“Education is not the filling of the pail, but the lighting of the fire.” – William Butler Yeats

As parents, we care deeply about what our children are learning, yet often find ourselves somewhat mystified by the process. I’ve caught my husband drilling our daughter on numbers in the bathtub with mixed success and I confess I try to capitalize on her inner genius at all times. While I’m confident that our daughter is learning from us for better or worse, I have witnessed incredible growth in just three months of her attending Pacific Primary, which I can only attribute to the school. How do they do it and what can we, as parents, learn?

Part of the special sauce used at Pacific Primary is the practice of Emergent Curriculum. This is a philosophy by which educators spend time observing children in order to discover the children’s interests and inquiries. The curriculum, often in the form of projects, is then developed based on the children’s interests. It “emerges” from the children, in a manner of speaking.

What does this look like in practice? In an example from the Rainbow Dolphin classroom, teachers noticed the children showing interest in the insects and spiders they were finding in the garden. The teachers followed up by asking the children what they knew about spiders and insects during circle time; they taught the children songs and finger plays with factual information on insects; they set up science experiments to learn about venom; they took the children into the garden to explore with magnifying glasses and bug catchers. Teaching in this way supported the children’s learning of science and mathematical concepts, among other things. For example, counting and comparing the numbers of legs and antennae, and learning about and noticing symmetry in insect bodies.

Why does this type of teaching matter? Laura Galvin, now retired, one of the staff
Continued on Page 2
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Contributors
Nancy Anderman
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Anthony Larkin
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Pacific Primary Staff
2011–2012
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Director
Lynn Turner
Finance Director
Amie Haiz
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Eric Wilson, Lead Teacher
Tammy Barchas
Hanna Alemayehu

A Message from the Board President
Hassan Zaidi

Emergent Curriculum: Why it matters for life-long learning

Continued from page 1
who helped bring Emergent Curriculum to Pacific Primary.

Belann Giarretto
Lynn Turner
Joan Viglotta
Nancy Anderman

Contributors
Ileana Street
Rachel Levin
Seth Blacher
Sandy Crockett
Mimi Rosenheim
Keith Gilhooly
Patricia Callaway
Charlie Miles
Alessandra Sanguinetti

Emergent Curriculum: Why it matters for life-long learning

Type of learning at home. Teachers suggest that parents spend time observing their chil-
dren’s play. Pictures they draw or games they play can illuminate topics to start exploring.

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Children’s play. Pictures they draw or games they play can illuminate topics to start exploring.
At the heart of Pacific Primary’s Emergent Curriculum is the school’s talented and dedicated teaching staff. They work hard to create meaningful educational experiences around our children’s interests.

Projects in an Emergent Curriculum are driven by the children’s own interests and ideas, so the teachers diligently observe those ideas as they develop and create an environment in which the children can explore these ideas more deeply. “We pay close attention to what the children are playing, what they are talking about, and what they’re gravitating towards in terms of toys, materials and artwork in the classroom,” explains Coyote Lead Teacher, Nadia Jaboneta.

“The children toss us the ball, which is an idea,” says Polar Bear Co-Lead Teacher Brian Silveira. “We listen and think, ‘What can we do with this idea?’ We toss the ball back to them in various ways: perhaps through reflection at morning meeting, introducing different play materials, bringing in an expert or deciding what field trips to take. Then we see how the children react and what they do with that. Maybe it takes hold, or maybe it doesn’t and we have to go in a different direction. We make these decisions as we go along.”

When children in a classroom keep returning to a topic day after day, it becomes an opportunity for the teachers to design a project based around that topic. The teachers meet to brainstorm ideas on how to create projects that will include science, literacy development, music, pre-math, art, field trips, and all the other aspects of the school’s educational program through a process called ‘webbing.’

The Penguin class developed their project on “Songs Come to Life,” which followed the children’s curiosity about specific songs and topics related to those songs, according to Penguin Lead Teacher, Saeda Fuller. The children participated in a variety of experiences and activities when exploring the song “Two Little Black Birds,” such as learning about bird habitats; helping to create nests with natural materials; making eggs with painted rocks; making little black birds with pine cones, paint and feathers; test- ing flight movement; weight of feathers and discussed migration at morning circle by testing temperatures of objects that were warm and cold.

Finally, the teachers keep an eye out for when a project has run its course. As Brian explains, “often times a project will come to a natural closing, where we’re struggling for more things to do, or if the children’s interest doesn’t seem to be growing. Then we will say ‘OK, it’s time to bring this project to an end.’”

The class will then hold a “project party” to honor the work of the class. Teachers create documentation panels which capture the joint children-teacher learning process through photo displays, specific descriptions and explanations of how the work on the project progressed. Parents are invited to school and the children lead their parents around the class explaining the photo displays after the teachers lead a circle time which includes highlights of the children’s contributions. Parents bring a potluck dish to share with the class to celebrate the significant learning and work that occurred this year. This is the way Pacific Primary teachers create the rich educational environment that has a significant impact on our children’s development and which sparks further curiosity.

This is the way Pacific Primary teachers create the rich educational environment that has a significant impact on our children’s development and which sparks further curiosity.

This chain of events demonstrates how children can learn from one another, which allows them to expand their understanding of concepts through their classmates. This also exemplifies the benefit of Emergent Curriculum, the children displayed an interest, and by the teacher providing the right materials to fuel their curiosity, optimal learning was able to take place.
My son, Walker, came home from school recently and started talking about Martin Luther King. His teachers have been talking a lot about Dr. King and what he stands for and I got to see what a huge impression his teachings can make on a community — even when that community is under the age of five.

Friday, January 13, 2012, was the Pacific Primary Peace Parade celebrating the life and teachings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Families were encouraged to participate so Larry, Aunt Hilary (a Pacific Primary Alum), Grammie Jane and I crammed into the Rainbow Dolphin classroom with another 50 or so people, to help the kids get ready for the big march. All the kids had made peace crowns, necklaces and signs and we had a massive Circle Time, where the Lead Teacher, Jamie asked the kids to remind us all what Dr. King taught us. “No hitting,” declares Walker. “No biting,” “No spitting,” “No fighting,” other kids contributed. And Jamie asked what we should do instead of these things.

“Use your words.” “Share.” “Go to the Peace Place and solve the problem.”

The Peace Place is a special spot in each classroom that the children use when they have a problem. While there, they state the problem, discuss options and, together, work toward a solution. It’s amazing to watch four-year-olds resolve differences better than most adults.

Once it was clear the kids truly understood what this parade was all about, they practiced the chant they would share with the rest of the school — “Martin Luther King was a good, good man and a good, good man was HE. He was a teacher, a preacher, a man of power who worked hard for YOU and ME!”

The kids were ready and we joined the other 200 Pacific Primary kids, parents and staff for the walk. It sounds corny and a bit stereotypical for a preschool in San Francisco to have a Peace Parade, but I am not a skilled enough writer to communicate the feeling I had watching these kids celebrate the teachings of a man who died the year before I was born. It’s so easy to get caught up in the history and the complexities of the time, but, at its essence, it is very simple. Dr. King thought things were unfair and he used his words to drive change. And as if the parade didn’t have enough of an impact, we all reconvened in the courtyard and listened to the last three minutes of the “I Have a Dream” speech.

Then we sang “Happy Birthday, Dr. Martin Luther King” and had popsicles.

Thank you, Pacific Primary, for making such a special and memorable experience for our family and every family at the school.

Family Perspective on the Peace Parade

By Mimi Rosenheim

Dear Belann,

I just wanted to tell you how much I appreciated and enjoyed this morning. I’ve lived here in San Francisco for 11 years and seen a lot of parades, but today was the first time that the spirit of Martin Luther King Day was really brought to life for me. Being part of the Peace Parade with Larry and all the other Pacific Primary parents and staff really brought Dr. King’s achievements for us and the meaning of his words — into sharp and happy perspective. I have to thank you and everyone at PP for that.

All the best — Richard Wood,

Panda Parent

Letter from Belann:

I am very proud of the work we invested years ago to make this event and all of our celebrations meaningful and appropriate for young children. We meet outside of work for months discussing how to bring our values to each of our special events, while still making them developmentally appropriate. The Peace Parade was especially challenging, as we wanted it truly to be something that would inspire the children and not just the adults. We pondered the question “What does “Peace” mean to a young child?” and “How can we celebrate Dr. King’s birthday in a way that is meaningful throughout the year and not just one day?”

This is at the heart of Peace Education. The teachers are moved by the impact that the Peace parade has made in each child’s education. Throughout the year, they often hear a child say, “Don’t hit — Dr. King wouldn’t like it!” Many of our graduate students take this mandate to their kindergartens and help their new schools honor Dr. King.
The Role of Field Trips in an Emergent Curriculum

By Keith Eiger, Lynn Turner & Vanessa Maren

Critical learning takes place both inside and outside of the classroom. Within each Pacific Primary classroom, ideas from field trips emerge as the foundation to pursue learning, with materials appropriate to the child’s age, and with guiding outcomes adaptable by the teacher. The teachers use weekly curriculum meetings and the process of webbing (described earlier) to discuss how field trips can support their Emergent Curriculum project.

As part of the Gray Whale “Build!” project, the class took a walking field trip to sketch the “Painted Ladies” near Alamo Square. During circle time the next week, they compared pictures of two different houses and made a Venn diagram comparing the similarities and differences between the two houses. Mahroushka was amazed at how much the children noticed. The class then headed to the Ferry Building to meet with a Gray Whale parent who is an architect and whose firm designed the remodel of the Ferry Building. He gave them blueprints and samples of materials for the children to make dioramas. The Gray Whales bought sandpiper at a neighborhood hardware store during another recent field trip, to sand down the wood sculptures they continue to build.

The result is not only a better understanding of the symbolic world and the real, but an understanding that learning and discovery is something they can actively engage in at any time in the world around them.

Our summer bus field trips continue to enrich the children’s learning experience by allowing us to take longer trips out of the city twice a week in the summer. Additionally, these field trips provide a special opportunity for alumni to participate. Alumni that are 12-15 years old may volunteer to help in the classroom for up to two weeks, while those 16 and older are paid as Summer Assistants and work as classroom aides to help with the field trips. Our alumni have fond memories and an amazing connection with the summer field trip program and look forward to reconnecting with Pacific Primary each summer. This is a unique program that continues to keep our young teen and adult alumni connected to the school and models for our current families, the special ties that Pacific Primary fosters.

Diversity as a Primary Strength

By Seth Blacher

Why do some people view challenges as an opportunity, while others become passive or cannot respond? Why can some people accept constructive criticism in such a way that furthers personal or professional growth, while others take the same criticism personally? Why do some people adapt to change more easily, while others struggle with it?

While there are many variables that contribute to an individual’s personality or a response in a specific situation, according to Dr. Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph.D., an internationally recognized authority on brain development, healthy childhood development creates a strong foundation for happiness, positivity and productivity that one keeps for life. So how does one acquire this strong foundation, and achieve a sunny outlook, flexibility, and a creative, open, problem-solving mind?

Dr. Perry asserts that awareness, tolerance and respect learned in diverse environments are critical developmental building blocks that serve as the benchmark for not only social responsibility, but also flexible thinking. Over the years, educators have found that exposing children to diverse environments at a young age significantly contributes to the three tenets of flexible thinking:

1) the ability to cope well with change; 2) the ability to assimilate change. Another social-cognitive ability that has been linked to diversity is the skill of “multitude classification.” Up to the age of three, children sort objects across one dimension only, but as they get older, they develop the ability to sort objects and people along multiple dimensions, such as multiple social categories that don’t necessarily match traditional stereotypes, e.g. a woman and an engineer.

The rich diversity at Pacific Primary provides our skilled teachers an opportunity to help our kids understand and celebrate both visible and invisible differences every day. Our teachers are trained to establish a classroom environment where children can comfortably express different thoughts and opinions and still feel validated. In the classroom, teachers weave diversity into the curriculum by establishing an initial framework for the kids to learn about each other and allowing their interests to drive the classroom experience.

Children begin exploring differences amongst themselves by talking about their families, creating a family tree with photos and a language chart. This sparks further interest and discussion about different types of families.

Each year, two Staff Development days may include workshops on a broad range of human diversity, including gender, socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, and all types of families, including adoptive, single parent and LGBT parents. It’s a way for the staff to re-connect with the mission of the school, with diversity as its cornerstone, and to provide a safe place to talk about social and cultural issues.

Mary Bay Area schools send representatives to Pacific Primary to understand how it approaches and reinforces diversity. What other teachers come to our school to learn, we as parents already know: that Pacific Primary’s teaching and reinforcing of diversity is a strength that serves our children now and into the future.

Children discussed their family members and what they mean to them, learning that everyone has different types of families.
Music and Art Expressives are tightly woven into the daily curriculum at Pacific Primary. Their purpose is to nurture each child to feel confident in his or her choices, to problem-solve, to collaborate in teams and work independently, and, most importantly, to have fun while developing key skills.

According to OSS Music Specialist Kevin Genzel, the Off Schulwerk educational approach partners well with the Emergent Curriculum because both share the value of setting up an environment whereby a child may explore and play, while the teacher simultaneously guides and follows the interest of the child. This provides a flexible framework for children to experiment with pitch, rhythm and movement. “If several children show a strong interest in pitch, we can further the discussion with games and activities related to pitch,” Kevin explains. “For example, a simple song about fire engines can provide an opportunity to visually and vocally express pitch moving up and down, as we move our hands up and down matching the movement of a vocalized siren sound.”

“During the school year, I read countless stories to the children and it’s music to my ears when someone asks, "Can we act out this story?" says Melodi Dalton, YSS Music Specialist. There are certain fables and folk tales selected especially for re-enactment. "When I ask, "Who are the characters in this story?", Melodi continues, "the response is a resounding, 'I want to be..." This tells me that the story is a winner and every child has his or her own creative ideas and interests which are unique to them. There is no fixed agenda, and the focus is process-oriented to provide a setting of continual practice to master specific skills. Children have the freedom to explore a particular medium or theme, for an hour or for the entire year. For example, Penguins may focus on using scissors to cut tape, a Prairie Dog on storytelling, Pandas on making traps, or a Polar Bear may get to focus on finding a solution for attaching sleeves to a dress or articulating a sculpture.

The Arts program primarily uses recycled materials and emphasizes re-use and resourcefulness in our children. What child doesn’t enjoy playing with boxes? Ah, but box inventions are a whole different matter. Boxes have been repurposed as skyscrapers, computers, mountains, beds, helmets, microscopes and trains with its inventors articulating its creation and many uses. These enriching experiences give children the life-long gift of a strong and satisfying confidence in their creative abilities.

By Patricia Callaway

How Music and Art Contribute to Pacific Primary’s Emergent Curriculum

Panda focusing on cutting tape.
Polar Bear testing a telescope invention during Expressive Arts.

Music Specialist Melodi Dalton guiding the 2011 Circus play which is a re-enacted play inspired by the Ghanaian story, “The Leopard’s Drum.”

By Rachel Levin

1. I used to drag race at Infineon Raceway in my 20’s.
2. Scrabble – my highest score is 496, best word: Eulachon for 113.
3. Whenever I am near a body of water, no matter how cold, I feel a necessity to immerse myself.
4. I played broomball in high school.
5. I was awarded a prize for 3rd place for a national poetry contest. The prizes were awarded by Maya Angelou.
6. I was on-air talent for the California State Lottery’s Decco Game.
7. I’ve ridden my bicycle across the country twice.
8. I love olive oil so much – could be because my mom gave us olive oil to drink as children.
9. I was born in New Hampshire.
10. I won my high school’s vocal competition with an aria from Mozart’s Cosi Fan Tutte.
11. My first job was in a record shop.
12. I have over 5,500 children’s picture books in my living room and own over 14,000 books altogether.
13. I was born in a hospital in France!
14. Elvis Presley winked at me at the Ear, Nose and Throat doctor’s office in Beverly Hills.
15. I have hopped trains (for fun).

By Patricia Callaway

By Rachel Levin

Guess who?

They’re not just teachers, leaders, and all around great people... Match the Pacific Primary staff to their secret. By Rachel Levin

1. B
2. O
3. C
4. H
5. E
6. A
7. J
8. M
9. K
10. G
11. N
12. F
13. J
14. L
15. I

Answers on opposite page...

Pandas making traps from colored masking tape.
Dragon Dance celebrating the Chinese Lunar New Year.

By Patricia Callaway

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Primary Talk

See that cluster of folks on the sidewalk? You know, that bunch of parents sipping coffee and swapping stories about, oh, their kids, their weekend plans, their hectic mornings . . . it’s not some private party you weren’t invited to—it’s Primary Talk. And it takes place on the third Friday of every month — thanks to over-caffeinated volunteers who set up hot coffee stands outside of YSS or OSS, with the sole hope that you’ll stop and talk. Take a moment out of that hectic morning to meet and mingle—before moving on with your day. Be sure to stop by!

School Income (2011/2012)

Tuition 90%
Auction 4%
Other Fundraising 1%
Endowment 1%
Annual Fund 4%

2011/2012 Income

Staff and Benefits 76%
Bond Expenses 8%
Tuition Assistance 6%

2011/2012 Expenses

Alumni Notes

By Rachel Levin

Former Pacific Primary students and fraternal twins, Kelsey Siegel and Tara Siegel (’79) are now Pacific Primary parents. Kelsey is also a former Rainbow Dolphin teacher and Tara is serving her first year on the school’s Board of Directors. Kelsey’s three-year-old son, Caio, is a Gray Whale and Tara’s son, Declan, is a Coyote, now in his third year at Pacific Primary. Kelsey says he used to love the Cook Reetha’s fried chicken—“It was the BEST!” He remembers being read to at rest time by his teachers. “Pema Chodron (now a prominent Buddhist teacher and author) used to read ‘Little House on the Prairie’ to us. I also loved music with Bob Leswan—he was the composer of the Pacific Primary song we sing our own kids today.” As for enrolling their kids at Pacific Primary, both say it was a no-brainer. “We actually returned to SF from Brazil earlier than planned, just so Caio could attend,” says Kelsey. And Tara says they moved back from NYC, so that they could send their son, Declan, to Pacific Primary and moved here one week before Declan’s first day. Now their kids play with the milk crates just like they used to! Caio loves music with Melodi and comes home singing a new song every day. And Declan loves “everything” about school. Tara gave birth to daughter, Oona, in October and hopes she’ll be a Sandpiper in 2014!

Abe Pressman (’95) is in his final year at Brown University, studying applied mathematics and biology, drawing a daily comic for the school newspaper, singing in school opera, and telling stories to live audiences. He is a co-founder of a student-run storytelling group at Brown (Thank you for inspiring him, legendary PP storyteller, Heidi!). His sister, Zoe (’99), is in her final year at the Bay School, where she’s been involved in theater, writing for the school publications, and working with the Gay-Straight Alliance.

Scott A. Shulkin (’95) is teaching at Creative Arts Charter School in San Francisco.

Hannah and Miles Cosselman are attending Alice Fong Yu Elementary in 6th and 2nd grades. Hannah is serving her second year as a peer mediator at AFY and says that Pacific Primary trained her well for this role. Miles loves reading in English and Chinese and says “hi.”

Kate Delaney (’85) graduated from Barnard College in 2001 and now lives with her husband and two boys in Wisconsin, where she received her masters in Early Childhood Education at University of Wisconsin. She is now getting her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction and is teaching at the university. She considers PP the “model school” and says that while she has found good programs for her children, she has “yet to find one that lives up to the standard of Pacific Primary.”

As we prepare for our 40th Anniversary in 2014, we are updating our Alumni database. If you have new contact info or have reconnected with a former Pacific Primary friend, please let us know at info@pacificprimary.org

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Auction 4%
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Bond Expenses 8%
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