come up with effective strategies for negotiating solutions to the conflicts they have with Zach.

On May 25, I start observing and videotaping Zach as he draws. He has drawn several pictures.

Zach: "Now Tubby's car is working."

Duke joins Zach at the table and says to me: "I think Zach is drawing his favorite stuffed animals."

Amy: "His favorite stuffed animals?"

Duke explains: "That's Tubby's car."

Amy: "Oh."

Duke: "Tubby still has, Tubby still has his tall Humvee."

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[135] Again, "checking-in" with each other, particularly in times of conflict, is a regularly practiced ritual developed at Springhill to make sure children are aware of each other's feelings as they resolve issues.

At this point, Duke seems to have said something that Zach doesn't like. Zach starts to head-butt Duke. (Again, this seems to be Zach's default strategy for expressing frustration, a strategy that seems to be easier for him than verbally communicating his sentiment.) Then Zach softly says, "no" and begins to reverse directions and pull back his head. (Perhaps, continuing his work towards self-regulation.) At the same time, Duke backs away, to prevent the physical contact. (It seems from Zach's perspective that Duke may have misinterpreted part of his drawing, bringing about his frustration. Perhaps, it was the fact that Duke didn't explain that Tubby's Humvee was broken.)

Amy: Tubby drives a Humvee?

Zach in a rapid pace explains: "Yeah. This *is* his Humvee. But, see look on the back [Zach points to another picture of a car he's drawn] See Arfie had to pull him with strings. Because, because it wasn't working. So, so, so, that's Arfie down there and now it's working. See the exhaust coming out of the exhaust pipes? That means it's working."

Amy: "Oh."

Zach: "See how the exhaust is not coming out of the exhaust pipes."

Amy: "Yeah."

Zach: "That says, 'Wee' and an exclamation point, 'cause Tubby's driving fast. Wee! Wee!"

Duke continues to look on as Zach draws until suddenly someone spots the Springhill Dragon outside their window, and they both hop up from the table to take a look.

Duke often watches Zach draw and knows many of the storylines that show up in Zach's work. Duke seems to understand that Zach doesn't always verbally explain his work, so he takes the initiative to help tell me about Zach's drawings.

Interestingly, Duke also volunteers to explain to me some of the sounds that Zach sometimes directs toward other members of the community. In late May, I was in the hallway outside the classroom door watching Helen [Orson's older sister] share her microscope and slides with Duke and Lila. We can hear Zach, who's inside the classroom, making loud grunting noises. Duke smiles and says to Helen and me: "That's my friend Zach. He's always making loud noises at people."

As Duke's poignant remark shows, even with all of his eccentricities and atypical behavior, Zach at no point is labeled or ostracized by his classmates, but instead, with the help of his teachers, is clearly an accepted part of the Springhill community.

"People really make the place," Sophie points out during a collaborative planning session with Jess, as they look at "paper dolls" created by Lila. Earlier that day, Lila wrote a note to go to the studio to draw "Jess" and "Sophie." In the studio, she discovers extra room on her paper and decides to add an "Amy," "Lila," "Kate," and "Zach doll" (with pants for the Kate and Zach doll of course!). When young children create people in their art, typically it is the significant people in their lives that they choose to represent (e.g., family members, teachers, and friends). Lila's choice to represent Zach in her work suggests how successfully the Springhill community has integrated Zach into the social and emotional life of the community. And both Lila's project and Sophie's comment (emphasizing the social dynamic of children's work) sends a strong message, that in this

relationship-based community, *all* members of the classroom community are valued and accepted.

So, how did the teachers and children create this culture of acceptance and care around a child who may have had a significantly different outcome in a less democratic school? First, the teachers created social opportunities for Zach based upon his strengths, and at the same time, made those strengths visible and valued throughout the entire Springhill community. Second, the teachers provided persistent but gentle encouragement for Zach to acknowledge the rights of his classmates, and to reciprocate when friendly overtures were made in his direction. Third, the teachers never shamed or ostracized Zach with behavior-based types of discipline. Instead they focused on what lay beneath the surface of Zach's behavior. Fourth, the teachers provided a warm and friendly presence in Zach's life, and were quick to show empathy and support whenever he encountered social difficulties. Fifth, the teachers showed flexibility in adapting to Zach's needs, and earned his trust by following through on promises made to him. Finally, Springhill's insistence upon respecting the rights of *all* children, regardless of special challenges, provides invaluable experience for the other children to develop their citizenship skills. In other words, without facing the challenges presented by Zach, the other children, quite possibly, would not have attained the level of perspective-taking, social problem-solving, and democratic tolerance that I encountered in the daily life at Springhill.

Conclusion

Through my interviews and field observations at Springhill, I discovered several commonalities in the teachers' belief systems and practices that seemed to play a central

role in the creation of a democratic space where social relationships prosper: One, the teachers seem to have a deep conviction that children are capable problem solvers. Two, teachers have an unwavering trust that children, with their support, will be able to handle tough situations with a satisfactory resolution for all individuals involved. Three, teachers have a deep respect for children as fellow human beings, including a respect for their feelings and ideas, no matter how incomprehensible they may seem from an adult perspective. Four, teachers value relationship-building as serious work and make it an integrated part of their curriculum work. Five, teachers believe that they must slow down the learning process in order for meaningful growth and development to occur. Six, teachers understand that opportunities to develop children's relationships often arise organically and cannot always be preplanned provocations, making relationship-building a dynamic and evolving process. Seven, teachers put attentive listening, observing, and reflecting at the forefront of their practice and use these inquiry-based methods as the starting point in scaffolding children's development. Eight, teachers understand that building relationships requires daily and repeated practice. Nine, the teachers at Springhill have a tremendous capacity and willingness to 'stay in the moment' (emotionally, as well as, physically) with children as they figure out how to negotiate the complex and challenging nature of relationships. This is true even when an unplanned opportunity for relationship-support requires unscheduled and/or large blocks of time. Ten, teachers understand that relationship work cannot be done in isolation, but must involve the whole community in the process (including other children, teachers and parents), to allow for successfully sustaining and deepening children's connections and social relationships.

CHAPTER 10

STEREOTYPES, STATUS QUO, GENDER DIFFERENTIATION: ACTIVE

PRODUCTION VERSUS PASSIVE CONSUMPTION

In this chapter, I highlight some of the ways that gender stereotyping, consumer

culture, and popular culture in United States society influence democratic preschool

communities. I also discuss the possibilities that may arise when community members

(e.g., at the Springhill school) intentionally address and challenge some of these

stereotypical assumptions, which inevitably seep into our individual identities *and*

community culture. Finally, I provide examples of how intentionality, dialogue,

narrative, and active participation within a safe, trusting, democratic environment can

foster the development of new, more nuanced, and shared understandings of these

complex and difficult concepts.

This chapter begins with a vignette and critical reflection from my own

experiences (and subjectivities) as a preschool teacher, which I use as a critical lens for

my data interpretation and analysis in the remainder of this chapter.

Autoethnographic[136] Reflections

I first started teaching in the 1990s at a high-quality preschool in Florida with a

group of three-year-olds. I was in my early twenties and just beginning my Master's

degree in Early Childhood Education (my bachelor's degree was in a different field).

After taking a job as a substitute teacher for just a few weeks, the director, in what I can

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[136] *Autoethnography* (Ellis, 2004, p. 37) "refers to writing about the personal and its relation to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness."

only imagine must have been a leap of faith, hired me to take over a class that had an

unexpected teacher vacancy. As I began getting to know my class of three-year-olds (8

boys and 2 girls), I discovered that one of their favorite activities was dramatic play. We

had an entire room at the school devoted to dress-up play and a closet full of dress up

clothes. There was one ballet tutu that a former parent had donated to the school that was

particularly loved by the children. The tutu was rainbow-colored, sparkly, and

lightweight enough to have a great twirling effect when spun just right. One late

afternoon at school, Nathan, one of the boys in my class, was happily dancing around the

room in this tutu when his father arrived to pick him up. Immediately upon seeing

Nathan in the tutu, his dad's face turned red with anger.   He marched over to Nathan,

yanked off the tutu and started scolding Nathan for wearing it. He followed up his

redress of Nathan by yelling at me for allowing his son to wear the tutu in the first place.

Nathan, not surprisingly, went from what seemed to be pure joy, to crying, and then to a

kind of flat facial affect. I can only imagine what stress hormones were coursing through

Nathan's body at that moment.[137] I was filled with anger and sadness too for the way that

Nathan's father had reacted to him. It seemed only natural to me that all the children

(girls and boys) loved wearing this colorful tutu and why shouldn't they? It didn't even

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[137] As described in *Science of Parenting*, Sunderland (2006) discusses the deleterious effects that repeated emotional distress has on the body. The brain reacts by sending high levels of the hormones cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine throughout the body affecting mood by "telling the heart to pump faster harder, the liver to release glucose, the fat stores to release fat, and muscles to mobilize energy stores...When strongly activated they make us feel angry or anxious or both" (p. 87). They create intense focus "on feeling[s] of threat, real or imagined, and our bodies move into a state of hyperarousal, activating all manner of lower brain fight impulses (aggression) or flight impulses (withdrawal and avoidance). Research shows that a child's early experiences of parenting are extremely influential in determining whether stress chemicals are strongly activated on a regular basis in later life" (p. 88). The more they are activated the more easily they are retriggered in the future (creating a hypersensitive stress response).

occur to me that some parents would think that only girls should wear the tutu or that it would provoke such an emotional and angry response.

As for myself, I was stunned and barely able to respond to Nathan's dad's attack. First, I tried to explain that *all* the children in my class wore that costume. [Again, I was a brand new teacher, and had never experienced such anger from a parent]. When that response failed to appease him, I tried to placate his father by explaining that young three-year-olds are just starting to discriminate sex differences and our culturally expected gender roles (something I had recalled reading in an "ages and stages" manual I had been given in my new teacher orientation packet several weeks prior).[138] Trying to sound professional, I went on to explain that children do not start differentiating gender roles until they are a little older. [I discovered later through observing and teaching children that this view is far too simplistic and that unfortunately development does not actually fall into neat and specific categories--See "Gender Categorization and Exclusion" section below.] Nathan and his father then abruptly left the classroom, and we did not discuss the incident any further.

Going forward, how did I handle this situation? From that day on, I continued to allow Nathan to wear the skirt during the day, but I quietly put it out of reach in the afternoons before pick up time. Later, Nathan started a distressing habit of banging his head on the floor when he was upset. At three years old, he was self-injurious when he was in conflict. Whether there was a direct connection between this behavior and the kind of parental control I witnessed on that afternoon, I don't know.[139] But in all likelihood, the tutu incident was just one example of how Nathan's feelings were not

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[138] Perhaps, this suggests one of the limitations of using developmental milestones, or "ages and stages" as the primary framework in which to think about young children.

validated by his parents, and how he was treated with shame and disgust when he was merely seeking pleasure and building his identity. I can only imagine what that style of parenting might mean for his mental health in the long run. Unfortunately, I never brought up the issue with the father again, never discussed it with Nathan, or sought advice from other teachers or my supervisor.

In retrospect, the question I want to ask is, why did I take such a half-way approach to this situation, an approach that accomplished very little? Approximately 15 years later I still remember this child and have feelings of guilt about not handling the situation better. Why didn't I go to my boss, the director of the school, and ask her advice or seek outside help or resources in this situation? Not only was she very supportive of me in general, but she also had a Ph.D. in multicultural education and doubtless would have validated my feelings and concern for Nathan. I regret not advocating for him more vociferously and wonder why, instead, I took a more *covertly* transgressive approach. And what about Nathan's father? Did he fear that Nathan would grow up to be gay if he wore this skirt? Why did seeing his son in the tutu provoke his anger? Why would something like a three year-old boy wearing a tutu evoke such an extreme emotional response from an adult? I recall several years ago, teaching in a toddler classroom, when one of my male students had on a dress-up skirt at pick up time, and his mother saying, "Luckily his father didn't pick him up."

I grew up in a fairly egalitarian home (my father is a self-described "feminist"), so why was it hard for me to be an agent for change? My conclusion is that, in part, it goes back to my experiences growing up. In our family, my two sisters and I always had the freedom to debate different issues and share our opinions and feelings on a range of

topics.   However, when we were outside of our home, the expectation was that we would be respectful and polite to those around us, especially adults. Thinking back on my experience, this is very much the behavior my parents modeled for us. Essentially, the message was you can share dissenting opinions in the home, but it is not polite to argue, be critical, or share your differing perspectives on issues with guests, elders, teachers, supervisors, or friends. Deference and decorum seemed to be the implicit goals.

I can think of several other situations in my youth when I failed to act as an agent of change. In middle school there were several boys who were targeted and quite brutally bullied. Brad, a boy who rode my bus, would regularly target someone, such as a boy named Justin, who also rode my bus, throw his books out the window, thump him on the head, and throw things at him. I wondered how Brad and his entourage could treat other kids as if they were not fellow human beings. Brad and the other "bullies" had many friends and were part of the "popular crowd." What I found bewildering was that he was perfectly affable, gregarious, and kind to my friends and me, all of whom were part of the accepted groups of kids. Once again, I never confronted Brad or his cronies about it. Instead, I realized that if I sat by Justin on the bus, then Brad wouldn't antagonize him.

So, once again, instead of trying to tackle the problem through open dialogue, I used an indirect way of handling the issue. I never confronted Brad or his friends. Rather, I just tried to prevent the bullying when I was around. My friends and I recognized that it was cruel, so why didn't we ever address it directly? I don't think we feared similar retribution, but perhaps we feared a rejection from the group? And, again in my family, we would sit around the dinner table and discuss how horrible it was, but the conversation never went to what can I do to *actively* change the situation? I think it

would have been considered butting into a situation that didn't involve me. I wonder now, if by talking to the bullies, who seemed to respect us, would anything have changed? Even if talking did not result in any change in Brad's thinking, at least I would have felt empowered and not complicit in his hurtful actions.

When the daily life of the Springhill Preschool is examined, it becomes evident what a difference it makes when children (*and* adults) are taught how to listen and talk with each other, confront hard situations directly as they arise, and actively solve conflicts without merely relying on the solutions provided by adults. Active participation and not passive acceptance seems to be essential in well-functioning democratic communities. Further, when a community is built with a foundation of trust, care, and respect for all individuals, it seems to prevent repression of feelings and explosions of anger. I wonder if perhaps Brad, like Nathan, was expected to repress his feelings and follow certain norms of behavior. Research shows (Fosha, Siegel, & Solomon, 2009; Gerhardt, 2004; Miller, 1990; Sunderland, 2006; Szalavitz & Perry, 2010) that when children are not able to express their "negative" feelings in healthy ways, they either redirect those hostile feeling internally toward the self (e.g., Nathan's self-injurious behavior) or express them outwardly in unhealthy ways (e.g., Brad's "horizontal violence"[140] on other children).

However, when there is an expectation of *social responsibility* toward all members of the group, especially the most vulnerable, then neither self-loathing nor bullying goes unaddressed. And within a community based on an ethic of care, people are not treated or viewed as "others;" people strive to protect not just themselves but all

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[140] See footnote 121 for definition of horizontal violence.

members of the group; and people understand that the community is as healthy as its most vulnerable member. (See chapters 8 and 9 for examples of the way Springhill's community supports these types of social connections and social responsibility for the common good.)

Acceptance of and Respect for All Human Beings, Individual Identities, and Gender Variations

I now use these personal experiences as a critical lens in examining some of the factors in the Springhill community that seem to make it possible for teachers, administrators, and parents to feel safe in allowing children to be able to authentically explore their identity in a nonjudgmental, safe, and open atmosphere. And I suggest, in turn, how the Springhill faculty has created a democratic environment where children develop tolerance, acceptance, and appreciation for difference in their fellow citizens and are not afraid to advocate for change. I start with a vignette excerpted from my May 2010 field notes:

> Madison, a four and a half-year-old, sits outside her classroom door, in the grassy meadow area, underneath a large (approximately 5 feet-high) horse which she and her classmates have constructed out of tree branches, rope, tree stumps, and pine straw, as part of their year-long study of horses. Madison is wearing the pastel-colored and striped skirt, pink t-shirt (with a horse on it), and yellow barrettes she picked out this morning. She is whispering and giggling with her friend Stella as they wait for several other girls to rejoin their "doggie" play in their "house" underneath the horse structure. She is a well accepted member of her class and plays with a variety of friends daily. She particularly likes dramatic play and art.

Through my field observations, Madison appears to be a happy, well-adjusted girl excelling in all areas of development, cognitively, socially, physically and emotionally. However, Madison does have one unique distinction, she is a transgender girl, who was anatomically born a male, but has a female gender identity.[141] Cindy, Madison's mother, explains during our interview (personal communication, May 26, 2010):

> Madison is a transgender child, which we're just coming to understand. So born a
> boy but really feels like a girl...Madison has been showing us for two years that
> she's a girl by the way she dresses and so one thing that Madison has been doing
> this year is dramatic play, all year long, not really getting into any projects, of any
> kind that I know of but dramatic play, and what I think is amazing is that since
> she's been allowed to do this she's really been letting her peers know who she is,
> through the dramatic play. You know, like setting up a scenario, since Madison is
> the youngest of 4 and has 3 older brothers, letting the whole class know like, "I'm
> the only little sister. I'm the only little sister, right?" And in the scenario three
> older brothers, other people were doing the parts and I think it's interesting
> because Sally Jo [one of Madison's teachers] was saying too that she really loves
> what dramatic play can do for children too because it's a safe way to get a
> message out and it's not directed, any response you get is not directed solely to
> you, it's to your character and so even sometimes she's noticed that kids won't

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[141] As described in *The Transgender Child* (Brill & Pepper, 2008, p. 4), "*Gender identity* refers to a person's internalized, deeply felt sense of being male, female, both, or neither. It can be different from the biological sex assigned at birth. Because gender identity is internal and personally defined, it is not visible to others—it is determined by the individual alone. Most people have an early sense of their gender identity, and if it is not congruous with their anatomical sex they may begin voicing this between the ages of 2 and 4."

even play the part themselves, but they'll do a little puppet, and then it's easier to.

"It's not me, it's the puppet"…That's so important when you think about this

child's life and this *big deal*, it's a big deal for our family and the school to finally

get it and understand. And then through school has a safe place to play all these

scenarios out and let people know. You know they're not making Madison, say,

"No Madison, you need to come over and do this project with so and so." It's

really been able to play out. And I think it's done a world of good for Madison.

So, it's a good thing. And then one of the projects which, some people may not

consider a project, but you've probably heard of the "Firebird Play" that Sophie

was a part of…That's kind of when Madison's first real feminine side came out at

school, because that story has a scary guy and it's got princesses. So Madison

was one of the princesses and it was *so cool* the way that the school has also

allowed Madison to dress however she wants. And, the kids understand that

people want to play different parts and stuff…So that's kind of what got it all

coming about at school as well and that was something that they were so amazing,

because…with this age group, the threes and the fours, there is often a lot of like

physical stuff [be]cause they don't have their words so well, and they tend to act

out physically…So the violent play is always something everybody's trying to

figure out, how to make everybody feel okay, the ones who don't feel safe about

it…So it started with kids wanting to do this wrestling, type of rough kind of

game…Then Sophie introduced the idea that they have here…[the teachers] often

say, "Alright, let's slow it down. What are the rules? And, how about no

contact? You can actually do this but not touch each other," which is great,

because then it turns into this whole other thing, but they still feel really powerful and really cool and they can be the evil guy and the good guy and whatever else, and they get it all worked out…Then Sophie just kind of, or the teacher's come in, where they do that scaffolding where they really help build it up and tweak it, and maybe make it go a different direction or follow the direction it's going. But she just happen[ed] to point out to them, "It really looks kind of like you're performing, like you're dancing, hmmm, I wonder if we could put this to music?" And then a kid brought in a book about the Firebird and there's music to that and the mom happens to play it in the symphony and so she came in and brought her flute and then it just went and went and went…It was like, I don't know, a 6 to 8 week thing that then turns into the entire class wanting to have a part… So they took turns being the different parts, being the powerful guy and being the monsters, and then of course, the princesses were all in there, dancing, doing their beautiful thing. But you know it was just amazing that it turned into this really, wanting to be physical and rough with each other, maybe out of an argument or not liking you that day kind of thing, into this really beautiful, beautifully choreographed, self-choreographed, you know. They did it themselves, production that they put on for the whole school with scenery in the background and costumes that they made, and it is what bonded the group together and they all remember this project, and they got to go home, because they brilliantly document here, with a CD, with a DVD that they could watch as many times as they wanted and put to the beautiful music of [Stravinsky's] "Firebird."…So those kinds of things, I really do think they are going to take with them.

And…any parent that's going to be involved and come to meetings and care enough to learn about what's going on, I mean something like that, you could see in your own household, how you could take the situation, if you had time and were not burning dinner, you could be like "Hey guys"…and kind of turn it into something really cool too, you know, so I just think…I know a lot of parents' value what they're learning as grown-ups, as much as what their children are learning, but if people don't know that, that's one of the really important things about what this program is giving our community…is that education for parents too. And I also think with the projects another really important part is they're learning lifelong skills, and if we can keep facilitating that at home, it is something they can take with them and probably be some of the most productive and useful adults out there. Because what they're doing and learning how to do in school most adults don't know how to do well. You know to really face somebody that's hurt you instead of running away from them but face them and say, with support "I don't like the way you did blah, blah, blah" and that child has to face up to what they did and they work through it so there's no grudges and then they move on and are best buddies for the rest of the day. I mean that's the kind of thing that most adults can't do because of whatever our baggage or fears are or whatever. So working in the group dynamic they really do work through a lot of things that come up and they have to and they figure out who's good at drawing and who's really the best cutter and who's the best one at writing this and they use each other's skills and just like with that Firebird play everyone knew, "no way" was Madison going to be the monster. They didn't even ask, but they

said "Madison, would you like to be a princess?" when they needed a princess, and of course they would have been okay with Madison exploring the monster side, being a rough character too, but they just know each other so well from having these experiences. (Lines 180-269)

In the case of Madison, we see another example of how Springhill teachers, parents, and children *respect* children's *individual identities* within a community of acceptance and care. Difference did not create fear, exclusion, and the ostracism of people as "others," but rather served as an opportunity for dialogue and narrative. As described in *Rethinking Gender in Early Childhood Education* (MacNaughton, 2000), an important aspect of forming our identity is through *narrative*:

> [This includes] telling stories, playing roles, critiquing our performances and being critiqued by others. We reshape our stories and our roles as we interact with others and with ourselves. Constructing stories of ourselves to others and negotiating these stories as others contribute and react to them can help us distinguish ourselves from others (our personal self) and at the same time find a way of being that shows others that we are recognizably normal (our social self). This allows us to think of our identity as personal to us, but at the same time socially situated and negotiated. Identity is not merely absorbed but has to be worked at with others who are actively engaged with us. (pp. 27-28)

As discussed in Cindy's interview, we see how the Springhill community members (faculty and other children) create a safe space that offers Madison multiple and varied opportunities to explore her gender identity through narrative, particularly by

telling and acting out stories and trying out different roles, within a negotiated social group dynamic.

During the interview, Cindy explains how the Springhill faculty has helped her children (Madison and her three older sons) cultivate a deep respect for people, and shaped their ability to listen to varying perspectives while allowing their own voices to be heard through the process of dialogue:

I think one of the most valuable things they've [her children] gotten, for the ones who've been through here [Springhill Preschool], and what I want Madison to take with her, is basically just how to treat people, you know. I mean the interaction with other people is huge and I also want them to have their own voice, you know, to be able to stand up for themselves, ask for what they need, give their opinion, not be afraid, and also to listen to other people's opinions and not feel that they can't do that because it's not their own. I mean I want them to be able to accept other's opinions and be open minded and I do, this is kind of an off-the-subject kind of thing, but Todd [her oldest son] is 15 and he babysat for a family here and they just couldn't, I mean he'd never babysat before, other than our family, and he went over there and they said they could not believe how "Springhill-y he was" and they LOVED him and they wanted to have him back and they were like "oh my gosh" because he and this child made a book together and this kind of thing. I mean he didn't just read a book, they made a book and did this and all this kind of stuff and the language he was using they couldn't get over it and he was like, I forgot what it was he said, but something along the lines of "Well, would you feel more comfortable with this or that?" you know, totally

going with what they wanted to do and then just taking it as far as they wanted to

go and they were just freaked by that and so there's one who I feel like 10 years

later still's got it going on. And it's interesting because I do see that in him. Now

some of my other's I always wonder like, "let's go back to preschool guys, how

are we supposed to talk to each other?" They're definitely attacking with words

their siblings but they have always been respectful students everywhere they've

gone, and they are respectful friends, and so I feel like they have gotten a lot of

that which is great and I certainly, as I told you earlier, have learned loads and

feel like I have improved as an adult as well and my communication with my

children is better than it would have been if I hadn't found this place. (Lines 526-

552, interview transcript)

In a democratic environment, there is a network of support that extends beyond

the classroom. For example, Cindy explains during our interview how valuable the

Springhill administrators, Mary (the early childhood education director) and Lisa (the

Executive Director of the school) have been to her and her family throughout Madison's

transition:

Madison, of course is going to have to learn how to deal with criticism and

teasing because there's going to be more of it I'm sure. So hopefully we can

equip her with what she needs to be strong girl…And that's a unique situation I

tell you what, there's just no better place for Madison, to be a transgender child

then here because you know Lisa the director immediately understood and was on

board, immediately spoke to the teachers and they're waiting for me to tell them

what to do. It's just this working relationship that's great and Madison's going to

be, if there's any school that Madison could enter as a girl and have everybody introduce her as a girl, it's this place, but you know because you can't legally mark female on the records yet, there's no way she could go to a public school or any other traditional school and get this kind of support, so I really think that she's going to be in the best place and everybody's going to eventually say 'she' and it's going to become habit, just like 'he' has been, even though Madison's been in dressing. I mean for people to be cool with a girl, I mean boy, to be in girls dresses that looks like a girl and to be able to understand that that's a boy that's making those choices and we're cool with that. They're really going to be able to understand that Madison feels most like a girl, and so I feel really fortunate to have found this place and to be able to stay here, so they're rock stars in my opinion, rock star teachers, I'm a groupie. I'm a Springhill groupie. [Laughs.] (Lines 599-619, interview transcript)

This is not an isolated case at Springhill of children being accepted and free to express whatever gender variance they may have. For example, one boy in the Rainbow Room has a favorite pair of pink, sparkly shoes and another has a favorite Hello Kitty pair of shoes. At that age, clothing seems to be a powerful way that children can outwardly express (and feel control over) their emerging identity.

Through my observations, it seems when children are respected and supported among caring adults, they may not be as compelled to either perform self-injurious behaviors or bully others. I also discovered that when conflict or hurt feelings do arise within the school day at Springhill, the issues are immediately addressed (see chapter 9, "The Challenges and Joys of Friendships" for further explication). When relationships

are being developed in a safe, trusting space, children are able to express whatever diversity they bring into the mix, knowing that their feelings, thoughts and ideas will be respected.

As highlighted in Nathan's story, during my first years in the workplace, I viewed the school primarily as a hierarchical structure (e.g., be respectful of authority, do as I'm told, follow the rules) and with a client mentality (parents are the clients to be served and kept happy). Arguably, this type of structure effectively obstructs dialogue, inquiry, and transparency in the construction of relationships within the community.

In democratic educational practice, schools are structured around a *community of learners,* rather than as hierarchical organizations. For example, at Springhill, I found an expectation of and freedom to make your voice heard, through open dialogue among parents, faculty, and children. Along with that, there is an expectation for teachers to question, inquire, listen, and investigate important issues within the school and make their thinking transparent (e.g., through documentation, parent circles, faculty meetings) to the larger community. The Springhill faculty does not shy away from difficult topics (e.g., violence and issues around gun play, exclusion of children) but sees these issues as opportunities, as a group, for dialogue and moving forward to a deeper level of understanding (as discussed in chapter 7: "Democratic Communities: Where Everyone Teaches and Everyone Learns"). Their strong foundation of trust seems to be a critical factor in the successful functioning of these processes. (For further discussion of the factors that create this high level of trust among Springhill community members, see "History and Evolution of Springhill as an Exemplar Program" in chapter 11.)

Gender Categorization and Exclusion

During their toddler and preschool years, children begin to differentiate and explore the differences between sexes. Part of that exploration involves categorizing, such as "male" or "female," which can inadvertently create exclusion of certain "others" simply because of their gender. This categorizing often involves creating gender binary oppositions. As discussed in *Rethinking Gender in Early Childhood Education* (2000, p. 148), MacNaughton explains, "Derrida [a postmodern philosopher] argued that when we fix the meaning of words in this way a fixed and final 'Other' is created which has a negative, secondary and subordinate position in the pair" (p. 148). Throughout my field observations at Springhill I discovered that gender discussions and categorization emerge spontaneously throughout the day, as children start forming their understandings of what it means to be a boy/male or girl/female and play around with these meanings as distinct and separate categories. In the following vignette, we see, not surprisingly, each child chooses his/her own gender as the one they "like" as the privileged category.

"Raise your hand if you like girls!" This conversation took place in the Gardenia Room among a group of 3-year-olds at the snack table on December 15, 2009:

Evelyn (a child) asks the other children at the table: "Raise your hand if you like girls…or boys?"

Orson raises his hand and replies: "Boys."

Evelyn follows: "Girls."

Matthew answers: "Boys."

In the home, school, and greater community, children are bombarded with both *implicit* messages and *explicit* messages from their cultural surroundings that influence

their constructions of gender and identity. Examples of explicit messages would include parental comments (e.g., "stop acting like a girl" to a boy who is crying) or the way retail stores divide their children's toys by gender putting them into "girl's toys" aisles and "boy's toys" aisles. I wonder why they do not simply divide them by "dolls" aisle, "trucks" aisle, "blocks" aisle, etc.?

Not only are children exposed to explicit messages, but oftentimes the messages are more implicit, and we may not even consciously be aware of them. These implicit messages are often conveyed by characters marketed to children, whose main protagonists are predominantly male (e.g., Barney, Carboy, Power Rangers, Peter Pan, Harry Potter, Lion King, Santa Claus, and central religious figures). More often than not, when a female character *is* featured as the main protagonist, she is gender stereoptyped (e.g., Disney princesses who are valued, in large part, for their beauty and are ultimately saved through their connections to a male prince.)[142]

In fact, these implicit, androcentric[143] messages are so strongly conditioned that they sometimes appeared within the Springhill community itself. For instance, when Lila (a four-year-old at Springhill) showed interest in medical issues, the teacher suggested to her, "You could be a nurse." I wondered why the teacher did not suggest to her, instead, "maybe you could be a nurse *or* a doctor when you grow-up." In another instance, I observed that the "Springhill Dragon" (an iconic, collaboratively constructed character in the Springhill community as discussed in chapter 6) was most often referred to by the teachers, as "he." I wondered why the dragon was not called a "she," especially

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[142] See Linn (2004) and Thomas (2007) for more on the powerful effects of marketing campaigns (e.g., "the princess lifestyle") on young children's thinking.
[143] *Androcentric* is defined as "centered on, emphasizing, or dominated by males or masculine interests." (Random House Dictionary)

considering that it is a female teacher that dresses up and reveals herself each year. In a final example, I observed many children's interest in a two-foot-high model skeleton shared and used among the classes. The skeleton was referred to as "Mr. Bones." In this case, it was the children that brought my attention to the implicit message when Evelyn (3-year-old from the Gardenia room) one day asked the group of Gardenia room children, "What about *Mrs*. Bones?" And later, Lila (3 year-old) took active steps to resolve the problem by creating a "Mrs. Bones" drawing.

This androcentric tendency is reminiscent of what I have observed in my own teaching practices: I recall a conversation with David, a three-year-old boy in my class, who commented to me that "mom's do the cooking and laundry, NOT boys or dads." I told him that when I was growing up that my dad always was in charge of laundry and that my sister's husband (also "a boy") does all the cooking in their home. This did not alter his opinion, and he remained steadfast in this construction of gender identity. This was particularly surprising knowing that his mother was a feminist, a Ph.D. candidate in Sociology, married to a geography professor, and both parents were strong advocates for women's rights. What's more, I had babysat David several times so that his parents could attend a cooking class together! And yet, more powerful cultural images were obviously influencing David's strongly held beliefs, even at the age of three. I later did an inventory and analysis of our school's picture books, and found that virtually all of them featured the mother in the cooking and cleaning role. This was true not only of the older books (e.g., Richard Scarry books, Bernstein Bear books) but also of the more recently published ones. Perhaps this pattern contributed to David's thinking.

In another example of androcentric cultural conditioning from my experiences, I recall later that year, Maddie, a three-year-old, told me that she could never be president because she's a girl.

More recently, in 2009, I was teaching in a young two-year-old classroom. The children in my class, especially a little girl Haley, loved fire trucks. So, I went to several large bookstore chains (Barnes and Noble and Borders) to find books about fire trucks to add to our library collection. I found many firetruck board books (at least 15), but not ONE of them featured female firefighters. So, I had to take a black pen and color in long hair to make it appear that there were female firefighters.

"**Pink's a girl color.**" The following vignette, excerpted from my field observations, takes place in the Springhill Gardenia room and is another example, made visible during children's play, of how many stereotypes and cultural expectations already become internalized, by the age of four, even within a progressive community.

On the morning of October 23, 2009, Kate and Lila are happily playing in the pretend "kitchen," one of their favorite parts of the classroom. They are making "cupcakes" in preparation for their "picnic."

Oscar comes over to Kate and asks her, "Can I have some cupcakes?"

Kate responds, "Yeah."

So, Oscar asks her, "How many cupcakes can I get?"

"Two," Kate says.

Oscar tells her, "I'll have a pink one and purple."

Kate responds, matter of factly, "Pink is a girl color."

Oscar doesn't challenge this assertion and takes two purple cupcakes instead.

This conversation between the children was not overheard by the teachers, or I think they may have challenged the assumption that "pink" things can only be for girls. There were several other occasions when I observed the teachers, gently and non-judgmentally, challenging children's stereotypical assumptions that became evident during their conversations, play, and work. I discuss these examples later in this chapter.

No boys allowed! As discussed previously, well-intentioned people sometimes unconsciously cater to stereotypes and reinforce specific gender roles. However, creating a space where stereotypes and prejudices are intentionally challenged provides children and adults opportunities to develop more nuanced understandings of gender, sex, and identity. MacNaughton (2000, p. 149) suggests that, as educators, "if we can deconstruct gendered binary oppositions *with* children, then new gender meanings become possible for them." The following vignette taken from the Springhill Website ("The Preschool Curriculum," 2010) is a powerful example of how the Springhill faculty intentionally addresses these issues, by incorporating them into the curriculum in ways that are meaningful and relevant to the children and by making them visible to the broader school community:

The social complexity within projects evolves over time. While children at the youngest end of the spectrum may be involved in projects about making connections, the older children of four or five might be pursuing projects with more nuanced social dimensions. For example, the following was an inquiry in which children took on exclusion by gender, personal boundaries, group expectations, and respect. When a group of five-year-old girls carefully lettered a "No Boys Allowed" sign to hang on their newly built block enclosure, the boys

were angered and objected. The teacher invited the children into a conversation to help them articulate the thinking underlying their actions. It turned out the girls were concerned about the structure being knocked down and associated this behavior with boys. As they talked, the girls remembered many boys who did not knock things down and decided to make a new sign that read "Nobody allowed who knocks things down." These complex social relationships are sorted out in the midst of many investigations of big ideas and topics. In addition to supporting the children's process of acquiring social knowledge, teachers also support the children in gaining topic-specific information and in learning other skills that will help them move to the next level of their education.

This passage illustrates the possibilities that can arise in democratic environments, like the Springhill community, where the faculty intentionally challenge children's gender exclusion by slowing down the process, using dialogue to uncover children's thinking, and remaining respectful and nonjudgmental of the children's feelings. Note also how the educators develop the issue into a meaningful project and make it visible to all stakeholders through documentation.

"Can boys be beautiful?" The following conversation took place on May 28, 2010, in the studio between Alice, the studio teacher, and two three-year-old girls, Lila and Grace, from the Gardenia room. The conversation serves as another example of how Springhill teachers use conversations with children to both deconstruct gender categories and help children develop more complex and nuanced understandings of gender (in this case, the girl's socially constructed conceptions of "beauty").

Grace and Lila are working together on "unicorn pictures." They share lots of materials together, cutting pieces so they can each have a half, helping each other with the glue, and using lots of materials, especially ones that are "pink" and "beautiful." As they are drawing, a conversation begins when Valerie (a child from the Rainbow room) walks into the studio to borrow some materials. Valerie points at Grace and Lila, and says, "You guys both have pink!"

Grace: "Yeah."

Grace hands her pink pen to Lila and says: "You can have this pink!" Lila smiles and gives Grace her darker-shaded pink pen in return.

Alice: "When Grace saw Abigail [another child from the Gardenia room] was wearing pink this morning, she said, 'Abigail you're pink-a-licious!'"

Grace starts laughing at something seemingly unrelated, maybe a memory she's having, and says: "Last time, I tricked the Gardenia room that I had a kitty."

Alice: "You did? Did they believe that trick?"

Grace: "Uh-huh. (Laugh). But they didn't think that was real."

Alice pointing to Lila's picture: "So who's that guy Lila?"

Lila answers: "It's a lot of pony. This is the mommy pony and these are the baby ponies."

Alice: "There's only one unicorn? Is this the only unicorn or are they all unicorns?"

Lila: "They're all unicorns."

Alice: "So you need to show their horn to everybody so they'll know they're not just ponies"…"What about, could you make triangle ears? Like, you know, like Kate's pony ears that she wears on her hair-band?"

Grace (donning a headband with flowers): "Well, I'm BEAUTIFUL because I have my crown on!"

Lila (also wearing a headband, with attached pipe cleaners attached as "ears."): "ME TOO!"

Grace continues: "And my picture is going to be SO beautiful!"

Alice asks, "Does that mean me and Amy are not beautiful because we're not wearing a crown?"

Grace hesitantly and not sure how to answer, says, "Well…well…"Grace looks at me and Alice and seems to be stuck, not knowing how to answer Alice's question. She seems to not want to hurt our feelings, but also not want to say something that she doesn't think is true (that Alice and I are beautiful even though we're not wearing crowns or anything pink.) After pausing for another few seconds, she decides not to answer the question and turns to whisper something in Lila's ear.

Lila then says, "Grace, I think we're done. Aren't we Grace?"

Grace says "No." They work for a few more minutes and then head back to the classroom for snack.

Later that day, they return to the studio to make more "beautiful pictures" and to paint their unicorn drawings "pink." As they work on their pictures, gluing on pink paper, flowers, stars, pink fabrics, scraps of wallpaper, pink markers, they repeatedly talk about how "BEAUTIFUL" their pictures are going to be.

Grace takes a scrap of wallpaper and says: "Let's cut this in half."

Lila: "Yeah."

Grace: "Because we both like this paper."

Lila: "Um-hum. We don't want any fighting, right?"

After cutting the paper, she hands one half to Lila and says: "Here you can have a shiny piece!"

Lila: "Okay."

Grace: "Mine is going to be *so* beautiful!"

Lila to Grace: "Mine too!" (Pause) "It wouldn't be good if you would say, [mimicking Grace's voice] 'Mine is going to be so beautiful…Not yours!' That would make me sad that mine wouldn't be beautiful."

Grace agrees: "Yeah."

Lila: "So we'll share."

Grace: "Yeah. Ours is BOTH going to be beautiful, Lila."

Lila: "Yeah."

Grace: "Because mine is BEAUTIFUL!"

Lila: "Me too."

Grace: "Yours is beautiful too!"

Lila: "Thank you."

Grace: We have a lot of things. We both have flowers.

As Lila and Grace continue to talk about beautiful things, Alice asks them: "Could others be beautiful too?" After a brief pause, Alice adds, "If someone said, 'boys are beautiful?'"

Grace responds, "He can be cool."

Alice continues to inquire, "Can Oscar [a boy in the Gardenia room] be beautiful?"

This time Lila responds, "No, because boys don't wear dresses." Grace and Lila both start to laugh at the silliness of Alice's suggestion.

Alice then asks, "Can Evelyn be beautiful?"

"Yes," reply the girls.

Then Alice asks them, "Kate?"

"Yes," they respond again.

Grace in a sweet voice, says to Alice, "You're beautiful TOO Alice."

Alice continues to ask questions, "What about the boys who wear pink, sparkly shoes, can they be beautiful too?"

Grace and Lila contemplate for a moment and then say, "Yeah."

One of the girls responds: "But Ethan doesn't have them."

Alice describes some of the preschool boys at Springhill who have pink and/or glittery pink shoes and once again asks if those boys can be beautiful. Grace and Lila laugh again, but at the same time, agree that "yes" these boys could make beautiful pictures too.

MacNaughton (2000) suggests, "If we analyze children's meaning-making…we can expand our options for working with children by learning to privilege their *subjectivities*[144]" (p. 102). She offers three ways teachers can work to understand

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[144] *Subjectivity* (MacNaughton, 2000): "describes our ways of knowing (emotionally and intellectually) about ourselves-in-our-world. It describes who we are and how we understand ourselves, consciously and unconsciously. In poststructuralism, the

children's subjectivities, primarily through discourse: One, seek "information from children about how they have categorized themselves and others and how gender is implicated in these categories" (p. 102). Two, identify "the social practices through which children come to understand what is meant by the gender categories that build their discourse" (p. 102). And three, explore "the *patterns of desire*[145] implicated in how children understand and 'do' gender" (p. 102). Alice's conversations with Grace and Lila offered insights into their discourses, subjectivities and "patterns of desire." It seems that Grace and Lila may be using their shared interest and desire for "beautiful things" (a social construction) as a way to connect and solidify their growing friendship. (See "Closing Circle Conflict: "I don't think they want to play with me!" section in chapter 9 for another example.) However, inadvertently they seem to exclude others by gender. We see in the latter part of this exchange that through their conversation, Alice deconstructs Lila and Grace's conception of beauty (boy's can't be beautiful) and works to expand the meaning of that concept (boys who wear sparkly or pink shoes *can* be beautiful), thereby making the boundaries of the children's gender categories somewhat more malleable.

Cautionary Tales in Spontaneous Conversations

At any given time, the studio serves as a hub for dynamic discussions on a range of topics, both child and adult initiated. Conversations often arise spontaneously with whatever is on the children's minds that day, or sometimes with a bit of prompting from

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individual is made subject (made knowing) by language (and hence discourse.) So poststructuralists (along with many others) see language as the key to how we construct our subjectivity (our sense of our self)" (p. 97).

[145] *Patterns of desire* refers to the emotional investments that shape our understandings and "provide the power behind what is learnt via discourse about ourselves-in-the-world" (p. 101).

Alice (e.g., what's happening at home, getting shots at the doctor's office, the Springhill Dragon, friendships, past experiences, project work). One morning in mid-November, 2009, a group of girls was working on various individual projects in the studio while having a lively conversation about upcoming play dates. As the conversation evolves, the focus turns to a discussion of boys' versus girls' toys.

Boys' versus girls' toys. As Valerie works on her airplane with a variety of open-ended materials, Alice asks: "Are you excited for your real play date Valerie?"

Valerie enthusiastically responds, "Yes!"

Michelle and Fiona also answer, "Yeah."

Alice sharing in their enthusiasm, says, "You have been waiting for so long."

Michelle responds, "And we, I have too."

With a big grin on her face, Peyton (a girl) adds, "I have been waiting for a longtime to have a play date with Madison."

Alice responds, "This will be your last play date at Madison's old house, because on the weekend he's moving to his new house." (This serves as another example of how Springhill faculty creates a culture of care and connectedness among all school community members. Alice knows each child well and is usually aware of the big events happening in their life, both inside and outside of the classroom. Oftentimes, she incorporates this knowledge of the children into their studio conversations, building a sense of closeness among the children and the teacher. The same holds true for the other teachers I observed at Springhill.)

Peyton corrects her, pointing to the ground, "No, he's coming over here."

Alice clarifies, "He's coming to your house?"

"Uh-huh," replies Peyton.

In an excited tone, Alice says, "Oh wow. Well that will be fun. What kind of toys do you think you'll play with?"

Peyton answers with a shrug of her shoulders, "I don't know."

Michelle, matter-of-factly, answers for Peyton," Boy's toys."

Peyton explains, "I don't have boy toys."

Alice adds, "The good thing about Madison is that he likes girl toys and boy toys. Like you could play with the doll house or you could play dress-up. Madison likes all that stuff too."

Michelle comments, "I like girl stuff too! And boy stuff!"

Peyton says, "I only like girl's stuff."

Ashley agrees, "Yeah. I'm like Peyton, I only like girls stuff."

Alice replies, "But I noticed one thing about you, both of you, you do like some rough stuff, like running around really fast, racing, climbing up trees, jumping off stuff." (Although Alice seems to be trying to challenge the notion that Ashley and Peyton only like 'girls' stuff. She actually reinforces the stereotypes and gender specific categorizations, that these active types of play are 'boy' activities. I wonder how that conversation would have played out if Alice instead asked the children, "What makes something a girl toy or a boy toy?"

"Sometimes," Ashley says.

Valerie corrects Alice, "That's girl's stuff, even boy's stuff!" (It's interesting to note how Valerie seems to be challenging the fact that climbing, running, etcetera, are "boy's stuff.")

Alice reiterates, "Girl's stuff and boy's stuff."

One of the children agrees, "Yeah."

Alice continues, "they're (meaning Valerie and Peyton) not like so fancy that they can't run around and climb a tree or stomp around in the creek."

Michelle now, along with Valerie, seems to correct Alice's thinking, "That's boy's stuff AND girl's stuff."

At this point Fiona, finishing up her bead necklace, shows Michelle how long it is, and Alice tells them it's time to stop working and to start cleaning up the studio to get ready for closing circles. So, the conversation ends there.

Through my observations, and as described in the previous examples, gender stereotyping seems to be a recurring theme that arises during children's spontaneous conversations. This is one vignette, that serves as a cautionary tale, of how as adults, we sometimes unintentionally reinforce certain gender categorizations. From a democratic point of view, it would be interesting to have seen how the children's dialogue (or thinking) may have changed if the teacher asked them, "What makes something a 'girl's' toy or 'a boy's' toy? Or, why can't a doll be a boy's toy?" In a democratic environment, children are free to have lots of conversation while working on their projects. This freedom allows teachers and children to address many important issues (e.g., overcoming fears, working through problems). The ease and naturalness of these spontaneous and open conversations are critical for allowing children to view themselves as active participants in their world, as illustrated in the Springhill studio. However, unless teachers are careful about what they say, spontaneous conversations can sometimes reinforce stereotypes and categorization ("otherness"). When considering the

possibilities and challenges in creating a democratic environment, this example highlights the importance and need for teachers to balance children's open and free conversations, with a continuing critical reflection of their contributions to the discourse and with a heightened awareness of the messages we may unintentionally be sending.

"They're just boys." The following vignette is another example of how spontaneous conversations help teachers understand children's subjectivities. Notice how the children are categorizing themselves and others, and how "gender is implicated in these categories" (MacNaughton, p. 102). This account also serves as a cautionary tale of how easily teachers can unintentionally misconstrue children's meanings and affect their growing identities. This conversation takes place in the studio with Alice (the studio teacher), Terra (a Rainbow room teacher) and a group of the Rainbow room children as they work on sewing leaves [See, chapter 4, section "Rainbow Room," for more context].

As the children sit around the large table sewing, the conversation turns to a discussion about "Lightning McQueen" and "Doc," two characters from the Disney/Pixar movie titled, "Cars" (2006):

Michelle: "McQueen's a boy."

Terra (the teacher) doesn't seem to hear Michelle, so Dave repeats her comment, "McQueen's a boy."

Terra with interested recognition, responds, "McQueen's a boy."

Dave then adds, "Lightning's a boy!" (McQueen and Lightning are the same character.)

Terra asks, "Lightning's a boy?"

Dave and Michelle both respond: "Yeah!"

Franklin then adds, "And Doc's a boy."

Terra shaking her head in acknowledgement, "And Doc's a boy."

Then in a discerning tone, Michelle comments, "I like Doc and

McQueen…But…they're JUST boys." (It seems as if Michelle likes these characters, yet

is conflicted by the fact that her gender excludes her from fully identifying with them.)

Terra asks: "They're boys? Well, is Franklin your friend?" (Perhaps, Terra is

misconstruing Michelle's intent behind this comment and instead uses the exchange as an

opportunity to challenge her feelings about boys.)

Michelle temporarily stops sewing and looks over at Franklin. She seems to

understand that a "correct response" of "yes" is the desired response. After a few

moments of contemplation, Michelle doesn't directly answer the question but modifies

her earlier comment. She responds, "I just don't like…I don't like cars." (Michelle seems

to have figured out a response that stays true to her feelings and, at the same time, avoids

hurting Franklin's feelings and appeases the teacher's wishes. It is important to note that

Terra did not at all sound judgmental or intimidating, however, typically, children *want* to

connect and please their teachers and are quick to pick up on the subtle messages teachers

put out.)

Terra clarifying asks, "Oh, you don't like cars?"

Michelle responds, "Carboy," as to what she doesn't like.

Terra then asks Michelle, "How do you get to school every day, Michelle?"

Michelle answers, "My bike." (She and her mom do ride their bikes to school

each morning.)

Terra (expecting her to answer car) smiles: "You take your bike?"

Alice asks Michelle, "But you like your dad right, even though he's a boy?"

Terra smiling at Michelle: "And he drives a car."

Again Michelle pauses before responding. She makes eye contact with Terra and replies, "Well… I…got on my bike myself." (Again, Michelle successfully answers in a way that doesn't rebuff her dad, making the teachers happy, and at the same time, dealing with her desire to put herself as a protagonist where the Disney story falls short.)

At this point, Dave chimes in, "He [Michelle's dad] drives a choo-choo!" and starts to laugh. The teachers do not press the issue any further and instead follow Dave's lead of turning the discussion into silly, imaginative play, with a nice mixture of fantasy and reality.

Dave laughing repeats, "A choo-choo."

Terra in a mock, surprised voice says, "A choo-choo?!?"

Dave again exclaims, "A choo-choo!" Terra and Dave laugh together.

Alice joining the silliness says, "Maybe Michelle could ride her sacred [inaudible word, sounded like sacred] broom to school."

Michelle laughing says, "Nooo!" Dave laughs too.

Alice continues, "Maybe Michelle and her black cat put on their pointy hats and get on this broom over here."

Michelle laughing: "No! I go on my bike!"

Dave says again, laughing: "A Choo-Choo!"

After some more silliness the conversation turns back to sewing as Terra starts to help Dave with his stitching. (Notice how the teachers participate in joining the children's silliness, humor, and imagination.)

In many traditional classrooms, teachers tend to do more 'talking at' than 'talking with' children. For instance, a teacher may read a picture book about sharing, but not

connect sharing to the children's daily experiences, or give them daily opportunities to share. Or a teacher may hear a child say, "You can't play--just boys." At this point a teacher may require the boys to let the girl be part of their play. The problem is, this approach often involves no discussion, alienates the children from each other even further, and prevents a shift in children's thinking towards more social inclusivity. However, in democratic classrooms, listening to children and having meaningful conversations with them allows teachers many opportunities to discover what children are thinking about and what stereotypes they may have. Teachers cannot challenge stereotypical thinking in constructive ways, if they don't know what assumptions children are bringing to the table.

In this vignette, Terra and Alice tried to challenge some contradictions in Michelle's thinking (e.g., Franklin and her dad are boys, therefore she must like boys, and she rides in a car and therefore should like cars). And yet, however well-intentioned, I think they are perhaps missing the underlying conflicting feelings that Michelle is trying to process. At 4 ½ Michelle has firmly put herself in a specific gender category: "girl." Yet, this strict category doesn't allow her to relate with the "boy" cars. Michelle seems to be drawn to these Disney characters (Lightning McQueen and Doc) but at the same time is trying to reconcile the fact that there are no girl race-car drivers in the movie. In looking for appealing female characters in *Cars*, Michelle's only option is to settle for secondary characters like Sally (the love interest of McQueen), or Tia and Mia (cheerleaders for McQueen). How does this lack of strong, female protagonists affect Michelle's identity?

In this case the teachers, quite understandably, may have failed to grasp Michelle's dilemma, and therefore missed the opportunity to discuss with her the fact that there are no girl race cars, perhaps offering her the opportunity to create her own character if she was interested. Or, perhaps she could write a letter to the producers requesting another female character for *Cars*? Again, in a democratic environment children are not passive consumers of culture, but actively participate in reshaping it.

This vignette also serves as an example of how Disney cartoons and other popular culture phenomena impinge on children's thinking. During my field observations, popular cartoon characters, storylines, and related stereotypes arose often during spontaneous conversations, play, and classroom projects.

Reconstruction of Powerful Consumer and Popular Culture Icons and Images

With the influx of commercial products and advertisements (e.g., toys, movies, TV shows, lunch boxes, logos), characters (e.g., Disney princesses, Carboy, Power Rangers), and storylines capturing children's interest and attention at unprecedented levels and at younger and younger ages (Linn, Thomas, 2007; Anderson), children are inevitably coming to school strongly influenced by scripted narratives. In *Nobrow: The Culture of Marketing, the Marketing of Culture*, John Seabrook (p. 222, as cited in Thomas) discusses the concept of the "marketer within" that has shaped youth culture, primarily through television and marketing. He explains, "Studies have shown that two-year-olds can recognize the difference in volume and tone of the commercial voice on television and know it intimately in a way that they don't respond to the editorial voice. And you internalize that voice, so that marketing no longer seems like an alien external manipulative force; rather, it's just part of your world."

Further, research suggests (see Linn, 2004) that cartoon characters and their accompanying products impede children's inner private speech, critical thinking, and creativity.[146] Marketer's (such as Disney's Cinderella) give the toy and story creators a style guide that requires the authors to obey strict rules and storylines for their characters that "must adhere to each character's brand identity"…"each [media] character has a complete biography (Thomas, pg.179)." Marketers then inundate the children's market with these images. Not surprisingly this is an ingenious marketing strategy. However, this type of narrow and prescribed narrative and character development impacts children's own developing narrative and stifles their creativity, critical thinking, and inner speech, all foundations for later academic success. Linn (2007, p.66) explains:

> Conformity, impulse buying, defining self-worth by what you own, and seeking happiness through the acquisition of material goods are traits that marketing inculcates in consumers. All of these are antithetical to creativity, which draws sustenance from inner resources rather than external dictates, fads, fancies, or rewards.

Clearly this has implications for creating a democratic preschool environment. School policies can range anywhere from a complete prohibition on any commercial product entering the classroom, to children having carte blanche access to these corporate

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[146] Thomas (2007) defines "private speech" as "the monologues toddlers act out to describe what they're working on and what they see, the antecedent to the inner voice we unconsciously use as adults to process our thoughts, feelings, and behavior." Thomas provocatively suggests "take away a child's ability to create her own private speech, and the marketer within may move in to fill the void" (p. 228).

characters, logos, and storylines, in an environment lacking any communal acknowledgment of the effects these commercial images have on children.[147]

In fact, even mainstream early childhood journals and academics sometimes encourage the use of corporate logos and images in early childhood classrooms. For example, the Southern Early Childhood Association, *Dimensions of Early Childhood*, Fall 2010, publication has an article titled, *Children Write Their World: Environmental Print as a Teaching Tool*, in which authors McMahon-Giles and Wellhousen-Tunks encourage the use of corporate logos as part of a literacy program for young children. One of their suggestions is to have kindergartners cut out logos from printed materials found at home and to use these as props for literacy activities at school. An example is featured in the accompanying journal photo, a teacher-created poster titled, "We see words everywhere!," with magazine cut-outs, ostensibly done by the children, of printed materials, including Cheetos, Coke, Krispy Kreme, Walmart, McDonalds, Little Debbie, M&Ms, Burger King, and Lucky Charms. Given that children by the age of three already recognize many corporate logos, what does this suggested activity really "teach" besides reinforcing brand loyalty?

With obesity rates for preschoolers at unprecedented levels, teachers have an ethical obligation to help children deconstruct some of these widely popular marketing and media images and help children understand why marketers target them as consumers. In other words, instead of unreflectively endorsing corporate products, teachers could use

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[147] In fact, companies such as Disney, American Greeting Inc., and Scholastic Inc., target child care centers and hospitals to give their products (e.g., Baby Einstein DVDs, Care Bears) and curriculum materials (posters, lesson plans) under the ruse of providing educational materials; but in reality they are trying to develop brand loyalty right from the start (Thomas, 2007, Linn, 2004).

the corporate logos as a catalyst to help children develop their critical literacy skills, perhaps even as a launching point for a discussion about why we are bombarded with so many unhealthy and aggressive logos and images. Children could then develop ways to become active agents, instead of merely passive consumers, in relationship to their culture. Consider how much richer education becomes when logo-recognition activities are replaced by such things as children learning about healthy foods, growing their own gardenia, making signs for the different vegetables they grow, writing letters to the companies asking for healthier options, or creating their own advertisements for healthy foods ("Banana's Rock!").

The authors in *Dimensions* also suggest adding corporate logos to the block area to encourage environmental print. Again, consider Springhill's "No Boy's Allowed" project discussed earlier in this chapter (where the children create their own signs for the block area). It serves as a powerful example of children actively producing meaningful print rather than merely practicing their logo-recognition skills. Teachers can also help children develop their own symbols or logos (See chapter 5, *Rituals and Traditions*, for examples), which could help build a unique classroom identity, rather than merely a cookie-cutter community of consumers.

These are the kinds of ideas that would typify a democratic approach to education, where teachers empower children to move from being merely passive consumers to active producers of their culture.[148] Taking this approach requires that teachers slow down the teaching process, view children as capable problem solvers, and constantly

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[148] In *Negotiating Critical Literacies with Young Children* (2004) Vasquez, a Canadian preschool teacher, highlights ways she developed critical literacy within her classroom.

monitor how their own brand conditioning might be inadvertently marginalizing children's voices.

In order to preserve or support a democratic preschool community, teachers will need to recognize the ways that popular and commercial culture and their prescribed values (e.g., conformity, materialism, and passive consumption) inevitably come into the school *and* then offer powerful antidotes to these strong influences on children's identities. For example, teachers need to be aware that children will come to school with emotional attachments to characters such as "Sleeping Beauty," with a desire to act out these roles (and fulfill the intent of the marketers). But more than just being aware of this dynamic, teachers should offer children opportunities to construct and expand other ways of knowing that are not limited by scripted narrative, and that support the development of more complex understandings. As described below, I saw several examples of this intentional type of work with children during my field observations in the Springhill community.

Whose story is it? Disney's or Rita's? In the following vignette, Rita, a five-year-old in the Magnolia room, is emotionally invested in Disney's "Little Mermaid." When she tries to create her own story in the studio, she has trouble getting past its prescribed narrative. Alice, the studio teacher, aware of this problem, uses Rita's interest in characters to help stretch her thinking and move her beyond the Disney orientation.

It's about 10:00 a.m. in the studio, and Rita is hard at work creating a story. As she draws a big wave and a mermaid on her paper, Alice (the studio teacher) asks her about the drawing. When Rita starts to retell her story, it sounds like she is recapitulating Disney's "Little Mermaid" story. Alice comments: "You're making your own story. It is

sounding like the Disney story." This starts a conversation in the studio about various movies the children have seen. Other children join in the conversation, including Ashley (another 5-year-old from the Magnolia room), who is also drawing a picture of a mermaid. Rita, looking down at her "Wizard of Oz" watch, explains to another child, "The good witches have two eyes. The bad witches have only one eye." The two children then discuss the witches that they have seen in different movies.

Rita works some more on her story, but continues to get stuck retelling the Disney story. Alice challenges Rita's frame of mind, but in a way that privileges Rita's subjectivity and emotional attachment to Disney characters. Alice suggests that she create a story where two characters meet (such as the witch and the mermaid). Rita seems to be satisfied with this suggestion and selects Dorothy (from Wizard of Oz) and the Mermaid (from Little Mermaid) to meet in her story.

As Rita works, Alice asks her, "What would happen [when they meet]?"

Rita starts to draw Dorothy swimming in the water.

Rita writes "Once upon a time" and then continues by dictating to Alice, who writes above Rita's drawing the words, "there was a beautiful mermaid."

Daisy, another child from the Magnolia room, turns to Rita and says, "Are you going to act it out?" Rita nods her head yes.

Alice asks Rita what happens next, reminding her, "Don't forget to tell a story different than the movies."

Rita in a sad tone says: "One day she grew very sad. She wanted to be a human."

She continues: "One day she saw a sailor coming towards her and she also saw a human ready to go swimming. Her name was Dorothy."

Alice continues to write as Rita continues to draw and tell her story on several pages of paper. As she progresses, the story starts shaping into something recognizably her own. At one point she says: "The mermaid was crying deeper tears" and "her tears were as long as Rapunzel's hair." (Note Rita's beautiful imagery when she creates her own dialogue.)

Rita: "Oh, I forgot to write 'there was a big wave coming towards the sailor.'"

Alice asks: "Is Dorothy or Toto in the story? What's happening next?"

Rita explains, "Dorothy is watching the mermaid. Then the mermaid grew even more sad and Dorothy was always there feeling more and more sorry for her. The wave does him [the sailor] no harm because it goes beside him."

Alice says, "Maybe you can draw a 3rd picture of the ending. People will want to know if the wave hit the sailor."

Rita says: "And the sailor was always there also."

Rita continues: "She grew so sad that her skin turned green and her tears grew long. She wept and wept and wept."

Alice comments: "This is a very sad story. Is it going to have a happy ending?" (I wondered at this point why Alice asked her about a happy ending. Are we conditioned to look for happy endings? It keeps in mind that we need to be vigilant not only about children's preconceived notions, but ours as well.)

Rita answers: "Of course."

Ashley adds: "Mermaid stories always end happy!"

They discuss the Disney mermaid movie ending again.

Rita adds, "Oh I forgot to make a title for the story."

Rita draws another page of her story, featuring Dorothy and a small wave by the sailor. She then tells Alice that part of her story: "And Dorothy thought that if she went to the good sea witch to turn her into a mermaid it would make the mermaid feel better."

Alice says to Rita: "I made a mistake, I spelled witch…with." (Springhill teachers regularly point out their own mistakes to children.)

Rita draws another page and says, "The witch gave her [Dorothy] a very long tail."

Ashley asks Rita if she can make her drawing the cover page of Rita's story and Rita agrees. (This serves as another example of Springhill's culture of collaboration.)

Ashley, looking at the drawing, says: "The witch gave the mermaid a crown."

Rita says: "Yeah, 'cause she turned her into a fish and the sea witch greeted Dorothy as if she was her own pet."

Rita and Ashley head back to their room to have snack and then return to the studio.

Rita writes these words on her next page. "And Dorothy swam back to the mermaid and comforted her." (Notice how children's work is not dictated by time, as Rita and Ashley return to the studio to further their work. Alice has a work basket for children to revisit work on other days if they so choose.)

Alice also made a word card with the word "mermaid" for Rita since she has been using that word a lot. (Teachers provide meaningful literacy connected to students' interests.)
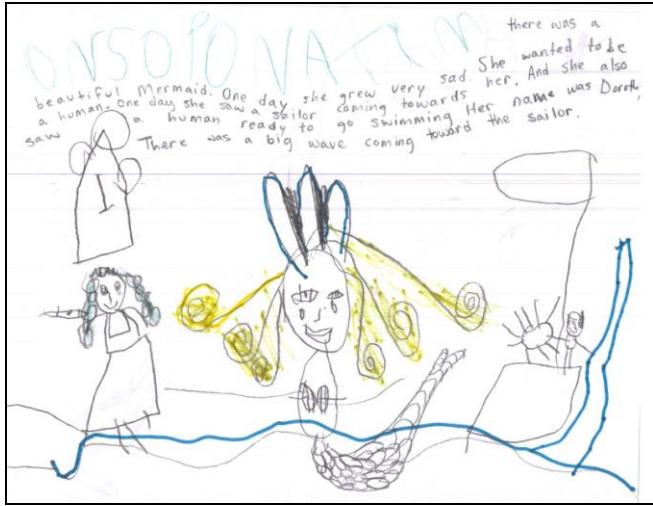
Figure 3 Rita's mermaid story (retrieved from Studio Blog, February12, 2009)

During my interview with Alice, I asked her about the children getting stuck retelling the Disney version of stories, whether or not she saw this happen regularly, and to tell me about how she challenges them to tell their own story. Alice explains (personal communication, December 16, 2009):

Yeah, I really do try and work on that. And that's, again, I know the history, so Rita, last year, would keep getting stuck on these, she would see a new Disney movie and then that's all she could talk about. That's all she could play. That's all she could draw. So [we] really worked with her intentionally, a lot last year to try and stretch her out to think, "Now okay, what could that crab do that's not in the movie?" and it wasn't so successful last year because she would get really stuck. And it also made her parents crazy and so they really I think they had been trying, and we talked together last year about, "What are some things you could do to help Rita move off that scripted play?" and I think she knew when she was doing that story that I was going to challenge her. I knew that she was going to

keep going to that place and…it was a much more mature interaction because of all the history behind it. And some years we have kids, like last year, it was really funny because all the Gardenia room kids had the Disney movie [stuff], it was a lot of girl stuff. The Magnolia room kids were on Star Wars and it was just Star Wars all the time…And some of them hadn't even seen the movie. I really would love to do a study some day about popular culture in the school and how they get the information because I know in this population there are not that many families that watch TV. There are some families that don't watch any TV or any movies at all, yet still their kids know things like that Spongebob has a friend named Patrick. You know? So, I think they get it off underwear, I think they see each other's t-shirts and lunchboxes, and this sort of mythology builds. Anyway so I'm interested in that." (Lines 220-246, interview transcription)

Again we see that Alice and the rest of the faculty are intentional about each interaction with children and involve all members of the community (parents, faculty, Rita) to try to help Rita move away from scripted play that was stifling her creativity. Research (Linn, 2004) suggests that "ready-made visual images and story lines require less work from viewers. When children play with a toy based on a particular television character, they play less creatively, especially right after they have watched a program" (p. 72). My observations and Alice's experiences discussed in our interview brings to mind the evidence of the growing power of corporate marketing to children and the effects that it has on their thinking. Alice revisits the topic of popular culture later on in the interview:

Can I go back to the popular culture thing real quick, because I really think that's part of democracy and education, that whole thing about banning guns or not talking about Disney stories, or…I feel like if we cut that off, out of the school, I know a lot of schools that are progressive schools just sort of make the choice to not have any of that. But I feel like that's a big part of children's voice in what they want to talk about so while I don't want them to be stuck on the same script over and over again, I want them if they need to be able to draw about SpongeBob, or Anakin [a Star Wars character], or whatever. I want that to be a valid thing that they can do in school. We've had kids here who are, our general population is very liberal and pretty middle class, and you know, listens to only the best children's music, but we've had kids from time to time who come from more working class families, a couple of times we've had kids who come from the neighborhood who only speak Spanish and their families are new immigrants and they put them here so that they can learn English, and those kids come from a different place, they listen to different radio stations, they watch different shows, you know? They wear different clothes, and they don't eat organic food. And I feel like we've got to make sure, we have an extra duty to those kids to make sure their voices are heard in here. So that's important to me and it doesn't look that way as much this year just because there's not as much interest in it, but other years, lots of the projects I would be doing were about Power Rangers or about, whatever. That's my soapbox. (Lines 396-412, interview transcription)

Clearly, Alice seems to recognize the importance of validating children's subjectivities, even when those attachments are in part marketers' constructions. Any

unilateral prohibition against these corporate characters coming into the school may

silence children's voices, and constitute an infringement of democratic educational

practice. The alternative approach at Springhill appears to be to use children's interest in

corporate storylines as a starting point to stretch children's thinking, which leads

eventually to children's growth into media-savvy, self-determining, democratic citizens.

"I'm a Princess!" Both market research and social scientific studies (see Linn,

2004; Thomas, 2007) have discovered that infants and toddlers form attachments to

characters when their environment is saturated with the character's images (e.g., TV,

commercials, grocery stores, book stores, toy stores).[149] For instance, in 2000, when a

former Nike marketing executive (responsible for the "Just Do it" campaign) took over

the marketing of Disney Products, he launched a marketing campaign to accomplish the

goal of image saturation. Disney marketers clumped all their Disney princesses together

(e.g., Cinderella, Ariel, Belle, Sleeping Beauty, Jasmine) and launched a marketing

campaign to inundate the market with their images (e.g., princess dresses, tiaras,

underwear with a different princess on each pair). Thomas (2007) explains, "Just four

years after the launch of Disney Princess, a Disney marketing study revealed that 91

percent of moms with kids between the ages of two and five were familiar with the

brand" (p. 137). Prior to this 2000 campaign, consumers of Disney movies and products

were typically 6 years of age and older; the new campaign targeted the infant, toddler,

and preschooler market as well. As Thomas describes it, "Each character represented a

distinct personality and had its own following—a clique…as a whole the group of

characters represented a magical, glamorous lifestyle" (p. 137). Sadly, children's desire

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[149] Market researchers (Linn, 2004) have discovered that *familiarity* is the primary appeal and motivation to desire, and in turn, buy the product.

(or attachments to these characters), and their accompanying representation of materialistic lifestyles, supersedes (and arguably conflicts) with any ethical and/or moral implications in which the fairy tales were originally created. Marketers successfully saturated toddler and preschoolers environments with these characters, making the concept of "Princess" synonymous with *Disney Princess"* and left very little room for children to construct varying images in their mind.[150]

In the episode with Rita, we see the powerful influence Disney's narrative and images have on her thinking and the obstacles they cause when she tries to create her own narrative. We also see how Springhill as an intentional community provides space for Rita to stretch her thinking and move beyond passive consumption and into an active agent in producing her own stories. This was certainly not an isolated case.

In the Magnolia Room, five year-old Lila is in the habit of insisting that she is a "princess," a situation that creates problems for the other children in the class. Nanette and Sally Jo (the two Magnolia room teachers) decide to address this problem as part of their ongoing project work and start an inquiry with the children around the question, "What does it mean to be a princess?"

Investigations and projects at Springhill are shared and discussed throughout the year with the faculty for support. During the October 5, 2009, faculty meeting, Nanette and Sally Jo discuss their princess project with the group. They share some of the

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[150] The following exchange highlights the children's attachment to Cinderella and its connection to desire of a materialistic good as the value: Rita and Abigail begin to draw on the chalkboard and Rita comments, "I remember when Cinderella was sick." Adelina responds, "I like Cinderella because I have a beautiful Cinderella dress." Ruby excitedly says, "I do too!" and then adds, "Let's pretend her head was cut off." Adelina: "Yeah." Rita: "I'm going to draw Cinderella wearing a beautiful necklace." Adelina: "Me too." Rita: "Let's not play in here anymore, I'm tired."

questions that they posed to the children, such as "What do you know about someone by looking at them?" and "What are princesses?" as well as some of the children's responses (e.g., princesses "can't be dark skinned" or "wear glasses").

As the meeting continues, Nanette and Sally Jo discuss ways that they tried to challenge stereotypical assumptions about what defines a princess. They describe the children's drawings of princesses (which were basically versions of the Disney princesses) and explain how they brought in various books about nontraditional princesses and photos of real princesses in different parts of the world to build more complex understandings of "princess."

Nanette and Sally Jo tell the faculty how part of their teacher inquiry is to explore the question, "Why is it important for Lila to be a princess?" They want to explore Lila's possible reasons and feelings behind the motivation, as well as their desire to value those feelings as legitimate. They discuss some background information and possible motivations: Lila's mom and dad call her their princess. She has a book "My Very Own Fairy Tale," in which she is the princess protagonist. Lila's previous teachers mention that she has been a "princess" for several years. (Notice how Springhill teachers know all the children, not just the students in their room.)

Nanette and Sally Jo explain that they asked the children why they don't like Lila saying she's a princess and the children responded "because it's not true." They discuss the fact that Madison, biologically a male, dresses like and identifies herself as a girl, a

pronouncement completely accepted by the other Magnolia children. Yet, when Lila insists that she is a princess, the Magnolia children reject this as "not true."[151]

The teachers discuss Rodari's (1993/1996) book, *Grammar of Fantasy: An Introduction to the Art of Inventing Stories* and how some of it relates to strategies that may be effective in approaching the princess topic in curricula development. (Springhill teachers regularly seek outside resources for their topics of inquiry.)

The following vignette, from my field notes, is an example of Lila's interest in being a princess, her classmate's strong reactions, and the teachers, in this case Sally Jo, attempts to negotiate a shared understanding.

Several children and Sally Jo are sitting on the snack blanket eating their snack and talking to each other. Lila sits with them and pretends to eat "a poisonous almond and die."

Lizzy and Ashley say to Lila: "Princesses stink, princesses are dumb. Princesses are dumb as toast."

Lizzy adds: "We hate princesses."

Lila: "Well, I like giants and I like princesses." (Note how, perhaps, Lila is connecting the concepts of princesses and giants to power.)

Sally Jo intervenes: "Lizzy what is something you really love?

Lizzy: "Babies."

Sally Jo: "Okay I'm gonna write it down." She continues asking the children about other things that they really love.

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[151] Perhaps, in part, for the children, Madison *being* a girl is disconnected from issues of status and power in the classroom. Acknowledging that Madison is a girl does not take power or status away from anyone else. Claiming you are a princess, however, *is* a claim to status and power.

Ashley responds: "Doggies and puppies."

Daisy: "Little chihuahas."

Sally Jo: "Rita, what's something you really love?"

Rita: "Toads."

Lila: "Hey guys you know what I really love is animals and nature…and also princesses."

Lizzy in a teasing voice: "Lila hates princesses!" She repeats this again.

Sally Jo ignores Lizzy and says: "Ashley loves dogs and puppies. Is it okay she loves puppies?"

The children say "yes."

Sally Jo: "Is it okay with you Lila that she loves puppies?"

Lila says: "Yes."

Sally Jo: "Is it okay with you Lizzy and Daisy?"

They both respond "yes."

Lizzy then repeats again: "Lila hates princesses."

Sally Jo in a very nonjudgmental, calm tone says: "Stop for a minute, we're not talking about what we hate right now, Lizzy we'll get to what we hate in just a minute." (The teacher in this case may be missing part of the children's legitimate grievance against Lila's claims that she is a princess. At some level, the children seem to understand that when Lila claims to be a princess, she may also be laying claim to the power, privilege, and status that goes along with this special title. In a democratic community, where presumably everyone has an equal share of power, when Lila calls herself a princess, she perhaps makes the other children feel like she is trying to get more

than her fair share of power, which puts the other children into the unappealing role of second-class citizens. Furthermore, this consideration suggests a socio-political deconstruction of princess beyond just a gender deconstruction.)

Sally Jo: "Everybody agrees that it's okay for Daisy to love chihuahas?" Is it okay Rita likes frogs?"

Lila: "It's okay with me."

Ashley and Lizzy: "No."

Lizzy adds: "Well I guess I like turtles but not frogs.

Sally Jo: "Is it okay that Lila likes animals, nature and princesses?"

They respond yes and then Sally Jo asks them: "If you had to choose chocolate or strawberry which would you choose?"

All of the children answer "chocolate."

Sally Jo asks them: "Do you like the sun or moon?"

Lila answers, "The moon because it lights up the night and sometimes you can have bonfires under it and play."

Rita answers: "Moon because you can have campfires and the moon can make it more lighted."

Sally Jo says: "So you both have something in common." (Perhaps, when Sally Jo tries reframing the issue, I wonder if she is actually in some ways suppressing some of the deeper underlying issues. The issue may not be simply likes and dislikes in the sense of trivial preferences. It's perhaps more about democratic equality and privileged status. The teachers have on the one hand cultivated children's view of themselves as co-equal citizens in the community. But on the other hand, when those children stand up for their

rights and resist the claims of one child to be above the others, the teachers may inadvertently focus on protecting the princess' rights and overlook the rights of the citizenry they have worked hard to build.)

Lizzy says she likes the moon "because you can have bonfires, princesses, play, and take a rocket ship up to the moon."

Stella says the "sun because it lights up the day and you can play on the playground and have walks around the block."

Daisy says the moon because: "you get to play with glow sticks and then I like if you have a yellow one, then you can pretend it is a firefly and follow it."

The discussion of likes and dislikes continues for several minutes. When they finish snack they decide to play with small hoops and carpet squares on the floor. Their play scenario seems to be inspired by their previous conversation. The children create a game that becomes "princess doggies, doggie princesses."

Sally Jo: "I see you combined some of your likes."

Later in circle Sally Jo explains to the rest of the class how the children figured out a way how to negotiate a play scenario with children's different likes and dislikes.

Through my observations at Springhill, Disney Princesses and other marketing images seem to have influenced children in many significant ways (e.g., children's identity, narrative, creativity, critical thinking, play, and the way they negotiate friendships). In the example with Rita, she gets stuck with strong preconceived images and scripted storylines that challenge her ability to create her own narrative. In Lila's case, being a princess seems to be a significant part of her identity, causing exclusion from other children. And a significant portion of Kate, Grace, and Lila's play, especially

towards the end of the school year, involved pretending to be "beautiful princesses" as well as making and wearing "beautiful" things (as discussed in the previous vignette, "Can Boys Be Beautiful?"). Kate, Grace, and Lila seem to use materialistic goods—sparkly pink shoes—to negotiate and solidify their friendship (see chapter 9, "Closing Circle Conflict: I don't They Want to Play with Me!").

Again these dynamics seem to reflect some of my own recent experiences working with children. During my years teaching in the 1990s, I don't recall any of the children in my class pretending to be princesses. However, in recent years that has changed quite dramatically. In 2009, when I was teaching two-year-olds, the two girls in my class both had multiple Disney princess dresses (with the corporate logo strategically sealed to the front of the dress). Tiaras, heels, picture books, and other paraphernalia were also part of the product line. In 2010, I babysat a three-year-old girl, Melanie, for several months, and she was also consumed by the Disney princesses. She had most of the Disney princess DVDs (e.g., "Little Mermaid," "Beauty and the Beast," "Cinderella") and had watched all of them numerous times. The majority of time that we played, Melanie would put on one of her Disney princess outfits, ask me read her one of the Disney stories, and then re-enact the Disney story in dramatic play. Her favorites were Sleeping Beauty and Cinderella. We repeated this play often and the re-enactments didn't vary much. Because of her interest in these fairly tales, after several weeks, I decided to bring some alternative, non-Disney versions of the stories that I thought she may enjoy. I brought several versions of Cinderella (including an Irish and African version), another version of Rumpelstiltskin (a version with basically the same storyline as Disney's but with different illustrations), and Robert Munsch's "Paper Bag Princess"

(a story where the *princess* saves the prince.) She almost immediately rejected each of these books and quite quickly and adamantly denied the legitimacy (to the point of being upset) of the stories and their variations, as simply "not right" and outright "wrong." This highlights some of the challenges of princess play and its relation to power, the ways in which it may be antithetical to the teaching of democratic equality and citizenship in our schools, and the importance of making the issue visible to parents.

Interestingly, this November 2010, I was helping my niece (a five-year-old in kindergarten) write her Christmas list. While she was writing down some items, she expressed to me that she does not want *any* "princess toys" for Christmas. Several years ago, she loved dressing up in "princess" dresses. This year, however, it was the only thing she specifically said she did not want. Reflecting on this, I wondered if she has, at five, outgrown this "product." In terms of "age compression" [marketer's term for the KGOY (keep getting older younger) phenomenon] where there are infant toys and board books with princesses, she is ready for the next consumer product marketed towards her age. This year it happens to be the Zhu Zhu pets, an electronic toy which seems to offer even less room for creative play or lasting interest.[152]

Springhill Culture Gets Equal Footing with Popular Culture

After reviewing my photos and video-clips, I noticed an evolving trend in the types of shirts the children were wearing to school. In the beginning of the year children wore many shirts with prominent corporate logos and cartoon characters featured (Batman, Spiderman). Yet as the year progressed, I observed (and the children showed

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[152] Perhaps certain children's consumer products or toys are being created with a limited lifespan in an attempt for *planned obsolescence*, with the goal being to increase both the desire to make new purchases and the amount of money spent by the child consumer.

me with excitement) that they were wearing shirts that seemed to be related to their own classroom projects and interests (e.g., Stella wore a "Mr. Bones" t-shirt while they were taking an interest in him; Kate wore a dinosaur shirt while they were reading books about dinosaurs and dragons; Larry wore several robot shirts; and Madison wore a horse shirt). Are the interests developed in the classroom culture superseding the pop culture and corporate marketing influence of batman, superman, etc? Or is there at least a leveling or equalizing of the influence of classroom culture with popular culture? Perhaps the benefits of following children's interests and pursuits and developing them into meaningful projects also serves as a powerful antidote to consumer culture and mass media's influence.

CHAPTER 11

CONCLUSIONS: SPRINGHILL AS A DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITY WITH IMPLICATIONS, INSPIRATIONS, AND CHALLENGES FOR OTHER SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

Emerging Themes Revisited

In chapters 4-10 of this dissertation, I have discussed a number of overlapping and interconnected themes which emerged during my study of the Springhill School and which reflect the pedagogical, curricular, and structural qualities that support their democratic culture. I begin this concluding chapter with a brief overview of those themes:

- *The importance of a cultural foundation of respect, trust, and care among all community members*

Many of the teachers and parents described being drawn to the Springhill community specifically because of the school's deep respect and care for children. Springhill teachers knew the children intimately, were highly attuned to the children's feelings, and paid close attention to significant happenings in the lives of the children. For example: 1) teachers connected stories and classroom experiences to children's lives outside the classroom (e.g., initiating the summer memories project in chapter 4, sharing home journals in chapter 6, incorporating Zach's love of "Arfie" and "Scat the Cat" into small group experiences in chapter 9, reading a book about grandmothers and connecting the book to Larry's recent trip to his grandma's house in chapter 4); 2) teachers used their awareness of significant events at home to help children with challenges at school (e.g.,

taking into account the fact that Stella's parents are out of town and responding to

Stella's "hiding out" under the table with "you must really miss your mommy and

daddy," as described chapter 8); and 3) teachers respected children (e.g., respecting and

validating children's feelings regardless of how outlandish those feelings may seem from

an adult perspective, and providing emotional support to those children, as described in

chapter 9; taking children's ideas, interests, and investigations seriously and creating an

environment that supports their pursuits, as described in chapters 5 and 6; building trust

by following through on stated plans and agendas, as described in chapters 4 and 5; and

showing appropriate forms of physical affection, as described in chapter 4).

In a similar fashion, and arguably as a result of being part of this community,

Springhill children themselves demonstrated high levels of care and respect for their

friends. To mention just a few examples, recall in chapter 8 when Nora (in the toddler

classroom) is afraid to climb up the hill, how her friends rushed to her aid and came up

with many creative problem-solving ideas to help her (e.g., push her up, hold her hand,

use a stick, bamboo pole, or rope); how Matthew regularly helped his classmates with

coats and shoes in chapter 4; how Grace helped Abigail and Stella negotiate a conflict

over the magnets in chapter 8; how Evelyn helped Ethan clean the crayon marks off the

stool in chapter 4; and how several children eagerly helped Nicole clean up the

playground when she asked for help in chapter 4. Several parents also mentioned to me

that "Springhill kids" had a reputation for being pro-social when they move on to other

schools.

Adults in the Springhill community reflected respect, trust, and care in many

ways. For example, Mary and Lisa created a safe and trusting environment where

teachers and parents felt safe to express their feelings and vent their frustrations around various issues (e.g., the gun debate in chapter 7 and the open door policy in chapter 8). Mary and Lisa also set up many systems and events (e.g., parent coffees and dialogues, weekly faculty meetings, end-of-the-year picnics, portfolio sharing, and a family campout in chapter 6) to sustain social connections, trust, and care.

- *Using responsive and intentional teaching practices and making learning processes visible through diverse forms of discourse and documentation*

As an intentional and responsive community, the Springhill faculty consistently engaged in ongoing dialogue, reflection, and action about their pedagogical and curricular approaches (see chapter 5). When teachers made their (and the children's) thinking and learning processes visible, they invited all community members to be collaborators alongside them, thus deepening their inquiry-based work. This type of teaching is the antithesis of the entropy-creating, path-of-least-resistance type of practice that is evident in many early childhood programs in the U.S.

Critical theorist Paulo Freire (1970/2007) argues that an education for "authentic liberation—the process of humanization—is not another deposit to be made in men. Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women of their world in order to transform it." He argues that reflection without action is just empty verbalism and that for true dialogue and praxis to take place, you must act and reflect on the world. Springhill's culture certainly reflected this type of praxis.

The Springhill faculty continuously strove to improve their school and transform it in ways that support their founding values and mission. For instance, through my interviews and a review of their past documentation (starting in 2002), it became evident

that Springhill faculty members refined their ideas and continued to evolve their program in ever more intentional and responsive ways (e.g., expanded room size, decreased numbers of children per classroom, improved documentation and portfolios.)

In my interviews, many of the parents expressed their appreciation for the teachers' consistently high level of intentionality and responsiveness. For example, Sue, a parent at Springhill, explains what stands out to her about Springhill teachers:

I think just how thoughtful they are about *everything*, you know, when we were having the whole gun debate they were coming at it from a perspective of reading the literature, understanding the literature, experience, classical experience...You sort of get the feeling that they don't do anything without really thinking about it…which I could imagine, if you worked there, could be paralyzing sometimes. But the effect of it is that everything's *really intentional* and everything feels really well thought out and everything feels like it's got the full weight of experience and research and literature and it's a smart preschool…The stereotype is "go teach preschool when you can't get another job and you're not qualified to do anything else" and…that's totally not Springhill. It's people who *really* want to be there, who really want to think about kids, who think about learning. It's a much higher level caliber of learning than I think is usually associated with preschool and I think people think of preschool as play and learning your ABC's and…they're really teaching these kids critical thinking, they're teaching the shy kids how to be more assertive. They're teaching the assertive kids to be more kind. They're teaching social skills. They're teaching…big stuff that a lot of adults…have yet to learn.

Not only did teachers practice and model this approach to learning, but they also created a space for children to develop these critical habits of dialogue, reflection, and action as they engaged in the learning process. For example, recall how children actively pursued their own agendas and through the process of reflection and action gained deeper levels of understanding, as described in chapter 5 (e.g., Orson continued to refine his camera creation after reflecting on his past work; Duke drew his ideas about a mouse x-ray and shared his thinking with the group, and in the process both he and his friends gained a deeper understanding; Oscar reflected on a photo he took of his "dogs watching t.v." clay creation and discovered further work that needed to be done on it, therefore deciding to revisit his work and to add the missing elements). Clearly, children at Springhill did not sit around waiting to have information "deposited" into their heads, but instead actively constructed knowledge.

- *Shared decision-making, power and control among all community members*

Important curricular, pedagogical and structural decisions were shared with all community members. Parents were involved in curricular decisions (e.g., parents developed the "lighting the labyrinth" project to support children's interest in light and dark, as described in chapter 7 and shared ideas and materials for the children's photography project, such as x-rays and old cameras, as described in chapter 5). Parents were also included in structural decisions (e.g., the school's board consists of current and former parents, as discussed in chapter 7 and in a later section of this chapter). Lisa and Mary held parent meetings on important school issues to open those issues up for discussion and to gain parental input.

Teachers also had much freedom and input in decisions made at Springhill (e.g., the freedom to choose topics for research, create their curriculum, and arrange their classroom environments as they saw fit in chapter 5; the freedom to contribute to the agenda and topics discussed at faculty meetings in chapter 9).

Children also had significant power over and influence upon decision-making at school. For example, children were free to pursue their own investigations and play scenarios (e.g., robots in chapter 4, "dead kitty play" in chapter 9); children participated in decorating the classroom walls, arranged classroom materials, and displayed documentation (in chapter 6); children negotiated classroom rules (e.g., a group of children discontented with a classroom rule that only two children were allowed at the water table re-negotiated new terms to allow three children instead, as described in chapter 8); children created classroom rituals (e.g., the mulch chimes in chapter 9); and children had significant control over their daily schedules (e.g., they could go to different areas of the school and eat or not eat snack when they so chose, as described in chapters 4 and 6); and children were allowed to express or "unload" their feelings when needed (chapter 9).

- *Strong emphasis upon building social relationships and learning collaboratively with each other*

As discussed in detail in chapters 7 and 9, relationship-building and learning through social collaborations were at the heart of the Springhill program. Recall the many ways that teachers worked to bring all children into the social life of the community (e.g., Zach's story), and how they supported children as they figured out effective ways of communicating, problem-solving, and handling conflicts in pro-social

ways (e.g., Lila, Kate, and Grace's story). The same emphasis on building connections

and working collaboratively held true for the parents (e.g., launch meetings and parent

circles described in chapter 6) and the Springhill faculty (e.g., co-teaching, collaborative

planning, participating in faculty meetings, sharing documentation, and engaging in

dialogue).

- *Narrative as a critical tool for making meaningful connections and building memory and identity*

Springhill teachers and administrators used various forms of narrative as a critical

tool to help make meaningful connections and identity-shaping memories. According to

Wegner's (1986) research on "transactive memory," group members in close

relationships with meaningful shared history have much stronger communal memories

than strictly individual ones. Springhill faculty regularly connected children's daily

experiences with past experiences (e.g., the sewing project in chapter 4), past project

threads, classroom memories, and personal home-school connections. Teachers also used

narratives (e.g., portfolios and documentation) as part of their assessment of children's

growth and development.[153] As written on their "Kindergarten Assessment Report:"

> Teachers prepare a narrative consolidating their perceptions, reflections, and
>
> understanding of the student's growth. Our point of departure is that all children
>
> are capable and able to learn. We regard children as individuals with a variety of
>
> intelligences. We observe children collaborating and expressing themselves each

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[153] The Springhill faculty describes "assessment" as a tool "to promote reflection and feedback during the learning process, permitting adjustment by both the student and the teacher" and as an "active and dynamic element" that contributes to a "shared understanding between teachers, students, and parents." They distinguish this from an "evaluation" which is "carried out at the end of the process to judge and grade the student's work." (Springhill document, "2008-2009 Kindergarten Assessment Report)

day. We document our observations and reflect on the group and the individual

child. We aspire to graduate children who are able to translate into any context

their understanding of how to learn, how to pursue knowledge in depth, and how

to inquire for greater understanding—all within a social milieu. This report aims

to be a useful measure of progress toward this goal.

In a democratic community, the co-construction of meaning requires that past

experiences be made available to children as a resource for present narratives, learning,

and creativity. Child-accessible documentation, journals, and portfolios are important

tools in this process.

Springhill teachers were also intentional about stretching children's narratives

when they seemed to be scripted, corporate, or consumer constructions. For example,

recall how Sophie supported Zach to expand his "Thomas the train" narrative by asking

him many open-ended questions in chapter 9. Or, recall how Alice encouraged Rita to

stretch her thinking when she got stuck retelling Disney versions of stories instead of

creating her own version in chapter 10.

- *Slowing down the learning process, both for children and adults*

Springhill curriculum, routines, and school structure were not ruled by rigid

increments of time or pressure to conform to teaching specific objectives at specific times

of the day. Instead, teachers were responsive to the daily rhythms of the children, and

understood that for authentic, in-depth learning to happen, teaching must be slowed down

to accommodate the non-linear thinking process of children *and* adults and avoid a

fixation on discrete skills or "standards" to be taught. Some examples: recall in chapter 4

how Sophie did not rush Walter's bridge building, but instead provided space for him to

save his work and continue working on it for several days, in the process allowing his work to achieve greater complexity and richness. Or recall in chapter 8 how Matthew and Duke broke one of the classroom blocks; while it may have been easier for the Sophie to just fix the block herself, she instead acknowledged the right of the children to solve the problem themselves, understanding also that a slowed down process offers invaluable lessons on responsibility and the care of materials. Or in chapter 5, when Larry and Oscar were exploring how a camera works, Sophie did not quickly give the children "the facts" about the camera. Instead, she allowed the children time to explore and discover themselves the way a camera works (an exploration lasting almost 2 hours). The patient process permitted Larry and Oscar to make many discoveries about the camera, including one (e.g., the music button) of which Sophie was unaware. Teachers also realized that communicating, building connections with friends, and working through conflict takes time and cannot be rushed for arbitrary reasons. For example, recall in chapter 9 when Kate was upset and in conflict with Lila and Grace. Sophie did not impose a solution but took time to allow them to work it out themselves.

This practice of slowing down stands in contrast to the detrimental effects that rigid time schedules can have on children's learning and emotional well-being, as suggested in Wien's (1997) study. Wien discovered that when teachers organize time as tightly scripted production schedules, several adverse consequences result, including: 1) arbitrary time dominated as the determinant of when work is done, 2) time became a scarce resource, 3) the strict organization of time resulted in the loss of program content and quality for children, and 4) the rigid time schedule reduced the quality of teacher interactions with children.

- *Upholding a strong image of both children and adults as powerful, capable and socially connected problem-solvers and fellow citizens worthy of equal voice and rights in the community*

In Corsaro's (2003) ethnographic cross-cultural study of children's peer cultures, he argues that both negative stereotyping and discrimination of children occurs in the U.S. because "children are not seen as full members of society—as citizens with basic rights and privileges. Instead, the United States children are seen as extensions of their parent or parents who are responsible for them" (p. 199). However, the Springhill faculty's image of the child stood in sharp contrast to this deficit-based, cultural norm and rejected this type of stereotyping and discrimination against children. At Springhill, Alice explained (personal communication, December 16, 2009, lines 77-81), "…the difference between the kind of teachers that are here…and other kinds of teachers is just the image of the child… I see children as people who are…other human beings who have their own ideas and can communicate and it's very much a partnership." Sophie also expressed this sentiment, when she explained (as discussed in chapter 8):

> The thing that I noticed about Springhill from the very first time I encountered it was that the youngest child was valued as much as the older child…I just remember…being struck by how Nicole was talking to the youngest children, that their voice was important and I think that is what is important about a democratic community, that the most vulnerable person, the most vulnerable member of the community is as important as the most powerful. (Personal communication, November 3, 2009, lines 414-423)

In democratic environments, children are respected and valued as fellow citizens worthy of rights within their community. Yet, as Hall and Rudkin (2011, p. 48) describe it,

> [C]hildren's rights cannot flourish in puddles of provision or in prisons of protection. It requires a confluence of love and respect. The philosopher David Hawkins (1997) held that "respect resembles love in its implicit aim of furtherance, but love without respect can blind and bind. Love is private and unbidden, whereas respect is implicit in all moral relations with other" (p. 350).

Treating all community members, including children as fellow human beings worthy of respect and capable problem-solvers, was a strongly-held, shared value among the Springhill faculty and an important factor in building solidarity in their community.

- *Social responsibility based upon the interdependence of self and others*

The educators of Reggio often use the expression, "Il cho siamo" (meaning, "I am who we are"). A similar guiding value was prevalent throughout Springhill's program. The Springhill faculty embraced the idea that in a democratic community, people take care of each other in many different ways. Recall the many examples discussed in chapter 8, how children shared responsibility in caring for their classroom and their classmates. For instance: Matthew and Duke fixed the broken block; Ashley and Mel helped Lila make the clown hat; children helped water the plants and feed the worms; when a child pushed the log down the hill, the whole class helps figured out how to get the log back up the hill.

- *A premium is placed on the values of pleasure, happiness, and levity*

Throughout this dissertation I shared several stories of children, teachers, and parents experiencing pleasure, excitement, humor, and silliness as they participated in the

daily life of the community. Recall in chapter 4, the silly and imaginative stories and jokes which the children took great pleasure in sharing with one another during snack time (e.g., "an elephant sat on my mommy's car," "my lunch box is on the ceiling," "I'm zero years old!"); in chapter 4, the fun and boisterous "stool drumming" activities that extended for quite some time; in chapter 6, the joy children felt when they spotted the "Springhill dragon;" in chapter 7, the delight and surprise in seeing the "un-bee-wee-vable" lighting of the labyrinth, and the shared pleasure they experienced alongside their teachers (e.g., in chapter 10, Terra played and laughed along with Dave when he jokes about going to school on "a choo-choo"). Another important aspect of pleasure is the act of being totally immersed in an activity and temporarily losing oneself in the moment (Grace & Tobin, 1997). Children's sustained engagement in developing and testing out their theories oftentimes resulted in this type of pleasure (e.g., in chapter 5, Larry and Oscar's explorations of the camera).

The Springhill faculty seemed to understand the importance of creating opportunities for children to fulfill their desires.[154] This held true for the adults as well. For example, Mary seemed to be particularly adept at adding some humor to faculty meetings, in particular when discussions seemed to need a little levity.

In contrast to Springhill's holistic inclusion of pleasure and silliness in their curriculum, an openness to pleasure and desire is largely missing (and oftentimes

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[154] It should be noted that, although there is a "premium on pleasure," there are many situations in which Springhill teachers encourage children to feel the full weight of a situation (especially during conflict negotiations, perspective-taking, and empathy-building), expect children to treat their investigations as serious work, and understand that challenges and struggles are often just as important as solutions that are easily reached. Arguably, reaching a solution to a problem with which one has had to struggle leads to a higher level of satisfaction and pleasure than one in which the solution is easily found.

suppressed) within many U.S. early childhood institutions. Grace and Tobin (1997) in

"Making a Place for Pleasure in Early Childhood Education," makes the case that many

early childhood classrooms are set up in ways that resemble feudal Europe, when the

nobility was well known for fearing both the anger *and* pleasures of the "shared social

body," that is, the uncensored expression of the desires of the masses. Grace and Tobin

argue that pleasure for its own sake—for the sake of enjoyment and nothing more---is

rarely valued as an end in itself. Instead, the discourse that surrounds the phrase "learning

should be fun" focuses on fun as a strategy for children's cognitive development.

Springhill provided a very good example of a democratic community where everyone

enjoyed the right to pursue happiness for its own sake.

In a revealing part of my interview with Springhill director Mary, I asked her to

share some of her favorite childhood memories. She responded with the following story:

There are a couple that come to mind, [Laughs] but probably [my] favorite is the

story of… the day my mother cracked an egg on my brother's head. Which

[Laughs] started in our kitchen and my brother was teasing me. My brother was

older, by four years, and he was teasing me by holding an egg over my head. My

mother was baking and he was pretending he was gonna crack it on my head. And

so, then my mother said, "OK, Chuck. Give me the egg." So she held out her hand

very firmly and he puts the egg, he sort of saw it and he puts the egg in her hand,

and so then he turns around to go away and she just sort of looks at me and smiles

and then she popped it right on his head and it cracked right on his head. [Laughs]

So then, he grabs an egg and she runs. And so what I remember is just-- I was the

littlest, but I just remember chasing them around the yard as my brother chased

my mother around the yard with an egg. [Laughs] So there was a fair amount of

hilarity in our household and that's evocative of it. (Personal communication,

November 17, 2009, lines 4-16)

The fact that after many decades this story is the one that sticks out in Mary's mind is

significant. In the story we see her mom taking a teasing situation that could have

resulted in tears or shaming, and turns it into a lasting memory of hilarity and joy. Her

mom breaks the traditional family hierarchy and her role as "mother" to allow her son to

chase her around with an egg.

For the purposes of contrast, I will share a story from an early childhood educator

friend of mine who professionally writes music curricula and songs for young children.

Curiously enough, this story also features eggs, but (as we will see) has a very different

outcome. As he describes it, as part of his job, he once wrote an egg song with the

following lyrics:

My mommy got some eggs today, she bought them at the store.

I asked her may I crack them please? She said "yes, I need four."

I cracked one on the table. I cracked one on the chair. I cracked one on my elbow

and I cracked one in my hair.

And when she saw the ooey-gooey, eggy on the floor, (long pause with icky facial

expressions)

My…. mommy got some eggs today, she bought them at the store.

Crack!

He submitted the song to his employer who records songs for children. His employer

responded that, while he liked the melody of the song, he was hesitant about the lyrics

and wanted to check with his early childhood advisory circle on whether the lyrics were "child appropriate." Within a few days, my friend was told that the group feared that too many children would take the lyrics too literally and would start cracking eggs all over the house. When I heard this story, it struck me that these adults were censoring out the joy, imagination, and silliness from children's songs largely because they had a deficit model of children. The idea that children would take this song literally begins with the assumption that children are incapable of distinguishing between transgressive humor and customary behavior, and are somehow imprisoned in a stimulus-response pattern vis-a-vis any imaginative material to which they are exposed. From my perspective, the egg song is funny for children not because it describes a plan of action, but because it imagines a different, silly world where cracking eggs all over the place is just fine. It seems that stripping people of their rights to engage in pleasurable, silly and even transgressive imaginings should surely be challenged in environments that strive to be democratic.

- *Commitment to freedom (physical, emotional, social, intellectual) and foundations of social equality and justice*

Springhill teachers regularly cultivated the skills and dispositions in children necessary for later participation/involvement in social justice issues (building social justice foundations akin to providing certain prerequisite literacy skills needed for later reading). For example, Springhill teachers supported children in their growth as active agents in the participation of their community (e.g., child-created stop-signs, writing a letter to parents to please pack popcorn in lunch); included children in decision-making as fellow citizens of the class; cultivated their negotiation and communication skills;

developed their ability to see situations from multiple perspectives and points of view (e.g., developing their compassion and empathy for other people's situations); created a space where individual differences are protected, included, accepted, negotiated and oftentimes embraced (e.g., recall Zach's story in chapter 9); and developed in children a sense of responsibility for themselves and others (e.g., shared use and responsibility for classroom materials). All of these dispositions and skills were supported in a space where the expectation was that children would treat other children and adults with respect, where children had the freedom to take the initiative to bring up classroom or community-driven, social justice issues relating to equity and fairness (e.g., an older group of Springhill children protested a teacher killing a poisonous snake found on the playground), and where they felt safe to express dissenting perspectives (e.g., children questioning the fairness of the water table and renegotiating the rule).

In addition, when real-life, social equality and justice issues (e.g., stereotypes and prejudices) arose in the daily life of the classroom, Springhill teachers used those events as starting points for discussions and projects that help children uncover some of the feelings and thinking behind their actions and/or assumptions. For example, as described in chapter 10, when a group of girls created a "No Boys Allowed" sign around their block structure, the boys angrily protested. Consequently, the teachers used the conflict as a catalyst to discuss (and deconstruct) children's thinking and to support them as they developed more nuanced and complex social understandings. As a result of their discussions, the children negotiated a new sign titled, "Nobody Allowed Who Knocks Things Down."

Interrelationships of Themes

The above overlapping themes flowed throughout the Springhill culture and manifested themselves throughout the stories discussed in the last 7 chapters of my dissertation. Much like the leitmotifs found in many operas, these themes (which emerged throughout my data analysis) recurred throughout the Springhill narrative, reflecting a rich, multi-layered *context* that was remarkably intentional in character. A leitmotif, which literally means a "guiding motif," is a recurring theme associated with an idea, event, person, or place that emerges throughout a narrative. When leitmotifs of an opera are brought together (e.g., in harmony or orchestration) they create a unified whole. As leitmotifs created an even richer sound when played together, so too did the themes of Springhill become even stronger as they were woven together.

Similar to the leitmotifs, the emerging themes that run through the Springhill community manifested themselves in different ways, but always retained their essential identity and provided a unifying coherence to the program. Consider, for instance, the following three examples of a theme like *respect,* a value that undergirded all aspects of the school and affected the ways in which various situations are approached. First, Springhill's faculty had developed policies that were intentionally put in place to support their mission of respect for children. In their document titled, "Some Thoughts on Confidentiality at Springhill at Stonewood: Particular Thoughts for Substitutes," they described respectful ways to talk about children's work and/or behaviors when they were nearby (Springhill Faculty, document):

> While the convention among teachers is to discuss the work at hand it is, again, important to include a child under discussion who is present. A particular

circumstance that challenges all of us is when a child says something or behaves in a way that seems very sweet or cute. While it may be difficult not to laugh we charge ourselves and you with refraining from laughter or comment because children may feel embarrassed, patronized, or demeaned by such a response.

This policy guideline for substitutes is one example of the ways in which faculty were intentional about developing provisions that protected children's fundamental right to be respected as fellow human beings and a specific approach teachers took to provide respect for children (and their feelings and ideas). Second, when an outside photographer came to take school photos, several teachers observed him being disrespectful to children (e.g., he used derogatory terms to refer to children and tried to have several girls put on lipstick). As a result, during the following faculty meeting, several teachers brought up the issue of children's right to be respected. They commented that the photographer did not reflect their cultural value of respecting children and discussed whether it would be appropriate to use him the following year. Third, as an avenue of respect, teachers intentionally documented and made visible to the community what was important to that particular group of children (e.g., their interests, questions, struggles, and passions), as opposed to merely documenting how children "measured up" on comparative developmental/skills-based checklists.

It should be emphasized that, much like a leitmotif, a theme like *respect* was *not* mutually exclusive/isolated. Instead, it retained its identity while in conjunction with other themes that had threads running throughout the program. In effect, each of these underlying values acts in harmony with the other themes, creating a more beautiful tapestry than if it were to stand alone. For example, Springhill teachers set up the

environment in a way that allowed children freedom to collaborate with other members of the community (e.g., allowing Abigail and Rita to join each other in their respective classrooms throughout the day, or letting children write letters when they want to go into the studio or another classroom) and freedom to follow their own lines of inquiry (e.g., making the "Brooklyn Bridge," photography project, and "Dance of the Pants"). In doing so, teachers were *intentional* about creating a space that both supports children's budding *social relationships* and *respectful* of children's right to do so. *Sharing* this type of *decision-making and power* with the children required teachers to have tremendous confidence and trust in children's capabilities (*strong image of the child).* As this example demonstrated, Springhill's interconnected themes worked in tandem to bolster one another and create a rich, intentional foundation for Springhill's preschool community.

While Springhill's democratic, nonhierarchical and nonlinear learning structures allowed multiple values and/or themes to freely complement and reinforce one another, traditional programs are often structured in ways that create competitive, mutually exclusive, hierarchical values. When values are largely linear, objective, and discrete, and when they are confined within a rigidly-structured schedule and environment where teachers are evaluated on specific behavioral skills and encouraged to use extrinsic motivators to "get children to learn," teachers are often put in the challenging position of having to choose certain valued goals over others. As a result, the creation of optimal learning environments where *all* values are respected becomes a virtual impossibility. For example, if the teachers (and/or children) are evaluated primarily on successfully learning the letters in the alphabet, this goal may override the teachers' valuing outdoor

exploration and free play. Of course, a problem like this is compounded when teachers are provided prepackaged curricula which they are expected to follow and which has them teach certain skills during specific times of the day. That type of system seems to create an unnecessary competition between values, given that children could in fact learn these skills in more authentic, meaningful ways. For example, let's say a group of children found a cricket in their classroom. Teachers could build these same "academic" skills (e.g., such as letter recognition) around the excitement and interest in the children's discovery. They could research its habitat, build it a home, make a sign for it, compare it to similar insects, read books about crickets, go on a bug hunt, and keep a journal of their observations. In this way, teachers do not have to sacrifice some values or goals for others, but instead can address multiple values simultaneously, allowing children to learn naturally through play, the telling of stories, and other meaningful activities and inquiries. In other words, a hierarchy of values creates unnecessary pedagogical trade-offs and quells children's innate curiosity and desire to learn.

Of course, the other side of the coin is that the democratic learning model, and the freedom that comes along with it, can make teachers feel as if they are constantly juggling the abundant possibilities, given the many choices and directions in which they could go with projects. To minimize this problem, Springhill has embedded individual teachers within a deeply collaborative system of administrative and collegial support.

History and Evolution of Springhill as an Exemplar Program

How were Springhill faculty and families able to form such an exemplary democratic learning community? What can be learned by this exploration of the program? And what are the challenges that may arise for other preschool communities as they strive to create their own democratic learning environments? I begin addressing

these questions by describing some of the history of Springhill, a story of how a seemingly ordinary group of teachers and administrators were able to create an extraordinary program that values the rich capabilities and uniqueness of children, teachers, and families. With childhoods that included playing on an island in Vermont; making a cat out of shells, seaweed, and clay collected from the shores of Maine; discovering ants in Zambia in a small mining town with children from all over the world; and living on a commune and joining a desegregated school in Arlington, Virginia—each of the Springhill faculty's life histories adds another layer of understanding to Springhill's unique school culture. The Springhill preschool was founded in 1972 and its core values remain steadfast. This was made possible, in part, by a group of committed women who came together in the 1990s and to this day continue to sustain the school's mission and support (and improve upon) their collaborative, caring, and intentional learning community.

In my interview with Lisa, the director of Springhill's preschool for the last 15 years, she explains that she first heard about the program from a book created by a group of Springhill parents (initially published in 1975) called "Richmond is for Children." After buying a copy in a children's bookstore she thought, "Wow! This is a place with real substance" and "a place that I'd like to know more about someday." Later, in the mid-1990s, she explains (personal communication, December 15, 2009, lines 59-70):

> So then, as [my husband and I] were approaching the point of having to make a
> decision for… the older of my two children, I had a friend whose daughter was a
> year older and was at Springhill. And it was in many ways a very illogical choice
> for me because I was working full time and it's the half-day program. But…on

the strength of my friend's experience decided to explore it and then *felt so pulled to it, so drawn to it,* that I sort of went through these machinations about, "How can I make this work!?" [Laughs] Part-time school, full-time schedule. As one of our recent parents said to me, "My life is a fat lady and Springhill's a bikini"…fitting my life into Springhill is really challenging. [Laughs] I *love* that analogy…So, once I really had some experience and a little bit of familiarity with the program, I just didn't want to go. I just got really sort of pulled into thinking about it. [I've] just gotta find a way to make this work.

Lisa's story (along with the parent analogy she shares of trying to fit her life into Springhill) resonates with what many parents and teachers expressed to me, that is, their strong desire and "pull" to be part of the community even when it doesn't fit easily with their daily life (e.g., schedule, cost, location). As a recent policy brief (Weber, 2011) indicated, two significant reasons parents select a child care center are cost and practical considerations (e.g., proximity to their home and/or work place and hours of operation). In contrast, Springhill parents and faculty seem to go out of their way to be part of this special community even though it can be more challenging to fit it into their life. This suggests that many of the parents and teachers who select Springhill are a unique subset of the population [Sophie, Alice, and Leanne also describe feeling "drawn" or "pulled" to Springhill as discussed below]. Lisa continues her story (lines 70-94),

And then, [Laughs] within the first month of our being there, the director announced that she was go[ing to] leave at the end of the year. And so I was dashed, you know, because I had a lot of respect for her and sort of really looked to her as a kind of sage educator and a person who would help me know my child

and know what to expect and how to support her. But then, happily, you know, we were able to hire another parent who had also been on the preschool faculty at an earlier time of her life. And she carried the program forward beautifully and then she needed to leave because of changes in her family circumstance. And then we hired a director who…was the first person to come into leadership of the program who had *not* had a relationship before, either as a parent or as a teacher and while her language about what she believed about children and how she had run programs in the past and what she would bring to us sounded very consistent with what, [and] how we saw ourselves, and what we wanted, in practice it ended up just being a little bit of a disconnect and then kind of a growing disconnect. And so, it was a critical time in the life of the school because the board had to come to terms with either keeping her as the director, but knowing that that might mean losing some of the foundations of the program or not renewing her but knowing that that would create some real-- if not crisis, some unhappiness and some difficulty within the school population. But, they made the brave decision *not* to renew her, just because they really felt like it was their duty to kind of protect the…founding mission of the school…Parents left and the director…It was not an amiable parting for awhile…I think schools face those moments and face them again and again. You know? Where you have to have a-- good leadership and a board that will do the hard work…make the hard choices sometimes.

Following the board's decision to terminate this director, Lisa took over as the new director and has remained at the school ever since. She explains (lines 95-108):

It's astonishing to me that over 37 years, I'm the fifth director. There have been five different locations. This [Stonewood campus] will be the sixth when we move over here. Really, *the founding vision has really stayed true*. And…our modeling of what we're learning from the Reggio educators has deepened our practice. But it's entirely consistent with what the founding parents set out in the first place. And it was a child-centered program with learning based in play and parents as an integral part of the experience, and parents and teachers as co-collaborators. We weren't using the terms co-constructors at that time. But that parent relationship and engagement with the program has always been really important. So, I think…I would say if we do nothing else as a school, the extent to which we can *reframe what people understand about the capabilities of young children and children in general*, that will have been our most important contribution. And I think we certainly see out of the preschool, that people understand and move to a different way of interacting with children that's more respectful of their abilities [and] their views.

As Lisa mentions, the board was faced with a critical decision in the life and evolution of the school. Should the board members terminate the director whose philosophy and practice does not mesh with the founding values of their program? Or should they take the path of least resistance and keep the director (to placate fears and avoid conflict)? Ultimately, the board's courage to terminate this director's employment seemed pivotal in continuing the program's evolution and sustaining their founding values and mission. This example suggests that Springhill isn't some charmed utopia that has somehow sidestepped conflict or does not have to make challenging decisions. Instead, this story

highlights the board's willingness to take on conflict and make hard decisions based first and foremost on how to best support the school's founding vision (e.g., collaboration among all community members, child-centered, co-constructed, play-based learning), even when those decisions have high short-term costs attached to them. Presumably, these types of challenging decisions are made possible, in part, because the board consists of current and former parents of the school who understand the program intimately and have emotional investment in the community's long-term well-being (as discussed in chapter 7).

For purposes of comparison, I share a personal experience working with a child care center that was run by a different type of board. This child care center served the employees of three large institutions (a private college, a federal agency, and hospital/health care conglomerate). Although the school was an independent entity, the board consisted of high-ranking officials of the three institutions that collectively owned the land and building for the child care center. The board members would repeatedly say that the purpose of the child care center was to provide childcare for employees as a benefit to entice and/or retain employees. The implication, therefore, was that worker productivity was the main purpose of the school, not the well-being and learning experience of the children. With neither much emotional investment nor an intimate understanding of how child care centers operate, and *with* an already overburdened schedule, board members still bore the responsibility of making all the large decisions impacting the program. Although they seemed well-intentioned, the board members often had little first-hand knowledge of the children or the daily operations of the school, and showed little motivation to improve their understanding or to research topics

concerning the education of young children. Clearly, when board members are not

remote overseers but instead active participants in the daily life of the school, they are

more likely to be invested in the relationships with their fellow community members

(*especially* the children), and a different type of school steward will emerge.

Another point of interest, the only Springhill director whose employment had to

be terminated is also the only director that did not have a prior *relationship* with the

school as a parent and/or teacher. As Lisa explains, during the interviewing process this

prospective director talked about having a similar philosophical frame as Springhill's.

Yet in actuality, she did not seem to fully embody or practice this type of approach,

bringing about a growing disconnect between the school's founding values and her own.

Shortly after Lisa became director, Mary joined Springhill's faculty and brought

with her both knowledge of and growing interest in the preschools of Reggio Emilia,

Italy. Prior to coming to Springhill, Mary was working at Virginia Commonwealth

University on some federal grants for the school's child care center. One day the director

incidentally mentioned the heavily publicized (and now famous) Newsweek article on the

Reggio Emilia municipal preschools, ranking Reggio as the world's best preschool.[155]

After reading the article, Mary went to a U.S. conference about the Reggio preschools

and soon after joined one of the first study tours in Reggio Emilia, Italy (arranged by US

Reggio Children) to observe and study the schools and their approaches firsthand.

Around this time at Springhill, Mary explains:

> Lisa had decided that she would continue as head of the school if she could get a
>
> curricular support [faculty member]. And she had only intended to take the job

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[155] "The Best Schools in the World" (Wingert & Kantrowitz, 1991)

for a year but decided with that support [she would stay]. So we had talked about some possibilities, and I had told her about Reggio and how excited I was about it. But in any case…Springhill decided that they would have this new job. They would fund a new position…and so I applied for the job and had an interview…I interviewed the week that I came back from Reggio. So I was just totally, totally jazzed. And then the parents conducted the interview with Lisa and then teachers. But I think I got them really jazzed. I mean, it was just so exciting, the stories that I could tell about what was going on. And it was for me, like, OK. This is what I've been envisioning but I just couldn't see it this far out. I couldn't see it 25 years in the distance and in the future and that's what Reggio provided, was that look, 25 years down the road. And so, I met with parents and met with teachers and was hired to do the job and didn't know at all what to do. [Laughs] But, *everybody was in it together* at that point. So that was, I think, just central. From what I understand of other programs, where one person was there, and then they're having to fight. But I just didn't have to fight at all. I mean everybody just knew Springhill was ready to go in this direction. And so, we just all jumped on board. …I think it was '95. And so, I interviewed in the spring. Yeah. And then… in the fall of '95, I came to work…There were only, I think, six faculty at that point. And…I think there were probably about 30 children or so. So it was not terribly large. And then,…the program developed slowly. (Personal communication, November 17, 2009, lines 166-192)

Mary's story highlights three pivotal influences that allow for Springhill's ongoing development and evolution as an exemplary program: 1) being able to see the long-term

possibilities by visiting Reggio's municipal schools; 2) slowing down the process to assure an in-depth as opposed to superficial implementation of their pedagogical approach; and, perhaps most importantly, 3) having a group of committed people supporting one another throughout their collaborative journey, as opposed to having to work as a lone "change-agent" in a larger school, against inhospitable odds, largely in social isolation.

Mary's experiences of other programs reflects my own experience visiting and working with other child care programs, where one or two teachers are "having to fight," wanting to try innovative approaches but not having fellow collaborators to support them and/or the freedom to actualize their ideas within the myriad structural and administrative constraints with which they are faced. Oftentimes, individual teachers reported to me their attempts to create democratic classrooms and the ensuing uphill battles they had to fight as a result of limited community understanding and/or support. Without having other teacher collaborators to navigate a bevy of school administrative and structural roadblocks, many individual teachers that want to create this type of community are prevented from reaching their full potential, resulting in both teacher dissatisfaction and frequent burnout.[156] Clearly, creating a network of support among people with shared commitments is a crucial factor with strong implications for other preschool programs who may want to create a more democratic community.

Besides Mary and Lisa, several other teachers joined the faculty around this time and still remain at the school today, including Sophie (the Gardenia room teacher) and

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[156] According to NACRRA's report "Child Care Workforce" (2011), the national annual turnover rate for child care teachers is between 25% and 40%. In addition, 33 percent of the remaining teachers reported that they planned to leave the field within 3 years.

Alice (the atelierista). Alice joined the Springhill faculty about a year after Mary and was also eager to join and support their mission. As she explains (personal communication, December 16, 2009, lines 53-59):

> So I worked in a day care center and then I started getting my teaching certificate 'cause I just had my BFA [Bachelor's in Fine Arts], I didn't get the education part of it and I was working through that and I read the "Hundred Languages of Children" and I was like "Holy Smoke" and then,… coincidentally, when I was almost finished with that book, [I] heard about Springhill from a friend. So I just knew I had to work here. So I was already working in all these after-school programs and camps and kind of piecing it together that way, but then I came here and so I've been here ever since.

Here we see Alice intentionally joining a program that shared similar perspectives about the possibilities in early education, specifically choosing Springhill because of its Reggio-inspired work. Her story also involved word of mouth and a bit of luck that she even heard about Springhill. Alice explains how it was a fellow colleague that initially told her about Springhill (lines 61-66):

> I was working at the children's museum and...[this colleague] had been a nanny for Lisa. So, I guess just in sort of following Lisa and maybe keeping up with her kids and babysitting sometimes…she heard about what Lisa was doing here [at Springhill]. And Mary came just a year before I did, so they had just started the Reggio thing. And she said, "Well, there's a school that's moving in that direction" and that was all I needed to hear. Thank goodness they hired me because I would have just come every day probably. [Laughs.]

Similar to Lisa's story, when Alice became aware of Springhill and their mission, she was determined to be a part of it.

Sophie, the Gardenia room teacher, has also been a part of the Springhill community for nearly 20 years, first as a parent and then as a teacher. She explains how she incidentally became aware of Springhill as a parent and has remained a part of the community ever since. Sophie explains (personal communication, November 03, 2009, lines 33-39):

> So I was a children's librarian. And I really enjoyed that. And then when I moved to this country [from Ireland] I worked as a librarian. But… then I had children and that was it. And my children went to Springhill. So…my older daughter was 4 when she started Springhill…and Nicole was one of her first teachers. So, there's a very long history with a lot of the staff here. I mean we've been here together, and Nicole's son was the same age as my daughter, and I actually had known Nicole before my daughter started at Springhill and our children were friends. So there is *this history of friendships and relationships that's very important I think.*

As Sophie points out, the teachers in this school community are closely tied together through many interconnected, long-lasting, and trusting relationships that were able to develop slowly and authentically. This prior history of friendships was the case for most of the teachers I interviewed. For example, Jess (Sophie's co-teacher), who has been at Springhill for over 10 years, had relationships with several faculty members prior to working at Springhill. Jess developed relationships with both Mary and Lisa from

living in the same neighborhood, and she knew both Alice and Nanette through their

connections with Richmond's artist's community.

After the birth of Sophie's first child, she and her husband took parenting classes

(the STEP program[157]) that were being held at Springhill. Sophie explains (lines 47-79):

So that was my first encounter with Springhill… and I did know Nicole at that

point, but she hadn't been thinking about Springhill [yet]. But, Nicole and I were

part of a group of mothers and we used to have play-dates and things like that and

one of the other people had an older daughter who was at Springhill and she just

really loved it and talked about it and…when I heard about it, I just couldn't

imagine going anywhere else…And at that point, Springhill was…influenced to a

certain degree by the British Infant school system.[158] So… that was something

that sort of resonated with me. And so I didn't really look anywhere else, it just

seemed like the place. And [at that point] Nicole was teaching there and all of my

friends were there and so that's sort of how we got to be part of Springhill. And

then we were very involved parents, my husband was on the board and…we were

very, very much part of the school and it was very small at that time. I think there

were probably just 35 children and we were in a different location. We were on

River Road and then we were part of the group that had to move. River Road

decided to start their own school to be a religious-based school, so we had to look

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[157] STEP stands for "Systematic Training for Effective Parenting" which are parenting workshops that are held over several sessions.
[158] The "British Infant Schools" emphasized holistic, experiential, child-centered approaches where learning occurs with lots of freedom of movement, play, individualized pacing, intrinsic motivations, individual and small group work, and multi-aged interactions. Many of the theoretical underpinnings and approaches have similarities to the Reggio philosophy.

for a new premises. So we were part of that group of parents who moved the

school here and built the fence and all that sort of stuff. And then it got to be time

for my younger daughter to leave Springhill, and I can remember just being

distraught that I was leaving the Springhill community and…I can remember

bumping into Lisa months later and she said, "Oh the parents have extended the

fence" you know because the playground had been too small and then we had

added kids. I got in my car and drove over here to look at it and I thought, "You

know there's something, I mean I just really am missing that community." And

also at that time Mary was…getting interested in Reggio and she made her first

trip to Reggio. She was working somewhere else, and she'd talked about making

this trip to Reggio and…I just was really intrigued by that, and you know, in the

library I was doing all this research and reading all these articles about it and it

just seemed like such an amazing philosophy…I just felt like this is really

something that I'd really like to be a part of. And then there was this position that

came up. So I switched careers…So that's how I got to be here and so that was

14, 15 years ago. But we started…really the week that my youngest daughter was

born. It was…around the first week of school. So that was 20 years ago. So

we've been part of the school for 20 years and that's the same for Mary and Lisa.

Several teachers mentioned in their interviews that once they experienced being

part of the Springhill community, they did not want to leave.[159] They felt emotionally

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[159] As a participant-observer, I myself felt a deep sense of warmth and caring within the community and experienced feelings of being part of an environment that I did not want to leave (akin to Mead's "going native"). There is a strong sense that Springhill is a safe place to make mistakes and that those around you will support you through the process. At the same time, their warmth, support, and kindness make you want to rise to the

invested in the school and had built many strong relationships there. As a result, many parents transitioned into the role of faculty member, even those that otherwise may not have gone into the teaching profession. In the following section, I will share Terra and Leanne's stories as two such examples.

Terra, although teaching only the last three years, has been a part of the Springhill community for the last seven years as a parent of three children who have all attended Springhill. Terra (personal communication, November 10, 2009, lines 10-25):

Well the background…is amusing because it's not a direct linear line to here.
I…professionally was a nurse and then went back to get a Master's in Public Health and did Program Management…and then had children. My focus had always been pediatrics and maternal child health, but it was health care. And so [I] had children. When my oldest, who is now 9, was 2, she came here and then the next 2 have, Orson is still here, and the other 2 girls are at the other campus and so it became…immediately apparent to me that I wanted to be doing *this* work. So having been here now for 7 years as a parent, last year I got serious about the potential because Orson was coming here and I had been involved with the board and with various pieces of the school, but always as a volunteer, and so last year they hired me as a social coach for a child that had some really special needs in the Gardenia room. So I spent last year in the Gardenia room which was fantastic because not only was I supporting him, but I had the experience of

occasion and always do your best in supporting the school's mission. I have never up to this point experienced being involved with a community that seemed so authentically to want everyone to succeed. Springhill teachers expressed to me that they were in a truly warm, loving and safe community, and as a result felt lucky to be part of such a great place to work.

Sophie and Jess which are 2 experienced teachers…And then, this year a position

[in the Rainbow room] opened up and that is how I am where I am…So, I don't

come to this with an education background, I come to it completely with health

care. Although, maternal/child [health care] is certainly helpful because of the

developmental stages that children go through…are important for both career

paths, so that's how I got here.

Terra's nonlinear path to teaching may not have happened if she had enrolled her children

in a different school environment. With the integral role that Springhill parents play as

co-collaborators in the preschool community, Terra's previous involvement as a parent

has many positive benefits for easing her transition into the role of teacher. These

benefits include: 1) a strong foundation of previously established relationships with

fellow community members; 2) firsthand experience and knowledge of the curriculum

approach; and 3) time spent observing Springhill teachers model their approaches with

children. Arguably, with such high turnover rates for new teachers leaving the field

within the first three years (NACRRA, "Child Care Workforce," 2011), a smooth and

supportive transition into the position would clearly help both retention and satisfaction

of new teachers.

Leanne is a second example of a teacher who initially started as a parent of

children enrolled at Springhill prior to joining their faculty. Once both of Leanne's

daughters started kindergarten, she decided to join Springhill's faculty. Prior to having

children and finding out about Springhill, Leanne had deliberately chosen to leave the

field of early childhood education. In the following excerpts from my interview with her,

she shares some of her history leading up to Springhill (personal communication, November 18, 2009, lines 36-79):

I loved going to school…and seeing friends and all that. But I remember not liking the work in the earlier grades. But then once we started doing more independent projects, I started really liking it. So my whole thought was, "Let's make learning fun! [Laughs] Why can't learning be fun in school?" And…so my thought was I could be a teacher and just make things fun. Well…I went to Guilford College, and they had a great education program that's pretty progressive. We did a lot of discussion to learn and we studied lots of different approaches and I really loved looking at the group work in classrooms and…I felt like it was really good in helping to learn to advocate for children and thinking about how to reach the individual child. What was disappointing to me was when I went into the school system, I had this idealized conception that you could go in and do what you felt was necessary in the classroom to meet the needs of your children. And what I found was the reverse. That you are restricted to certain time periods within the classroom and you had to stick to them because you were, you know, with a mentor teacher and they came in regularly to observe. And in one situation, I had to be on the topic at the minute it was to be discussed…And it was very frustrating because I tried to do some things where it would keep us involved, just questions that the children had. And every morning we would take one out of the box and discuss it. Now that was as a whole class, but it was exciting and the kids were really into it because they were questions that had come from them. And our discussions sometimes would go on awhile, but they

would involve science, math, history…the whole bit, depending on what the

question was. So we had a fun time exploring, so then I wasn't necessarily on a

particular schedule and…I wanted to work with children just differently. So I

found it to be very frustrating…That was in public school. So after about three

years, I stopped doing that and…at that time, [the school administrators] had

thought maybe I would enjoy [getting certified for preschool] because I had a

different way of thinking about children…So at that time I lived in North Carolina

and they have a "Circle of Childhood" program where they actually give you

accreditation to be a teacher of a preschool, and it's very much looking at outdoor

learning and working with children individually,…[and] in the group process,

social learning…It was really neat to go through that. I also went to…something

called Project Wild…and that really works on having more fun ways to bring kids

outside, to experience the different concepts and making it small group and more

individualized. So I loved doing those two things…as I left the public schools. So

then, I didn't really want to go back into a teaching situation at that time. So, it

was years. It was not until I came to Springhill with my children that I wanted to

go back.

So Leanne left the public school system, worked four years as a tech in occupational

therapy, got married, helped her husband with his new business, and had children, all

before ending up at Springhill. She continues (lines 103-117),

Some members of my church had helped to start [Springhill]…and actually one

was related to…my father-in-law…[and] were instrumental in getting it started.

And I heard about it from another church member who had sent her children to

Springhill. And so it was just really interesting how that all evolved…And then

another friend of mine was visiting here…from Australia. And she was really

interested in this type of teaching and it's very hard to find. So she had really

researched and found [Springhill], [and] was like, "Well I heard a lot about it,"

but we had to kind of be in touch…with Springhill to make sure you could go--

you know, you could go ahead with the program so at first I had started [my

children] in another program. And then we transferred here. And I'm just so glad

we did. And I couldn't leave.[160]

She continues (lines 119-125):

My children were here, so I subbed for two or three years. And then when I

left...with my youngest, I said, "well, I'd really like to work here, but I'd kind of

like to wait until after my youngest is through kindergarten." Because…you want

to kind of help get them started. But they really needed someone, so I came the

next year and have been here ever since… I loved it. I've worked with all the

ages.

Leanne's experience in the public schools, where she was expected to maintain rigid

scheduling and teach specific learning objectives in ways that had little regard for the

unique needs of each group of children, was antithetical to the approaches she understood

to be optimal for children (e.g., providing space for social learning, allowing children to

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[160] As described by Schmitt, Skiera, and Van den Bulte (June 2011, Para. 2): "We studied 10,000 accounts in a large German bank over a period of three years, and found that customers obtained through referrals are both more loyal and more valuable than other customers. After controlling for such factors as age and gender, we calculated that referred customers are, on average, about 18% more likely than others to stay with the bank." Perhaps, a similar finding holds true for preschools as well.

pursue answers to their own questions, and developing meaningful projects) and they left her little incentive to remain in the field. Leanne's reflection on the disconnect between the theories and research that she learned about in college and the reality of what was mandated in the public school system in which she worked mirrors the sentiment that I regularly hear from college graduates entering the teaching field, as well as many of my own experiences teaching in public schools. Teachers are often provided little room for creativity, innovation, professionalism, and freedom to actualize best practices for children. If they do what they think is best for children, then they often have to go against school protocols; or following school protocols, by contrast, often means going against the best interests of children. As a result, teachers are often conflicted and left with little job satisfaction. It seems to be especially hard for those teachers who take seriously the theory and research they learn about in education classes and then are unable to actualize it in the classroom. As Leanne's story suggests, she most likely would have never returned to the field of early childhood education had she not experienced being part of the Springhill community as a parent. Considering the high rate of yearly teacher turnover, this raises the question of how many potential teachers would have joined the field or stayed in the field had they had the opportunity to teach in this type of democratic learning environment.

Implications for Early Childhood Educators: Possibilities and Challenges

In this section of the chapter, I discuss some of the structural challenges that may arise for U.S. educators as they strive to create democratic preschool communities, share some of the unique factors that led to Springhill's exemplary program, and highlight what U.S. educators can learn from Springhill's story.

Level of education. There are several characteristics of Springhill teachers that are unique and atypical in comparison with the average early childhood educator.[161] First of all, the Springhill teachers come from a diverse variety of educational and professional backgrounds, including several with fine arts backgrounds (e.g., photography, crafts, ceramics), two with nursing experience, one a former librarian, and several with education related degrees (e.g., special education, child development, Christian education). Their education and previous work experiences seem to fall primarily under two categories: 1) the caring, helping fields and/or; 2) the expressive/creative arts [see Appendix S, for a breakdown of each teacher's educational background]. Second, all but one of Springhill's teachers hold a minimum of a bachelor's degree, over half of the faculty members have some sort of graduate degree, and Lisa, the executive director, has her Ph.D. in Special Education. The number of Springhill faculty members with this level of higher education is very unusual in the larger field of U.S. child care. For instance, only 12 percent of assistant teachers and 33 percent of lead teachers in the U.S. are college graduates (National Child Care Information and Technical Assistance Center, n.d.). In Virginia specifically, between 50 and 62 percent of child care teachers hold *only* a high school diploma or less (Virginia's Office of Early Childhood Development, 2009).[162]

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[161] In making this observation, I am comparing Springhill teachers to a category of professionals that includes both part-time preschool teachers and full-time child care teachers. The contrast on some of these points may be greater with the child care teacher population.

[162] The significance of having educators with a higher degree of formal education is supported by several research studies. According to the "Childcare Workforce" report (NACCRRA, 2011, para. 3): "The amount of formal education attained by a provider is the strongest predictor for the provider's ability to engage children in developmentally appropriate activities and positive interactions that better prepare them for school. A

Beyond formal education: Intellectually curious and critical thinking

"constructed knowers." Beyond being well-educated in the traditional sense of formal

education, each of the Springhill teachers seem to have a high regard for the learning

process, a thirst for knowledge, and an intellectual curiosity that extends well beyond the

classroom. They consider themselves lifelong learners and researchers, along with their

role as facilitators of children's experiences. In fact, each of the Springhill faculty

members I interviewed and observed seemed to reflect epistemological positions or

"ways of knowing" similar to the "constructed knowers" category of women described in

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule's (1997) seminal study of the different ways in

which women process and make sense of their ideas, information, and experiences.[163]

Constructed knowledge, as described by Thayer-Bacon (2000, p. 81):

> …is *an attempt to integrate the voices, to reclaim the self, and to integrate*
>
> *personal knowledge and expert knowledge*. The basic insight that constructed
>
> knowers come to is this: "*All knowledge is constructed, and the knower is an*
>
> *intimate part of the known*" (p. 137, emphasis in original). Theories are models

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2002 study of over 200 family child care providers showed that training was a stronger
predictor of high-quality care than the provider's experience, group size, ratio of children
to adults, or percent of infants in the care setting."

[163] The other four "perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions
about truth, knowledge, and authority" (p. 3) as described by Belenky, Clinchy,
Goldberger, and Tarule (1997) include: 1) *Silenced*. These women tend to be "extreme in
denial of self" and dependent on "external authority for direction" (p. 24); 2) *Received
Knowers* reproduce ideas that come from others. They are concrete and dualistic, where
"things are right or wrong, true or false, good or bad, black or white. From this
perspective, women "assume there is only one right answer, and that all contrary views
are automatically wrong" (p. 37). Their "either/or thinking makes it difficult for these
women to express notions of becoming" (p.50); 3) *Subjective Knowers* view truth and
knowledge as personal, private, and intuitive; "something felt rather than actively
constructed" (p.69); 4) *Procedural Knower's* thinking is "encapsulated within systems"
(p. 127). From this position, "women are interested in learning and applying objective
procedures for obtaining and communicating knowledge" (p. 15).

for approximating experience. To be a constructed knower, one needs a high

tolerance for internal contradiction and ambiguity, one needs to learn to live with

conflict. The constructed knower has to abandon the either/or thinking of

procedural knowledge and search for a unique and authentic voice. The

constructed knower moves beyond systems, but puts systems to her own service.

"When truth is seen as a process of construction in which the knower participates,

a new passion for learning is unleashed" (p. 140 emphasis added).

In this way, constructed knowers perceive knowledge as contextualized and value both

subjective and objective strategies of learning. The following story, with excerpts from

Exploring the Forest: Wild Places in Childhood, a NAEYC-published article written by

Alice (the studio teacher), serves as a brief example of the way the Springhill faculty's

passion for seeking knowledge and understanding resembles the process of "constructed

knowers" as described above. Alice explains,

This teacher research project began with a staff discussion about the Italian

tradition of the piazza. In Italy, towns are built around a central square, a piazza.

This is where people socialize, conduct business in open-air markets, hold

festivals and celebrations, and gather for quiet talks in the evening…It is the heart

of the community. The preschools of Reggio Emilia are built around a central

piazza for similar reasons. In this common area, children of different ages play

and learn, families interact, and daily school meetings take place (Malaguzzi

1993). (Golden, 2010, p. 2)

While considering the special piazzas in Reggio preschools, the Springhill faculty began

to wonder "What is our Piazza?" and "Could our Forest become this special gathering

place for children and their families?" This question led to further questions for discussion and study including,

> How could we use the forest as a space for young children? What could the school community gain from moving out into this space? Would families use the space? Could expanding into the woods bring our school community together? Could the forest become the Springhill School's piazza? (p. 3)

So, they decided to explore this topic both in their individual classrooms and as a group. The teachers documented children's experiences of becoming acquainted with the woods and brought their documentation to the weekly staff meetings for discussion and planning. To support this exploration, the faculty read various books on the topic. For example, each week they read and discussed a chapter of, "The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Spaces" (Nabhan & Trimble, 1994). Individually, they explored many other related books and articles, including Richard Louv's (2008) seminal book, "Last Child in the Woods," David Sobel's books on children's special places, and Robin Moore's writings on designing natural spaces for children. As Alice explains, "I was inspired to read more about children and their relationship to nature. The more I read, the more I recognized how my personal connection to the outdoors had evolved through my childhood experiences" (p. 4). As "constructed knowers," the teachers explore and make meaning of topics using a variety of modes (e.g., physically, sensorially, creatively, cognitively, and emotionally). For instance, Alice came to understand the topic of children's relationships to the forest by: 1) making connections to her own childhood experiences and memories; 2) carefully observing, documenting, and reflecting on children's experiences in Springhill's wild spaces; 3) reflecting on her own

nature-related artwork; 4) engaging others in dialogue on the topic; 5) reading books (and poetry) and integrating the information with existing knowledge and experience; 6) exploring the topic from her various voices including that of artist, daughter, and teacher; and 7) writing and blogging about her investigations, ongoing questions, and discoveries.

Springhill teachers continuously explore, research, incorporate, apply, adjust, and/or readjust "book knowledge" with their ongoing classroom practices and personal experiences and feelings. Additional evidence of the Springhill faculty's authentic interest in ongoing learning is found in their continual referencing of a wide, eclectic mix of books they were reading during the period I was researching the school (all of which they seemed intrinsically motivated to read, rather than extrinsically-motivated by reasons such as obligatory work or school assignments) [see Appendix R for a sampling of the many books faculty members referenced to me during my fieldwork (during interviews, faculty meetings, parent circles, etc.)].

To help situate Springhill teachers' (out of the ordinary) passion for continued learning in the larger early childhood education context, I share some of my experiences while I was director of a large, non-profit child care center (for employees of a university, federal agency and private hospital/ health care system). My challenge at the time was to try to create (find) a team of teachers that were either critical thinkers and/or had at least a modicum of passion for learning. Prior to resigning as director, I oversaw over 60 teachers and auxiliary staff. As various teaching positions became open, I would oftentimes read through hundreds of resumes submitted, and interview over 50 applicants, in a hopeful (desperate) search for at least one minimally qualified applicant. The applicants most often had minimal higher education, many were (quite frankly)

barely literate, and often had family crises, serious health problems, and virtually no understanding or visible interest in early childhood research, theory, behavior management approaches, or child development (besides the occasional use of oft-repeated phrases such as, "children learn through play" but without any real understanding of what that means). From my perspective as an employer, much of this entire class of applicants reflects the categories of either "received," "subjective" or "procedural" knowers. (In fact, many had a distrust of book knowledge, and many had trouble exploring issues beyond their personal feelings, without any critical reflection.) I rarely saw an applicant with an early childhood education degree (they usually went to the public schools); and when I did see the (rare) applicant with a related degree, they explained they were applying because they failed the GA licensing certification exam and needed a job. Typically, the few applicants who had just graduated with a bachelor's degree (e.g., psychology or child development) applied to work for a year before going to graduate school and needed temporary employment. This was the pool of applicants from which we were left to choose, even with our pay scale above the industry average. Although above industry averages, our pay scale was still very low compared to other professions. For example, in 2007 the average annual income for all professions in Virginia was $42,880 compared to the average income for child care workers of $18,700 (Virginia's Office of Early Childhood Development, 2009). In fact, several service type jobs (e.g., Target cashiers) with no previous skills required were able to offer slightly higher salaries, along with more inclusive health care benefits and retirement packages, compared to our program.[164] Although we were able to contribute to employees' health

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[164] According to Barnett's (2003) policy brief for the "National Institute for Early

care benefits, most preschool programs don't have the funding to do so (NACCRRA, 2010). As I struggled to find qualified teachers, parents would (understandably) become concerned that it was taking me so long to find a permanent caregiver for their child. Hence, I would feel torn between hiring a teacher that did not exhibit signs of being a quality caregiver (but would likely appease the parents), or holding out for the seemingly non-existent applicant who understood at least some minimum "developmentally appropriate" practices or display some interest in learning more about the field. For many of the parents, a teacher who keeps children "in line," uses time-out, has a structured program that teaches children the alphabet and/or a color of the week, is entirely suitable. In addition, with most of our parents working full-time with long hours, many as doctors, professors, and researchers, it is no wonder their schedule left little time to investigate themselves what a "qualified teacher" looked like. And with over 500 parents, I had virtually no time to build relationships and trust with the families.

How is it reasonable to expect teachers who themselves are barely literate to understand how to prepare children to read and write in the most effective ways, especially when those best practices require going against the prevailing political and societal pressures of narrowed, skill-and-drill methods? How as an administrator do you reignite teachers' innate desires to learn when it may have been squelched in their own childhood? How are teachers expected to create a classroom space where children's feelings are able to be expressed and validated when their teachers may have never had someone attuned and responsive enough to validate their own feelings? Or, how can the

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Education Research," preschool teachers make less pay than other industries, including janitors, chauffeurs, and secretaries and "the pay gap widens with similarly qualified works as the teacher's level of education increases" (p. 4).

teachers be responsive to children when they themselves are experiencing family crises, health issues, depression, etc.? How are teachers and administrators expected to support children's passions, curiosities and investigations when they themselves take virtually no initiative or interest in research or continued learning? When one finds the rare teacher with a more responsive, democratic frame, or a person willing and open to learn, how do you support them when most of the "role models" around them have a very different philosophy and/or techniques? These are some of the realities in the field that certainly present *extreme* challenges for administrators trying to create democratic spaces.

Unfortunately, the challenge of finding qualified applicants for administrative positions also became evident, both during my tenure as director and when I trained directors and owners of 50+ child care franchises. Particularly as a trainer of directors and owners, it was dispiriting to discover how little these "leaders in the profession" knew about early childhood education. In fact, one of the child care owners I worked with was elected as a representative of the Georgia governor's early childhood advisory committee, yet she didn't even know what NAEYC (National Association for the Education of Young Children) was or anything about the accreditation process. She and virtually almost every other owner I talked with owned and operated the child care center because they thought it was a profitable investment of their money. None of them had any background in the field of early childhood education.

As another example, when I resigned my position as director, the board of directors asked me to be part of the search committee for a replacement. As the salary and compensation package was well above industry averages, I was surprised at such a dearth of applicants with any sort of intellectual curiosity within the ECE community.

For example, I asked all of the applicants (each of whom held a Master's in Early Childhood Education or related field--a prerequisite for the position) what books they've read that had been influential in their practice. *Not one of them could think of a book that was seminal in their thinking about early childhood education*. When I asked them what they'd read over the last couple of years related to education, again, I received the same response, they couldn't think of any. The child care center in which I worked is heavily inspired by the philosophies of Reggio Emilia, so I also asked the applicants to describe their understanding of the Reggio Emilia Approach. The applicants all responded with very little information or apparent understanding. It seems unlikely to me that educators would be able to develop exemplar programs without reading and considering outside literature in the context of their own practice or showing signs of initiative for growth.

How is it that at Springhill a group of intellectual, thoughtful, constructed knowers were able to come together and remain at the school for many years? One factor to consider is that all of the teachers at Springhill had husbands whose incomes compensated for their relatively small teaching salary and allowed them to work in a field in which they might not otherwise. Certainly two other factors that contribute to Springhill teachers longevity is that they are a part-time program, which may help prevent burnout, and are among trusted friends and other highly motivated people who support one another.[165]

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[165] Another point of interest to consider is statistics that show around 40 percent of U.S. marriages end in divorce (Roberts, 2007), making Springhill teachers and faculty quite an anomaly. In fact, I am not aware of any children from the classrooms I spent time in having unmarried or divorced parents.

Funding issues.

Only 20 of 821 occupations reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics have lower average wages than child care workers. Child care providers earn an average wage of only $9.46 an hour. With average salaries of $19,670 a year for child care workers, many individuals holding these jobs do not earn very much more than the 2007 federal poverty level of $17,170 annually for a family of three. (NACCRRA, "Child Care Workforce," 2011).

If we are to have any hope of creating a movement of democratic preschool communities that are just and equitable for all children beyond the rare individual programs such as Springhill, where teachers have financial support outside their hourly salary, any significant change will require large-scale overhauls of the current U.S. financial structures supporting early childhood education today. In my view, we will never be able to attract high-quality, responsive teachers (including male teachers who are currently only 3% of the child care workforce) without a significant increase on par with other professional occupations.

Another funding challenge that arises in terms of creating an exemplary democratic preschool community is having sustainable funding, not only for teacher salaries but for the program at large. A cautionary tale may perhaps be found in the case of the Model Learning Center in Washington, D.C., an urban preschool largely dependent on government funding and the political whims of the day. The founding director of the school, Lewin-Benham, documents the school's brief history and eventual closing in her book, "Possible Schools: The Reggio Approach to Urban Education" (2006). The preschool opened with 12 children in 1989 and quickly gained recognition for their

remarkable, Reggio-inspired program. Yet, in 1997, less than 10 years after their initial opening, the school closed down. In the concluding chapter of her book, Lewin-Benham discusses some of the factors that led to its closing. She explains,

> I moved away from Washington…[and] the MELC's contracting officers came under fire at the same time as the city entered a period of near financial collapse; the MELC lost both its leadership and its funding simultaneously. Concurrently, unfavorable local situations—the death of a powerful city council chairman who had supported the MELC and a huge budget fiasco in the U.S. Congress, the source of the MELC's finances--coincided with a period when national attitudes toward the kind of values represented in the MELC were hardening. The MELC emphasized individual growth and lateral thinking at a time of pressure for increased testing. Testing forced children to be measured against a monolithic standard and forced teachers to focus on increasingly lock-step thinking, focuses that were inimical to the MELC. Finally, the MELC's classroom practices were not woven into a system of community and administrative support, both of which are essential for a school to survive, much less to flourish. (p. 154)

This story has significant implications for people hoping to establish democratic preschool communities, especially for low-income families where outside funding beyond parent tuition is essential (e.g., through government agencies or private organizations). In fact, even the company Google, Inc., had trouble supporting their new employer-sponsored, Reggio-inspired child care center in Mountain View, California. According to a New York Times business article (Nocera, 2008), the company was subsidizing employees approximately $37,000 per child each year on top of the parents

$2500 (infant) monthly tuition. While those types of fees may not be altogether

necessary for a high-quality program, it certainly suggests that if Google feels the

pressures of making this type of high-quality program financially feasible, families with

modest or low incomes are going to have a hard time affording quality care without some

type of outside financial support.[166] Nocera writes,

> Google may be providing the greatest day care ever, but so what? It doesn't
>
> matter how good the day care is if only its wealthiest employees can afford to use
>
> it. If Google had really wanted to do something path-breaking about its day care
>
> crisis, it would have spent less time creating elitist day care centers and more time
>
> figuring out how to "scale" day care for everybody no matter what their salaries.
>
> (para. 24)

This raises the questions: As a democracy, why is it that children's rights, in part, are in

the hands of the companies and private organizations in which their parents work, with

all their inherent instability? Why are private organizations responsible for children's

care during their formative years? In a democracy (as opposed to perhaps a plutocracy),

all children should have equal opportunity to a healthy start to life.

To offer an example of how the growing influence and acceptance of corporate

structures infiltrate peoples thinking in our U.S. culture, I offer a brief personal story.

One night I was flipping through the channels when a popular cable TV show started

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[166]A similar case recently occurred with a high-end child care facility in Atlanta, Georgia that considered themselves the nation's first eco-friendly center, featuring non-plastic toys, heated floors, and a trained chef using organic, fresh ingredients. The founder and "CEO" (note: marketing and real estate background) had to close the school 3 years after opening, having subsidized the program to the tune of millions of dollars, in a situation where (reportedly) parent tuition fees of $1500-$1700 monthly were barely enough to cover the rent on the building.

showing an interview with a Harvard-educated, married mother of four children, who was asked what she most wants for her children. Her response was that she would like them to grow up to be "good corporate citizens." First of all, notice how the language of the corporate world—in this case an expression taken from the "corporate social responsibility" movement—has penetrated this woman's conception of citizenship. Apparently the idea of a mode of citizenship outside the corporate context does not present itself as a worthwhile goal for her children. Secondly, notice how the legal status of corporate "personhood" allows for an insidious anthropomorphizing of corporate activity in politics. With the help of such linguistic tricks, corporate dominance in the political realm is made to seem perfectly natural and unobjectionable.[167]

As the interview continued, the mother did express some regret that she didn't spend much time with her children, perhaps a reflection of the higher value she placed on financial security than on expressions of emotional bonding and love. Moreover, the time that she did spend with the children at home seemed to be focused on "preparing" them for a "successful future" (i.e., the goal being to do well on tests so they can get into top-rated colleges and land high-paying, corporate jobs). The segment of the show highlighting their family-time interactions showed the mother giving practice spelling tests as the feature activity. If democracy is to succeed, there must be a deliberate emphasis on counteracting the corporate influence that infiltrates our thinking about democratic aims.

All of which is not to say that there aren't many wonderful companies that have all of their employees' best interests at heart, but in a democracy should we have to rely

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[167] In particular with the Supreme Court's ruling in 2010 that corporations are "persons" in Citizens United vs. Federal Elections Commission.

on a for-profit company's level of social or "corporate" responsibility or lack thereof when it comes to such important life decisions?

In addition to the challenges of teacher salaries and sustainable school funding, a third financial challenge is that of affordable tuition for parents of all income levels. For example, from my personal experience as a director, I discovered that many teachers could not afford to enroll their own children in our childcare program on their salaries alone (even with a 20 percent employee discounted rate). Yet, they expressed their strong desire to do so. Instead, they had to enroll their children in lower quality child care programs while they taught other people's children of the same age. There were a few exceptions with the teachers who had enough supplemental funding from their spouse's income. Certainly it seems quite unjust to set up a system that forces parents to put their child in subpar care because of their income level and cruel especially when teachers are expected to provide above-par service for other people's children.

The challenge of affordable tuition costs preventing parents from enrolling their children in optimal child care choice is supported by NACCRRA's report, "The Economy's Impact on Parents' Choices and Perceptions About Child Care" (September, 2010), showing that "more than half (51 percent) of families with children under age 5 say the economy has affected their child care in some way with more than three-fifths (63 percent) worried at least some of the time about paying their bills" (p. 2). While it is becoming more challenging for families in the U.S. to afford quality care, this same study found that the gap between parents' perceptions of quality and the reality of the care their children are receiving is growing even bigger. In other words, parents believe they are getting a much higher level of quality care for their children than they actually are.

Clearly a child's opportunity to be in a high quality, democratic preschool should not be dependent on the political whims of the day, a company's ability to contribute, or a family's income level. Making this type of program available to all families regardless of income is certainly an area that needs further consideration if we are to strive for democratic preschool communities for all children.[168]

U.S. cultural status of early childhood educators. It seems, beyond low pay, the low status of U.S. preschool teachers contributes to the challenge of finding highly qualified and motivated teachers to create and sustain democratic preschool communities. It is worthy of mention that most of the Springhill teachers I interviewed said that they originally did *not* want to go into the education field or work in public schools. In fact, Alice said she was determined *not* to be a teacher. She explains (interview transcription, December 16, 2009, lines 41-44):

> People always told me I should be a teacher because I was so good at it, and I was like, "No! I don't want to be a teacher!" I swore up and down that I didn't want to be a teacher. I would never be a teacher. It just seemed dumb to me. Like the dumbest kind of work there could be. So I didn't want to do it.

Gina also considered majoring in Early Childhood Education but quickly became discouraged after taking some college coursework in the field. Gina explains (interview transcription, November 18, 2009, lines 98-106):

> …I actually thought about getting an early education degree. So, I took a
> [children's literature] class and was very…discouraged by all the people in that

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[168] Ironically, as I wrote this section of the chapter at a coffeehouse, I overheard a woman sitting nearby express her sadness to her friend that she has to transition her son for a second time to a new preschool because his current one is too expensive for their family.

class. [The other students] wanted to know exactly what was going to be on the

test, what did they need[ed] to know. And, I just stepped back and thought this is

crazy. These are the people who are going to be teaching our children! And it

just discouraged me so much for some reason. I just said, "Forget it," and I didn't

pursue that anymore. I got out of school instead, finished my BFA.

It's hardly surprising that so many talented people avoid the field of education

considering the current U.S. cultural context and its low regard and status for the teaching

field (Barnett, 2003), low-pay, growing anti-intellectualism,[169] narrowed academic focus,

reduced freedom, and resulting low satisfaction and high burnout rate of teachers. In

another example, I taught nine sections of a career planning course for undergraduates at

UGA and discovered that the resounding opinion of students was that they would not

seriously consider being early childhood educators as their profession. This included

students who reported enjoying working with children (e.g., Sunday school, summer

camps, babysitting), as well as students scoring high in the "teaching and education" and

related categories on the career inventory and aptitude tests they took in class. The

primary reasons expressed to me were low pay, low status, and little respect given to

teachers.[170]

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[169] Margie Carter (2011) highlights this problem in an article titled, "What happened to intelligent judgment?"

[170] This assertion is supported in a Sehgal's (2011) article titled, "U.S. Teachers Work the Longest Hours But Students Stay Average," which reports: "[A] study on comparative educational systems placed raising the status of the teaching profession as a top suggestion for the U.S. In the report, it was not nearly an issue of salaries. 'University teaching programs in the high-scoring countries admit only the best students,' and 'teaching education programs in the U.S. must become more selective and more rigorous,' the report said. The problem there, however, is that while the average salary of a veteran elementary teacher in the U.S. was $44,172 in 2008, higher than the average of $39,426 across all OECD countries, that salary level was 40 percent below the average

As far as the teachers' experience at Springhill goes, the image there of the "teacher"-- as researcher, collaborator, and facilitator with space to be creative-- holds much more promise, it seems, in making teaching attractive than does the prevailing perception of teachers as technicians (e.g., "those who can't do, teach"[171]). If such practices as we see at Springhill were to become a possibility in many more educational communities, we might very well attract more passionate, critical thinking, high-quality teachers to the early childhood field.

Power of the group and appropriate size of the community. The power of Springhill's group of teachers and administrators willing to go on this journey together of creating a Reggio-inspired, democratic type of learning community, was made possible from the social solidarity of their group. As mentioned earlier, Wegner (1986) discusses research that shows people in close relationships have memory that is stronger than theirs alone, a phenomenon called, "transactive memory." This has positive implications for both children and adults in the learning community, especially in sustaining the core values and mission of the program. Yet, in schools where teachers are in individual, isolated fiefdoms there is little room for the development of shared experiences, understandings, or transactive memory. On top of that, when turnover rates for child care workers are at such high levels, this shared memory would be virtually impossible.

Another important factor contributing to Springhill preschool's well-functioning community seems to be the relatively small size of their program. According to several

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salary of other American college graduates." For preschool teachers, the level of education required and low pay heightens this problem even more.

[171] Or as Springhill parent Sue commented, "…The stereotype is "go teach preschool when you can't get another job and you're not qualified to do anything else." With this perception it is hardly surprising that qualified people resist joining the profession.

studies discussed in "Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference" (Gladwell, 2002), organizations seem to function best when there are no more than 150 people. My experiences working in a large child care center (two campuses with 200 plus children on each one and 60 plus teachers and part-time staff) support these research findings on the problems that arise when schools are too big. As a director, I often struggled with trying to establish trusting relationships with both staff and families with such little time for relationship-building in such a large school, especially with all the day-to-day demands of operating a school. Parents barely knew me and vice versa. With hundreds of children it is difficult to create a warm, close-knit community. And with such a large program and fairly high turnover rates, there was little chance for transactive memory building or continuity throughout the classroom. With increasingly large child care centers, this is a challenge worth considering (see chapter 2, for more information on the benefits of small school size in creating a learning community).

A specific challenge for Springhill in this regard is a successful completion of Springhill's preschool program's transition as they merge with Stonewood's elementary and middle school programs and share one joint campus. As the school gets bigger and has more teachers collaborating, it seems the challenge of dialogue and relationship building will become increasingly difficult. In addition, the elementary and middle schools have had a more traditional program, but are slowly adapting their approaches to reflect the philosophies and inquiry-based approaches established in the preschool. This unusual circumstance (e.g., modeling the elementary and middle-school programs on the preschool program) may certainly bring about some tension.

Continuity of faculty, values, and mission. Perhaps one of the strongest factors making possible the ongoing evolution of such a high-quality, democratic learning community at Springhill has been their ability to retain a core group of high-quality faculty members. For example, Mary, Lisa, Sophie, Nicole, and Alice have all been part of the community for over 15 years; and several other teachers such as Jess, Nanette, and Leanne have been part of the community for nearly 10 years (as teachers and parents). (For a more thorough breakdown of years at Springhill, see Appendix S.) With continuity of staff and a clear vision of the underlying mission and values of the program, the Springhill community was able to develop and build their community slowly and authentically. Across the board Springhill teachers expressed a feeling of good fortune that they were able to be working at a program like Springhill. So what are some possible factors that may contribute to the faculty members' high job satisfaction and ensuing longevity in the program? Some of the most appreciated and valued elements of working at Springhill, expressed to me during my interviews with staff members included: 1) being part of a community that demonstrates such a deep level of respect for children throughout the school; 2) being with such a high-caliber group of trusted colleagues; 3) having the freedom and support to try innovative approaches (and make mistakes) and do what they deem best for children; and 4) being part of a community that believes contributing their ideas to the larger early childhood community is an essential part of their mission; and 5) being given allotted time and financial support to actualize this goal (e.g., creating documentation, writing blogs, attending and sharing their work at a variety of workshops and conferences both locally and across the globe, and

participating in research such as my dissertation). These are important factors for other programs to consider, and they warrant further examination.

Continuity of faculty, mission and values seemed to be beneficial for the children too. Although children do not typically remain with their teachers from year-to-year, a practice known as looping, the continuity in Springhill's approach from classroom to classroom, the consistent language and respect used with children, and their ability to visit and play in all the classrooms (and shared playground space) allows children to maintain relationships with past teachers and build relationships with the other Springhill teachers prior to joining their class. This prevents children from moving into a classroom with a complete stranger (the exception to this is a child's first year at the school, and teachers have a lengthy phase-in period for children's gradual process of joining the class to ease this transition). In contrast, I have seen many programs with classrooms (especially toddler classrooms) that go through 6+ teachers in one school year.

Diversity Issues: Heterogeneous versus homogenous grouping.

Ethnic, racial, gender, and cultural diversity of families and faculty. A specific challenge that I observed for the Springhill community, along with other child care centers, is the fact that they are homogenously grouped in terms of both children and adults. For example, the entire Springhill preschool faculty is comprised of white, female teachers. In addition, there is very little diversity in ethnicity and race of families. Springhill administrators have made attempts to create a diverse group of children. For example, Lisa has put advertisements in Richmond's African American newspaper to recruit children of different race and ethnicities. Yet, at the time of my observations there were no African American children enrolled in the preschool classrooms, even with

Richmond, Virginia's African-American population being 57.2 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000). Their school's zipcode had an African-American population of 19.9 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). Clearly, investigating the reasons why it is so difficult to attract a diverse mix of families, and how to do so, warrants further study. Some questions to consider: Do various school philosophies have too great a gap among various cultural groups? Does it coincide with affordability issues? Or, location of the school? Or, a certain comfort level of being part of a community with similar ethnic, cultural, and racial backgrounds?

To accommodate families with varying income levels, Springhill provides some financial scholarships. The administrators use a special software program that determines total family income and then provides a sliding scale for the families with the lowest incomes. Approximately 12 percent of children enrolled receive some kind of financial scholarship. Unfortunately the limited availability of scholarship money makes it not feasible to cover full tuition for all of those that need it.

Another factor in terms of diversity and democratic programs has to do with the amount of participation of fathers in their children's experiences. At Springhill, there seems to be a fair amount of involvement of fathers (although probably not equal to that of mothers). There are even several stay-at-home dads with children enrolled at the school. A challenge for early childhood programs striving to create democratic spaces will need to make sure both parents are involved in (or at least invited into) the daily life of their children, even those with full-time, busy schedules. For an administrator, it would certainly require intentional and creative ideas of how to make that possible.

Homogenous philosophical perspectives of education. Beyond racial and ethnic segregation, there seems to be a fairly small range of diversity in terms of philosophical perspectives about education at Springhill. As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, most of the teachers specifically chose Springhill because of their philosophy and the types of approaches they use working with children (e.g., Lisa first heard about Springhill from seeing the book "Richmond is for children" written by Springhill parents.) And as Mary explained, when she joined the faculty, they were a group of like-minded colleagues who all supported the school's mission. This would certainly an unusual circumstance for many similarly idealistic teachers who feel like they must go it alone in other school communities. Furthermore, many parents intentionally sought out the Springhill community (e.g., Cindy read an article in the newspaper, several parents researched the area for this type of school, several heard about it from friends and family) for similar philosophical reasons. There seems to be an overwhelming sense of "buy in" and pride from teachers and parents in the program. Again, this seems to be fairly unusual compared to other programs with teachers who are not as invested in the program or who have little understanding of the reasons underlying their teaching methods. In this way, having a critical mass of teachers and administrators with similar, homogeneous perspectives supporting the school's mission can shape group solidarity and cohesion. Of course on the other side of the coin, such a philosophical consensus could perhaps limit optimal inclusion of dissenting voices necessary for a truly democratic learning community. For example, one teacher commented to me that she was concerned for parents who supported Republican candidates because they would perhaps feel alienated amongst the majority of other "progressive-minded" Springhill parents.

***Heterogeneous ideas and thinking about education*.** When parents are part of a school community with great diversity and competing views of what education should look like, another set of challenges and possibilities arise, especially for administrators who are trying to implement a more democratic approach with the majority of parents and/or teachers coming with a very different framework or perspective. Recall Sue's gradually shifting perspective, a shift that occurred over several years as a result of being immersed in the Springhill community. Her story may have played out very differently if she had not been in the minority and was instead with a group of like-minded parents. For example, Crawford's (2004) research discovered the powerful effect of school cultures on teaching practices and perceptions of children. For example, when a teacher using developmentally appropriate practices joined a faculty with teachers using developmentally inappropriate practices, she subtly shifted both her perceptions and practices, including her view of children (from a positive to more negative image), conforming to her school's culture.

Schools that are trying to create a collaborative, democratic learning community may have a harder challenge in this regard when the group is more diverse in philosophy. For example, at an employee-sponsored school many of the parents enroll their children not because of the school's philosophy or founding values, but because of its proximity to their work, low cost of tuition, etc. As the director of such a school, I experienced both the challenge and benefit of this type of diversity. The benefit was being part of a community that had families and teachers from over 20 countries and with a variety of educational and income levels creating a heterogeneous group with varied perspectives. However, that same diversity at times brought challenges when parents and teachers have

vastly different concepts about what their child's education should look like. Certainly a group, with many different cultural expectations, provides challenges for implementing a unified mission and/or shared values. What are the possibilities in creating a democratic preschool community when it is not embedded in a larger ecological system of a like-minded, supportive, community culture? Are we becoming more segregated into our ideological enclaves? In Bishop and Cushing's (2008) book, "The Big Sort: Why the Clustering of Like-Minded America is Tearing Us Apart" suggests a growing trend where people are self-selecting neighborhoods and towns that reflect their values and have similar ideological and political backgrounds. In relation to democratic preschool communities, is it possible to bring in teachers of different mindsets and create a well-functioning system? And, how do you share decision-making with families who may have very different ideas about childrearing and "academics," especially when they don't seem to mesh with teachers' understandings of what is best for children? These are certainly challenges that warrant further investigation.

Part-time versus full-time programs. Part-time programs by their very nature exclude both teachers and parents who need to work full time. In terms of democracy, this clearly excludes a significant portion of the population. Yet, admittedly, part-time programs allow for certain benefits that may not be possible in full-time programs:

- part-time programs can draw from a potentially larger pool of qualified teacher applicants with college degrees that may have families and not wish to work full-time;
- part-time classrooms enable teachers to have more planning time outside the classroom;

- and part-time hours reduce some stresses and perhaps prevent teacher burnout.

Without these same kinds of possibilities available in full-day preschool programs, the challenge of creating a cohesive, well-functioning democratic learning community certainly becomes more difficult. How can early childhood educators create a sustainable full-time program with exemplary faculty with both parents working full-time?

It should be noted that the Springhill community is aware of this issue and is striving to adapt their program in order to meet the changing needs of community, while at the same time sustaining their core values and mission. The board of directors and administrators decided to expand their before- and after-school programs, with more options for extended hours, so that they could accommodate families with two full-time working parents. Again, while this inclusive/democratic provision allows more diversity, it also creates possible challenges for the future. For instance, when both parents are working full-time jobs, they are not able to spend as much time participating in community activities (such as gathering in the "Forest" or playground with other families after school each day, or volunteering as "Star Parents"). Perhaps, as a result of these unavoidable constraints, it will become more difficult for community members to develop the same relationships and sense of trust that they have been able to in the past. Or at a minimum, Springhill faculty will have to find even more creative ways to build a strong sense of community with ever-growing busy families.

The approaches a faculty takes to address conflict and solve problems. It seems schools must be willing to frame obstacles as opportunities and conflicts as catalysts for creative problem-solving for democratic practice to work. The Springhill

faculty's acceptance of conflict (see chapter 7 "Weapon Play" for example of adult conflict or chapter 9 for example of children's conflict) is outside of the U.S. cultural norm. For example, Corsaro's (2003) research suggests that conflict is viewed very differently depending on the country (and culture) in which one resides. He found that by-and-large U.S. citizens are quite uncomfortable with conflict and certainly do not see conflict as a positive and healthy part of a community. The challenge for other preschool programs will be to embrace conflict and negotiate solutions in ways that honor each person's voice.

Quality of relationships and connections. Springhill started with a foundation of trust and previously established relationships and friendships. As described above, Springhill faculty has a history of easing newcomer's transitions into the school. Recall how many teachers (including Terra, Sophie, Leanne, Nanette, Lisa) were parents with children enrolled at Springhill prior to becoming staff members. Gina and Jane, two teachers that did not have previously established relationships at Springhill before accepting their positions (neither through friendships or children enrolled there), are the two teachers who have not continued teaching at Springhill following this study. During my interview with Gina in 2009 she mentioned her strong desire for her son to feel connected to the Springhill school and some of her sadness that she and her son didn't have that same connection with the school that other teachers had. Although I do not know their reasons for leaving, this certainly raises questions for further study: when teachers do not have the same sort of emotional investment and buy-in, are they more likely to leave the school in shorter periods of time? Do the new teachers feel somewhat alienated when they join this tight knit community?

Ability to embrace the unknown: Uncharted territories. Another challenge of implementing a democratic type of preschool program is that it can feel quite unsettling for parents (and teachers). Without a pre-packaged curriculum program or a specific "do's and dont's" type of regimented discipline program, many parents feel uncomfortable and unsure of how to handle situations with their children, or how similar situations are being handled at school. For example, one parent explains: "I don't know, there have been sometimes when I'm just like, I don't know what to say to [my child] when [they are] behaving [certain ways] and…that is unsettling for me as a parent who feels decently competent as a parent…But then there are other things, like, "I think you need to *check in* with her more," or certain kinds of language that I feel like I have learned and picked up and benefited from [Springhill]. But it's that unsettling piece that, kind of, *lack of surety of how to handle it that feels kind of unsettling for me."*

Certainly, seeing Springhill teachers in action, along with their intentionally transparent processes (e.g., use of documentation and dialogue with parents) helps assuage some of these fears and are important factors for other early childhood educators to consider.

Transition into elementary school. A final challenge that I observed for parents was the long-term options for children's schooling as they move into elementary school. Many of the parents said they would prefer to keep their child at Springhill past preschool and throughout lower and middle grades, but were unable to because of the tuition costs. Several parents dreaded their children's future enrollment in public schools, yet were resigned to that as the only feasible option. Parents seemed to view later public schooling as something their children had to "get through," not as somewhere they would prosper.

In the following interview, I asked a parent, "How do you feel that [girl's name] will be prepared for first grade when she does go into a more traditional public school?" She responded (Sue, personal communication, June 3, 2010, lines 674-693):

> I don't know. I'm afraid honestly. I hope that this kind of exposure during her most, you know, foundational, fundamental years…will be a good foundation for her so that she knows -- I mean, she knows how to learn and she knows how to be creative and so, you know, she's -- there's definitely going to be things in public school where being creative is not allowed and that's just the fact of the matter. I mean, you know, there's going to be times where she's told to do a book report and if she does a video it's not going to be allowed because that wasn't the assignment but I hope that -- I hope that -- I don't know…I mean, I don't know that it's prepared her. I hope that it's prepared her to withstand a little bit of that onslaught. I don't think it's prepared her in the way most people think of as prepared. I don't think it's prepared her in a way that will make first grade easy for her. I think it's going to be hard. I think it's going to be really hard for her to sit and I don't think it's prepared her to sit still. I don't think it's prepared her to learn by memory. I don't think it's prepared her to learn by rote. And I think those are probably things that for some people would be drawbacks about Springhill. I do think she's going to be a little bit at a disadvantage in that way, but I'm hoping that it's prepared her to just stand a little firmer against the onslaught of whole conformity that's going to happen…Or that we win the lottery and she can go to Springhill for five more years.

This sentiment was repeated to me by several parents, a sad resignation that their children were most likely going to be transitioning into a school where their creativity, critical thinking, and intrinsic joy for learning would be squashed. What does it mean when parents, such as these well-educated, caring Springhill parents accept this condition (or at least perception) of public schools?

Perhaps, lessons could be learned from a group of parents in the Grant Park neighborhood of Atlanta who advocated for their children when faced with their children's transition from Grant Park Cooperative Preschool's democratic learning community into a rigidly structured, test-based public elementary school. After seeing the possibilities that emerge out of an alternative type of program, the parents grew concerned and decided to take action. As change agents in their community, they helped establish an elementary charter school in their neighborhood based on constructivist and democratic learning principles, and four years later helped open a charter middle school (Cooper, 2007).

Level of freedom. The more I explore democracy, the more it seems that one of Springhill's contributions is in its absence of barriers—barriers so often placed between ordinary human impulses and the actions that, all things being equal, we would expect those impulses to give rise to. When schools, even preschools, turn into prisons with no freedom, where everything is controlled and manipulated, the natural abilities of both children and adults to trust their internal compasses are negated, all but eliminating the capacity to act upon simple impulses to: empathize, collaborate, nurture (others and their own bodies and self), learn, create, problem-solve, act morally, express feelings, make choices (e.g., safety), self-regulate conflicts between our urges and the interests of others,

and see the world and ideas as complex rather than binary positions or simplistically. In other words, when you can remove the unnecessary barriers to the natural expression of our humanity, you have gone a long way toward creating an entirely different kind of school, a school based not upon obedience, but upon freedom and democracy—a school like Springhill.

Conclusion

Clearly it is not easy to quantify or show all the complexities in the type of experiences and environment that Springhill has created. In our quick-fix society this is certainly a challenge in considering what can be garnered from this case study. In short, what can be taken from this dissertation? In a final enumeration, I include the following lessons from Springhill: 1) from Springhill we see the possibilities that arise for children and parents when they are allowed the opportunity to be co-participants and decision-makers in a democratic learning community; 2) from Springhill we understand the need for finding at least a small group of teachers or parents willing to take the journey towards democracy together; 3) from Springhill we take an inspiring example of what it means to strive to be a lifelong learner and the satisfaction that comes from working in that type of learning community; 4) from Springhill we take inspiration for the challenge and work that is sorely needed in advocating for a system that allows all income levels and diverse race and ethnic backgrounds to afford to work or enroll in this type of program; and most importantly 5) from Springhill we come to appreciate that ordinary teachers can doing extraordinary things with perseverance, community support, collaboration, problem-solving, plenty of time, ongoing reflection on practice, and freedom to actualize a democratic preschool community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Definition of Democratic Educational Practice

This chart serves as a tool to help show the connections between historical precedents in early childhood education (as discussed in chapter 2) and democratic practices. I have subdivided the definition into three categories: pedagogy, curriculum content, and school structure.

Pedagogy	P1 Respect and support well-being, happiness and rights of all children as citizen learners, including the rights to intellectual freedom, emotional expression, and unstructured exploration and play.	P2 Respect and support the well-being and common good of the community.	P3 Engage young minds in a co-constructive and participatory learning process.	P4 Include children in decision-making that affects school experiences both as individuals and as a group.	P5 Keep in check the tendency towards top-down social control of children.
Curriculum Content	C1 Reflect a diversity of perspectives and embrace similarities, as well as differences, dissonance and dissent.	C2 Develop a negotiated curriculum with priority given to children's emerging interests.	C3 Engage children's critical thinking skills and capacity for independent and collaborative problem-solving.	C4 Include social justice issues as part of the curriculum content.	C5 Include critical reflection in curriculum planning and implementation.
Structure	S1 Create access to a high-quality, citizenship enhancing experience for all young children regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, race, or disability.	S2 Include all community members in the operations and procedures of the school.			

Appendix B: Interview Protocol Used With Springhill Faculty

I used the *Interview Guide Approach* as discussed in Patton (2002, p. 349) where "topics and issues to be covered are specified in advance, and interviewer decides sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview."

Themes to Explore During Teacher Interviews Including Possible Start-Up Questions to Guide the Discussion:

Background Information: Life Histories and Childhood Memories

Can you tell me about your family structure and some of your childhood memories?

What are some of your most vivid memories of school, learning and play?

How did you come into this field? Prior work experience? Experience at Springhill at Stonewood?

Approaches to Behavior Management

Tell me about your behavior management strategies.

Share some example of conflicts in your classroom and what happened.

What are the purposes of rules?

Images of Children

How would you describe a typical preschooler?

How do children learn?

What motivates children to learn?

Images of Teaching

What is your philosophy of teaching?

What are you goals for teaching?

How do you describe your teaching style?

How do your teaching practices reflect your teaching style?

What have been the most important sources of knowledge that have influenced your practice?

Can you describe how you prefer to go about learning?

Ideas about Democratic Community

What does community mean to you? In the learning environment?

Share thoughts or examples of ways that you or the school creates a democratic community.

What role does competition have in school communities and individual learning?

Curriculum

How do you develop curriculum for the classroom?

How has your curriculum evolved over the years?

What are the challenges in creating classroom projects?

How do you think your approach is similar and/or different from other preschool programs?

Appendix C: Interview Questions Used with Springhill Parents

What are some of your memories of childhood?

How did you decide to enroll your child in this school? What were the influencing factors of your decision?

Tell me about the types of involvement you have in your child's schooling.

What are your beliefs and philosophies on children and how they learn and develop?

What are some of your thoughts and experiences about the school? Curriculum?

How does your child talk to you about their experience at school?

What are the most important values that you think should be instilled in your child?

In school this year, what would you like them to learn and why?

Tell me about your children's teachers.

How do you handle conflicts with your children?

What have you learned from your experience as a member of this school community?

What are some challenges you or your child has faced in this or other school communities?

If you have older children, tell me about their transition to elementary school and above.

Appendix D: Map of Springhill's 2009-2010 Outdoor Space
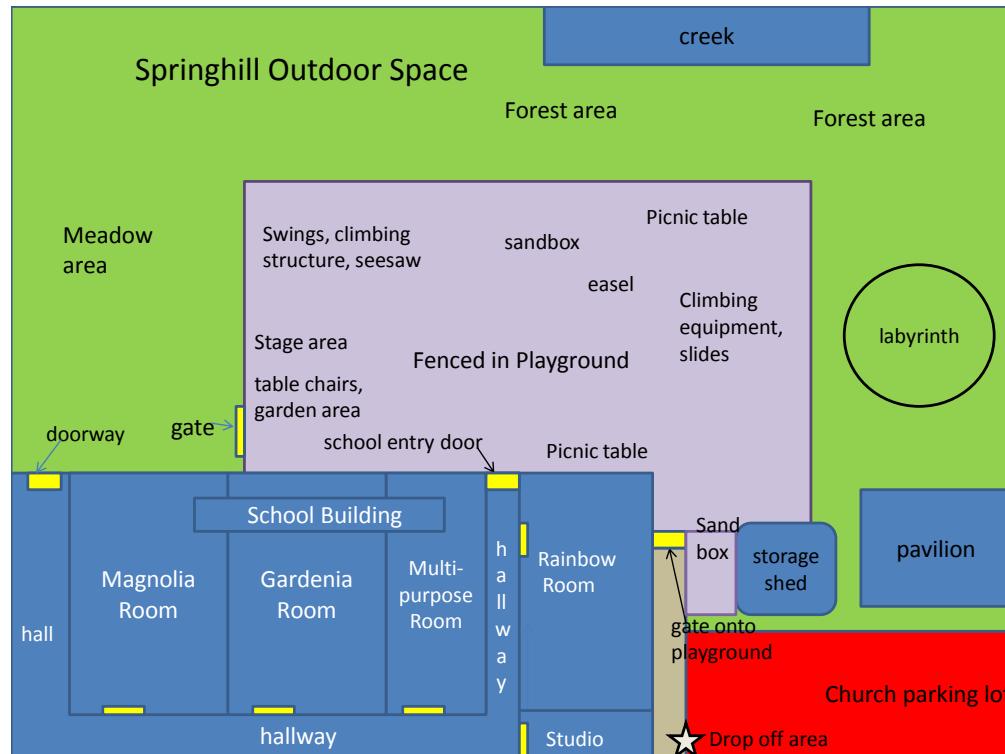
Two important elements of Springhill's school site to note: 1) their outdoor space was used as much as their indoor spaces and was considered a crucial part of the children's educational experience at the school; and 2) unlike the majority of preschools, children had the freedom to move from classroom to classroom, providing they wrote a note of their intentions.

Appendix E: Map of the 2009-2010 Gardenia Room
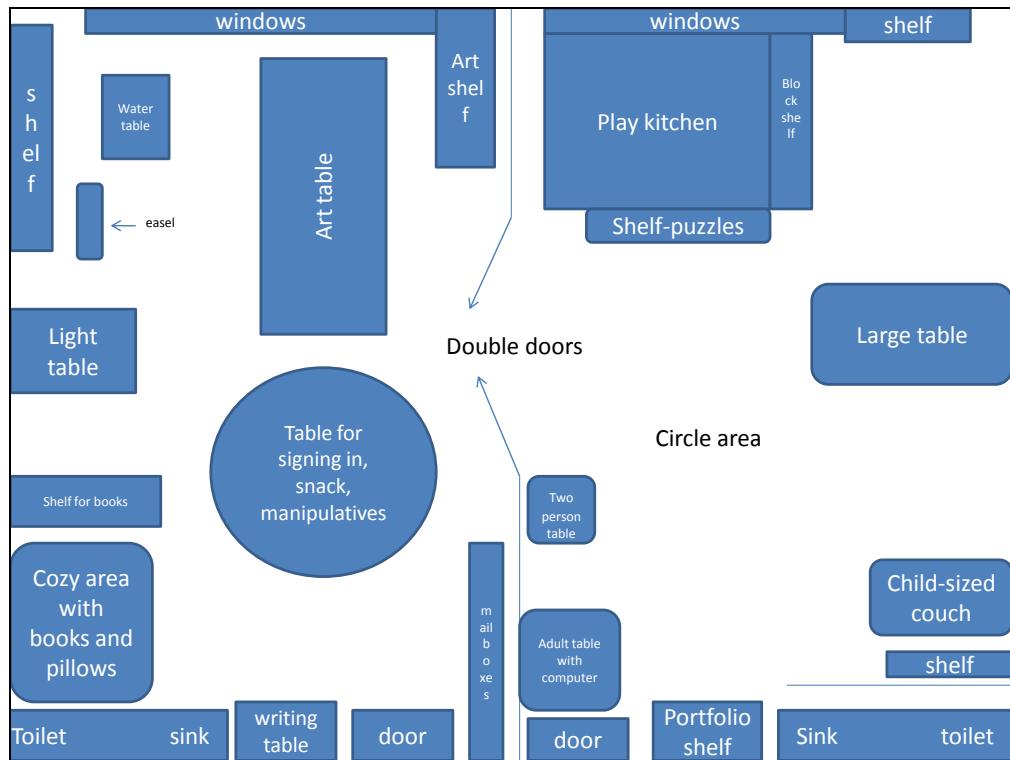
In many ways the Gardenia room looked like a "typical" classroom. However, there were three primary differences worthy of note: 1) classroom materials did not have to stay in designated areas but could be moved around the room as needed by children; 2) the classroom materials were primarily open-ended, including natural materials, construction equipment, and tools used to support project work and imaginative play (as opposed to the kind of toys that are typically found in "education" catalogs such as artificial, plastic, close-ended, manufactured toys that are designed for more limited uses and kinds of play); and 3) each classroom had a strong identity of the children and teachers in that particular classroom, with much evidence of their ongoing interests, investigations, and theories displayed in documentation throughout the room.

Appendix F: "Summer Memories," Gardenia Room, October 2009

SUMMER MEMORIES

o A SMOOTH SEASHELL
o PINECONES
o A BAG OF TINY STONES
o A FADED BLOOM FROM A BUTTERFLY BUSH
o CICADA SHELLS
o A SAND DOLLAR
o A FLUTTERING BUTTERFLY PUPPET
o ROCKS FROM A MISTY COAST
o A BASEBALL
o SWIMMING RIBBONS AND A CERTIFICATE
o A FRAGRANT BUNCH OF BASIL
o A CAMPING TRIP
o CAROUSEL RIDES IN NEW YORK CITY
o DRAWINGS OF BUGS AND CRABS
o HIKING IN THE MOUNTAINS
o A MAP OF SUMMER EXPERIENCES
o AND MANY, MANY STORIES OF TRAVELS AND VISITS WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY

THESE ARE THE SUMMER MEMORIES COLLECTED BY THE CHILDREN.

Several of the children created drawings or maps of their summer experiences. Mapping provides a fascinating glimpse into how young children view the world as children typically depict things that they consider to be important. We see them representing things that have significance and meaning to them – whether it's a hole where a crab was hiding in the sand or their grandparents' house in another part of the country. Are these children creating maps based on emotions (in the case of the crab – fear) and relationships? Another aspect of mapping that I have been noticing is perspective. Children almost instinctively draw maps from the perspective of looking down -- quite remarkable for small people in a big world. These maps of summer memories provide interesting insight into how children relate to places they have visited.

We will continue to think more about children and place throughout the school year as we explore what a sense of place means – you may have noticed a panel near the entrance of the school which is where all of the classrooms will be adding reflections on this topic as part of a school-wide investigation. Please take a moment to read the documentation on this panel and help us think about this study.

In the meantime, back in the Gardenia Room we will start work on creating a wire weaving of the summer memories.

Appendix G: "Robots and Shooters," Gardenia Room, November 2009

One morning, teachers set out an array of building materials, which included large wooden nuts and bolts. For several days prior to this, the children had been enjoying using small metal nuts and bolts and we wondered if they would be interested in similar materials, which were on a slightly larger scale.

The children were curious about the wooden pieces, but they did not seem quite sure about how to put the pieces together. A couple of children started stacking the long wooden bars, but they did not immediately see that the pieces could be screwed together. Then, one child picked up one of the wooden bars, pointed it and made a shooting sound. Several other children at the table immediately followed his lead, saying that they were making "shooters". Other children playing nearby looked uncomfortable at this development and so I stepped in to check if it was okay with everyone for such a game to be played in our classroom. After some discussion we established that children did not want shooting games to be played in the classroom. So, we discussed where would be acceptable to play a shooting game – the children came up with the idea that it would be okay to shoot the sand toys in the sand box. Everyone agreed to this, and so a group headed outside with a basket of "shooters".

The playground was not open at this point. We distributed the "shooters" and the children stood around the sandbox making loud shooting noises.

After less than two minutes (I was timing this on my watch) they were not quite as interested in shooting the sand toys and so we discussed what else they could shoot. They decided that they could shoot the trees in the forest, so they ran over to a picnic table and started shooting the trees. A game developed – the group would run over to the sandbox, shoot toys for a few seconds and then run back to the fence to shoot trees. The children seemed to really enjoy running together between the two locations and there was a strong sense of camaraderie as they shouted, "C'mon, guys!"

This game lasted under five minutes and then the children started handing me their "shooters" to put back in the basket – they wanted to swing, run and play on the seesaw. It seemed that the shooting game had provided a way for them to connect and once the connection was established, they no longer needed the "shooters".

When we returned to the classroom the group wanted to work on refining their shooters. During this process one child added some extra wooden screws. He held up his construction and declared, "Look, I made a robot!"

As the children became more skilful with the wooden building materials, their interest in shooters evaporated. Several more children declared that they were working on robots and children who had been hesitant about the shooter game started to come over to the building table to make robots.

Grace works on a robot

Interest in robots has continued over the last few weeks. Children visited the studio and started making robots using different materials – Alice has documented some of the robot work in the studio in her blog: (atelierista blog)   .   The children have created a varied assortment of robots, including robot babies (a gift to Stella from Larry) and even a pregnant robot!

Ethan's drawing of a pregnant robot

Stella creates a robot out of copper pipe

The initial inspiration for the robots was shooters, an assertive game initiated by a group of boys. With some guidance and clear limits, this game evolved and changed into an exploration of robots, which now involves many children in the classroom. Shooting games hold a lot of appeal for young children, most often boys, who are looking for a quick way to connect with others. However, this type of play has a number of disadvantages: it typically does not last very long and the social connection is not sustained. In addition, this type of play can be uncomfortable for other children (and adults!). With some support from a teacher, the game moved in a different direction – the play has developed and expanded to include children who were initially hesitant about the shooters. The robots have provided a much more satisfying experience for a larger group of children.

Ethan and Oscar add their robots to the documentation panel

Over the years teachers at our school have noticed certain patterns relating to shooting type games. Such games are often prevalent at the beginning of the school year when children are figuring out ways to connect. It's also a time that can be somewhat stressful as children deal with a new environment and a new set of friends. For three and four year olds who have limited social skills it is certainly much easier to start a fast and easy shooting game. However, as this story illustrates, more complex play is ultimately much more satisfying.

We expect that the topic of shooters will continue to crop up throughout the year– it always does with this age group. To read more about this issue I highly recommend *The War Play Dilemma* by Diane Levin and Nancy Carlsson-Paige – a sensitive and thorough examination of this immensely complicated subject.

Appendix H: "Chamomile Tea: Rituals & Relationships," Gardenia Room, October 2009

CHAMOMILE TEA: RITUALS & RELATIONSHIPS

"Would you like some chamomile tea? I made some for you."

Every day Evelyn extends this invitation to me. She offered me tea on the first day of school and now, each day, she continues to entice me to stop for a moment in our busy classroom to take some time to savor her special tea. And who could resist such a delightful invitation?

Evelyn's invitation is just one example of the children's strong desire to build relationships in our classroom. Small rituals, such as making a cup of tea, play an important part in creating a community.

Another ritual emerged during the phase-in period -- towards the end of his first morning of school, Zach picked up two tiny pieces of pine bark mulch, he tapped them together and softly sang "ding, ding, ding". He was anticipating the ringing of the chimes, which indicate that it is time to return to our classroom for closing circle. During circle time we invited Zach to show his "chimes" to everyone.

At our next circle two other children, in addition to Zach, announced that they had mulch chimes -- the children retrieved miniscule pieces of mulch from their pockets and then tapped in rhythm as we sang the "Hello" song.

We knew from the Forest Room teachers that music had been an important part of both classrooms last year and so it was not entirely surprising that the children from those classrooms were using music as a way to connect with each other.

However, children who did not attend our school last year were also producing mulch from their pockets. The mulch chimes had become an important way for the children in our classroom to create a common bond. Clearly, the desire to connect is apparent even from our very first encounters.

The mulch chimes have continued to be of significance in our classroom. Each day increasing numbers of children are bringing mulch chimes to circle at the end of the day. Over the weekend I was speculating about how this interest in mulch chimes might develop and then today, as so often happens, one child added a new dimension. At circle today Ethan   brought…….gumball chimes.

We'll see what happens at circle tomorrow!

Appendix I: "The Labyrinth is Long!" Hallway Display, Rainbow Room, November 2009

Appendix J: "Forest Mapping," Rainbow Room
("Forest Mapping" documentation was posted on Springhill's "Umbrella Project" blog on October 8, 2009)

Forest mapping

The Rainbow room is spending part of each day outside. The class of 4 year olds can be as active as they like. I enjoy observing the interplay of the cognitive and the kinesthetic that this type of outdoor learning in the Forest brings out. Children can run and jump, sit and draw, sing and dance, or calculate and count when the space is wide open.

On this day in late September the children had the idea to measure the labyrinth so that they could see how big it was in order to put it on a map they are making of the Forest. Children proposed different ways of measuring, including walking through it and counting your steps, and using a string to trace the shape of the labyrinth. It was so interesting to me that they posed such a knotty problem for themselves right from the beginning of the year, one involving measurement and scale. These are difficult problems for people of any age to solve.

More Forest Room Mapping documentation, "Place and Mapping -The Shelter of the Imagination Itself?," posted on Umbrella Project Blog, Tuesday, November 3, 2009

Place and Mapping -The Shelter of the Imagination Itself?

Teachers in different classrooms have noticed mapping as a thread running through our exploration of Place. Teachers listen closely to the children as they make maps, and they are noticing that the adult assumption of what a map is may be very different from children's ideas about maps.

Children have been describing and/or making maps that contain standard memes like roads and buildings, but also non-physical place markers like smells and textures.

The Rainbow room children have centered their maps (mental and made) on a cave which is a product of their storytelling, a place that might be deep and dark and scary. Other maps describe feelings and elements like wind.

In *The Poetics of Space*, Gaston Bachelard writes about how places experienced in childhood may form the basis for imagination and creative thinking in adulthood. In his introduction to the book John Stilgoe asks if the first places are experienced by a child not only cognitively, but also with "fingertip memory".

He wonders, "How does the body, not merely the mind, remember the feel of a latch in a long-forsaken childhood home?"

Appendix K: Studio Blogs on Gardenia Room Sun Prints

Photography and Place; the Gardenia room, posted Monday April 15, 2010

Last week on two different days, small groups came from the Gardenia room (3's, younger 4's) to the Studio to investigate new aspects of photography. These children have explored the digital camera, taking many of their own photos and learning things that the teachers didn't know, like how to play music and a slide show on the camera. Avery visited from her class.

Their Teacher Jess brought a group on Tuesday to look at a 35mm camera and film. A parent (Melissa) had donated an old camera, so the children were familiar with the lens opening and other parts, but they had not put film in the 35 millimeter or taken any pictures. I will post more on this after I bring the processed film back to them.

We wanted to somehow let the children in on the developing process, without having to find a darkroom. Cyanotypes (also known as Sunprints or blueprints) are a way of developing a picture just with water, in daylight. I got some chemicals from Rockland Photographic (http://www.rockaloid.com), mixed and painted the chemicals on 2 big pieces of paper at home, and brought them in. We had to work fast so the bright sun wouldn't expose the paper before we could get the objects in place.The children found natural items to make one picture, and Grace and Abigail lay on the other to make a picture of themselves. Some bugs crawled around on the sheet with the pinecones. We will try this again!

Here is what the children had to say about the experience;

Grace: It's me and Abigail

Oscar: No, it's kind of magic. It's regular green paper.

 We get shadows and put on the hose and it makes the shadows stay and makes it get blue.

Larry: there are bugs on there (did the bugs show on the picture, or is Larry remembering them?)

Oscar: it's kind of magic

More blogs by Alice on photography and sun prints, posted Wednesday, April 14, 2010

In the 3-4 Gardenia room, the investigation into PLACE has centered around photography. The children have looked closely at many types of cameras and have gone outside with me to make cyanotypes, or sunprints. When Oscar saw the photographs of hands (he was not in that group that day), he noticed that there were also prints of grass on them. This really disturbed Oscar, it seems, because it didn't fit in with some part of his working theory of how the photographic process works.

I don't quite understand the differences in the children's hypotheses, but can see them adding and subtracting information from them each time we make prints or talk about them.

Here is a conversation about how the grass got into those pictures;

Oscar "I don't know how the grass got here, because you just washed it in the sink."

Larry "Well, we holded really really still, and for a long time. Then the grass will just cut off, and go on here (the photo). Then we can put it in the sink.

Alice "Does the sink make the picture?"

Larry "No. The Sun and then the grass. No. The Sun makes the grass seal on the paper."

Oscar "No. The Sun and then the sink!"

Larry "When we put the picture in the sink, it makes a better picture."

Alice "But before when we developed the sunprints, we didn't use the sink. We used the hose, remember?"

Orson (Referring to Abigail and Grace, who made a picture by laying on a big sheet of sunprint paper) "When they were lying on the paper, did they get wet?"

The conversations between the three and four year old children about the photographic process allows a glimpse into their thought process. This allows me to reflect on my process -am I asking the right questions, providing the best provocations, and following through on the places where the learning is richest?

More on photography, cyanotypes and the 3/4 year olds, posted Tuesday, May 18, 2010

The children in the Gardenia room have continued to focus on photography, both in how it can be used in the classroom (for documenting happenings and artwork, for taking pictures of people and events, like birthday circles), and how it works. The Gardenia room teachers have provided many provocations about photography, including some x-rays on the light table. This led to some hypothesizing about how x-rays are possible.

Last week Larry and Oscar came to the studio. I told them I had the chemicals in a jar, and asked them if they would like to put it on some paper so they could make some more photographs. Larry painted "Mr. Bones", our model skeleton onto the paper.

The next day, Larry, Oscar and Lila came back to the studio to make some x-rays out of the now dry paper.

Later, I went back to ask them about that experience; "Remember when you put the chemicals on some paper and made those pictures? I wonder if you could tell me about that day, so I could write it down. How did those pictures get there?"

Oscar "It's magic"

Duke (narrating) "Can everyone see our X rays? On our paper that's white and blue? It shows our x-rays. The x-ray is Mr. Bones. The other x-ray is a painting of Mr. Bones. The other one is not an x-ray, it's just a man."

Oscar "It's magic. It's magic with the sun. The sun makes light."

Alice -Oscar, can you tell me the steps of how to do it?

1. paint on the green chemical
2. have to put it in the sink.

3. have to keep it still.
4. put it on for a long time.
5. have to run back, to put it in the sink.
You have to run, so the shadow doesn't get off.
So the green doesn't go off, and turns to blue."
Larry
"1. the sun helps paper get the blue.

2. you put the things on, like Mr. Bones, leaves or sticks.
3. Quickly run to the sink to get the paper in it.
Rule #5. First you need the sunshine. It shines on the
paper. Then, the paper gets all blue."
10. You get it out of the sink and take it to the Gardenia room, and hang it up for all the Gardenia room children to see."
I read back what they had said, and Oscar made this revision regarding where the 'shadow' gets on to the paper;
Oscar "I *meant*, when you're outside, you have to keep it on for a long time, and you have to keep it still for a long time, *when you're outside*."
I can see that Oscar still has trouble between his assumption (that the picture forms in the sink), and what he has seen, (the 'shadow' gets on the paper outside in the sun). He is still struggling in his mind to form a clear theory of this photographic process. Larry may be altering his theory to go along with what Oscar says about the sink. Perhaps I should interview Lila as the tie-breaker!

Appendix L: "Videos," Gardenia Room Emails, May 2010

The following emails with links to child-created videos were sent out by Sophie and Jess to the Gardenia room parents and preschool faculty:

We've been experimenting a bit with videos. Ever since Larry and Oscar made the discovery that our classroom camera plays music can run a slideshow, Oscar has been curious about what else the camera can do. He has been investigating the dials on the camera and figuring out different functions – not long ago he discovered the video function: (video link here)

That particular day a group of the girls was dancing, which provided the perfect opportunity for making a video: (video link here)

The girls danced to three pieces of music. The third piece of music was very fast and Oscar started moving the camera in time with the music – it created a very interesting and somewhat weird effect. (video link here)

When we reviewed the videos later we noticed that often the dancers were very dark, almost like shadows, and we talked about how much light was coming in the window. We decided to try a second round of videotaping the girls dancing, but this time Oscar would sit in a different place in the room with his back against the window. Here are the results:
(video links here)

(the girls often play a game called Yucky Witches on the playground, which involves mixing potions -- this music was chosen with that game in mind)

We showed some of these videos at circle and they generated a great discussion about light and dark.

Another email that followed several days later, from Sophie and Jess, May 2010

Here's another video -- this time with dancing robots. Interest in robots has continued throughout the year and last week a group worked in the Studio creating robot costumes. Alice introduced us to a great piece of music about robots which was perfect for some robot dancing.

(video link here)
Zach was the photographer for the video portion.

We are wondering if the children would be interested in creating a story to go with their robot costumes.....but, will we have time before the end of the year????

Sophie & Jess

Appendix M: "Getting the Ball Rolling on Greening the Classroom," Gardenia Room

Getting the ball rolling on "greening" the classroom....

One of the main topics of our recent parent meeting was reducing the amount of trash created at snack time. Last year we obtained a container of composting worms (aka Worm World) and we quickly realized that we had more leftover banana peels than the worms could handle. It seemed like the logical next step to start composting on a larger scale. We purchased an Eco-Composter ball which should take care of all the organic matter generated at snack time.

Many thanks to Stacy, Hank and Duke Wolski for putting the composting ball together. Hank and Duke finished assembling the ball at school and installed it on the playground.

The composting ball created a lot of interest with children from all of the classrooms – everyone was very curious about this new addition to the playground.

Meanwhile back in the Gardenia Room we were celebrating the new composter with a special snack of bananas and kiwi fruit – the peels were saved for the composting ball.

We are looking forward to using the composter and making it part of our snack routine.

We plan to talk more about ways to "green" the classroom at our upcoming parent meeting on March 23rd.

**Appendix N: "Imaginings," Magnolia Room**

IMAGININGS

Dramatic play continues to be a dominant feature of the Magnolia Room. We started the day by bringing our large hollow blocks into the room. The first children to arrive immediately started building. Madison and Alex covered the blocks with fabrics. The pieces of trim became snakes.

Ellen took one of our knitted bags and said she was going trick-or-treating for her snake, spotting a basket of small colored blocks to use for candy. They fed the candy to the snakes and then the children turned into mermaids who took care of snakes. Open-ended materials spark the imagination in a way that scripted toys usually don't. The children notice something – "aha!... that could be..." and it is scooped up into the story, transformed into it's new, loftier role. This is improvisation at it's best; a conversation in which the child uses all their mental strength and everything within sight to construct a story. Can't you sense their satisfaction?

The next morning Alex came in and made a family of people out of hollow blocks, something we don't often see blocks used for.
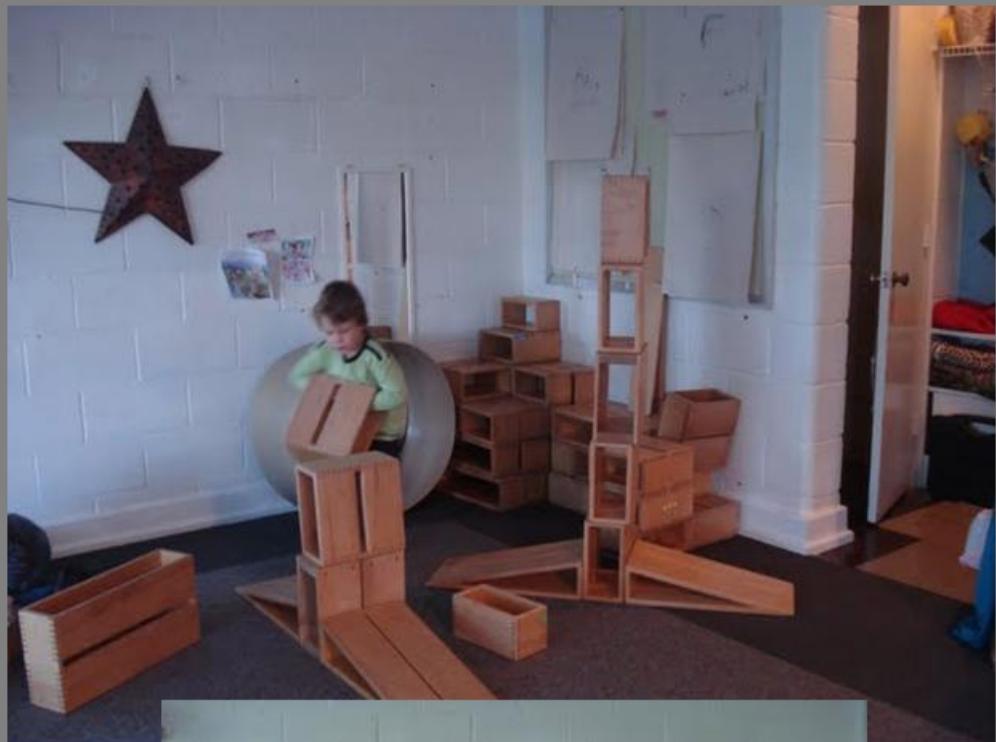
The less-comfortable side of pretend play and imaginings:
Jamie and Adam made a haunted house from the hollow blocks. They wanted the room so dark that you couldn't see but that wasn't okay with some of the other children. Sally invited them to go into the hall and build a haunted house from the small blocks and use play mobile people as the characters. They ended up writing a story about a vampire, a spider-ghost and a pirate. They thought of it at first as a movie, but then decided on a LIVE audience. They invited all of the children warning them of the blood and shooting involved in the story. Some children choose not to come, but several said it would be okay. The audience liked it so much they wanted to make it into a play to perform in the meadow.

Why do we allow such imaginings?
Sometimes children use pretend play to process scary, stressful or anxiety producing issues. As adults we feel compelled to stop them from exploring what feels violent and uncomfortable to us. But what are they supposed to do with those thoughts if we won't let them process them with us? Will it stop them from having them?

Here is an excerpt from Stanley Greenspan (note- we have changed the word "parents" to "adults":

Adults who don't encourage pretend play (which fosters the development of emotional ideas) or who don't support emotional ideas when it comes to coping with aggression only compound the challenges. The child doesn't progress beyond the physical and behavioral manifestations of aggression and learn to elevate his feelings to the level of ideas, in the form of make-believe play and narrative. The child doesn't learn how to construct an internal dialogue that connects his emotions and his language. He never acquires the ability to picture his feelings and is thereby unable to fully contemplate his actions in advance. Some adults, because of their own upbringing, may equate thought and action. "If I think it, I will do it." They, therefore, believe that it's best not to have any aggression emerge in either pretend play or verbal description. When the good soldier starts shooting the bad guy, the parent may respond with "Don't do that, " or try to change the scene to one of nurturing, "Hey , let's make those soldiers become good friends, and like each other!" While our desire to have our children think only nice and loving thoughts is understandable, we need to be more aware that all of us, by the very fact that we are human, experience the full range of feelings—assertiveness and anger as well as love and warmth. We, as adults have a choice. We can continue to let the child express anger at the level of behavior. But then the child can only either act out the anger or anxiously try to inhibit it. Alternatively, we can help our child to elevate anger and other feelings to the world of ideas and let him bring the feeling into pretend play (with soldiers fighting, for example) and into his words ("Mommy, I'm mad!"). Eventually the ideas will be accessible to his reasoning ("Boy, am I mad. I'm gonna talk to Mom about why I am mad"). When a child learns to picture and verbalize his feelings, he has the opportunity to reason and make intelligent choices. If we don't help our children learn to raise their feelings to this level because we are worried that saying "it" will mean doing "it", we actually increase the likelihood that our child will act out rather than talk out his feelings."

From: *The Challenging Child*

Sally pointed out that, interestingly, after that first session, the topic has been forgotten. Even though many children were very excited about making the story into a play, no one has brought it up again. The talk of vampires, shooting, and blood has subsided. We have to wonder - If we had tried to squelched this violent theme would it have come up in the subsequent days?

Appendix O: Pencil Night Documentation, Rainbow Room

Pencil night 2010
Map of the Forest

Showed slides to parents of the children's special places in the forest.

And the ways the children represented these places throughout the year.

Then parents got to work creating the forest map.

Poison ivy with stop sign.

Pavilion.

Cave with fairies.

Playground fence and swings.

I could go to the studio and make people for our forest. - Ellen
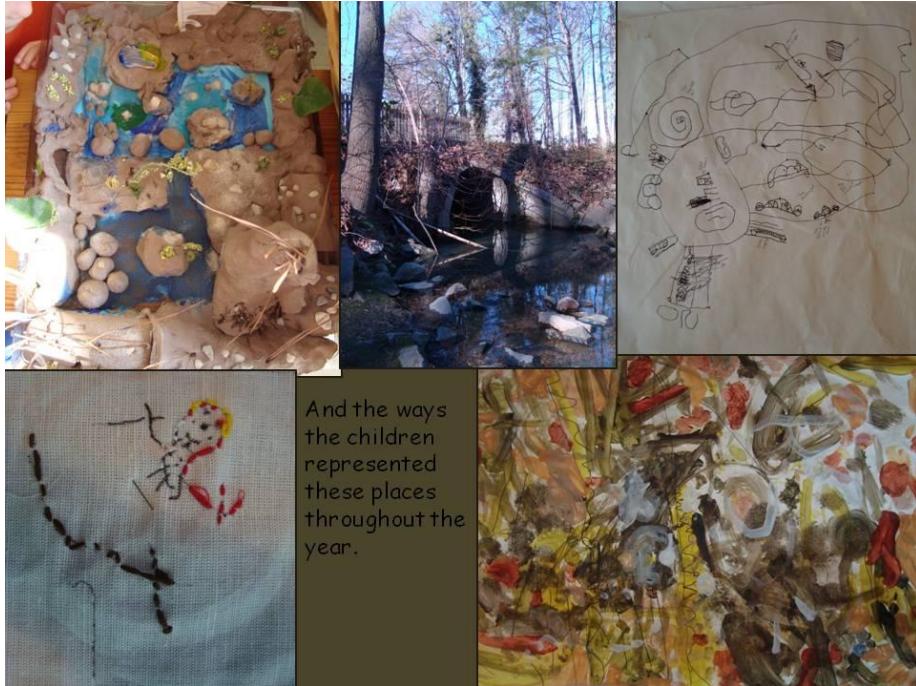
The children were very excited about seeing their parents in the slide show from pencil night. Many of them wanted to play with the forest map.

Look, ladybugs in the forest. Piper

I love all of it. - Tony

Swing set.

We asked the children to draw something from the map.

Teepee.

Pavilion with ceiling fan and picnic tables.

Forest Rooms

Appendix P: Mother's Day Portraits

Another tradition that emerged from the Springhill community is the yearly portrait drawing children complete of their mother. The teachers place these portraits in the children's portfolios each year, along with the following note to parents:

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Portrait of Mother

The Portrait of Mother is a Mother's Day tradition at Springhill at Stonewood. At the heart of this custom is the knowledge that young children are willing to spend time and commit their artistic energies to something that has deep personal meaning. Excited to receive the photographs of their "mommies," each child embraces the opportunity to apply very careful attention to drawing a portrait of their mother. As your years pass as a mother at our school, your collection of portraits will become a record of your child's love and development.

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During my time spent at Springhill there were several occasions when various children pulled out their portfolios and searched for their "mommy's picture**."** Note again how, Springhill teachers makes the purposes of their projects explicit to parents.

Appendix Q: Forest Room Documentation

Recently, we were in the forest when Cara noticed a stick that had a string attached to it. "String" Cara announced as he picked it up and noticed the stick and string had gum balls attached to the opposite end. "Stick" he added and grinned as he stood. He ran looking pleased with his find. He brought it to circle to share with the other children. They noticed how all of the parts were attached and enjoyed holding it for a closer look.

We took Cara's stick and string out to the forest the next day. The children liked the string and were interested in bringing some out that they could each cut for their own use. After cutting their piece of string the children ran around the labyrinth with the string trailing behind them. Belinda threw his string up in the air and said "Watch string go high! It floats!" Alison stood winding the string around her finger.

Jerry was interested in playing with Cara's stick and string and when he found it on the ground he said "Fishing pole!" Then he twirled it around really fast.

The Rainbow Room children came to the forest. Jerry and Cara walked over to them with the help of a teacher to see if they had seen string in the forest. Terra recognized the string and stick as one of several toys Valerie had made to play with in the forest. She called her over to see it.

"Look, Valerie, Jerry is holding your Stick Toy! Would you like to show him how it works?"

Valerie twirled the string with the gum balls around just as Jerry had done. Terra exclaimed "Valerie, your toy doesn't even need any instructions!"

We wonder, did Valerie think that the other children might like to play with the toys she created? Was her intention to hide the toys in the "peek-a-boo tree" part of her game? Did she want other children to find them?

Cara and Jerry certainly seemed delighted with her creations and the possibility for a deeper relationship with Valerie and the Rainbow Room has been sparked.

Appendix R: Book List

The following list of books and authors contains a sampling of the large amount of literature that Springhill teachers referenced in conversations or mentioned as influential in shaping their teaching practices.

Adele Faber & Elaine Mzlish, *How to Talk so Kids Will Listen and Listen So Kids Will Talk*

Barbara Kingsolver

Carolyn Edwards, Lella Gandini, George Forman, *100 Hundred Languages of Children*

Celestin Freinet

David Sobel

Diane Levin and Nancy Carlsson-Paige, *Peaceful Classroom*

Gary Paul Nabhan and Stephen Trimble, *The Geography of Childhood: Why Children Need Wild Spaces*

Gerard Jones, *Killing Monsters: Why Kids Need Superheroes*

Gianni Rodari, *The Grammar of Fantasy*

Haim Ginott

Howard Gardner

Jane Katch, *Under Dead Men's Skin*

Jean Piaget

John Dewey

Lev Vygotsky

Malcolm Gladwell, *Tipping Point*

Margie Carter and Deb Curtis

Patti Whipfler

Richard Louv, *Last child in the woods*.

Roger Fisher & William Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In*

Stanley Greenspan, *The Challenging Child*

Susan Scott, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time*

Vivian Paley

William Corsaro, *We're Friends Right? Inside Kids' Peer Cultures*

Appendix S: Teacher's Education and Years of Experience at Springhill

Teacher's Name	Education	Years *teaching* at Springhill	Children enrolled at Springhill prior to joining faculty
Jess	Bachelor's degree in Arts, major in Crafts	10+	No
Sophie	Bachelor's in Librarianship and French	14+	Yes
Terra	Bachelor's in Nursing; Master's degree in Public Health Administration	3+	Yes
Gina	BFA in Crafts, later received B. in ?Art education	2 (left following year?)	No
Leanne	Bachelor's degree in Early childhood Education (K-4) with preschool certification, also completed prerequisite coursework for occupational therapy coursework	6+	Yes
Nanette	Master's degree with a focus on Ceramics	5+	Yes
Mary	Bachelor's in Anthropology and Master's in Child Development	14+	Yes
Lisa	Ph.D. in Special Education	15+	Yes
Fran	Bachelor's degree in English, Master's Degree in Christian Education	4+	No
Nicole	Training as Licensed Practical Nurse	21+	Yes
Alice	BFA, degree in photography, Master's in Art Education	14+	Not sure