

2/am 3/am 3/pm November 10, 2013

Hi Everybody,

We would like to tell you a little bit about a policy we have at school that we refer to as Protection of Work. We understand that probably all of you have expended lots of time and energy on trying to instill the principals of sharing into your children, but hold onto your hats! At school under certain conditions we let kids know its ok not to relinquish what they're using and what they're thinking about just because someone else wants to try it. Let's consider someone building with blocks. They may be trying hard to execute a particular idea, say a tall tower. Someone comes running in to add a block and the whole structure falls down. All the mental concentration of the architect dissipates.

Here's another example. There are countless occasions when someone is painting at the easel and another child passing by randomly decides to join and start painting on the same piece of paper. If the original artist protests and a parent happens to be nearby the usual response is almost always "Oh we can all share." But this solution neither mollifies nor satisfies the child.

It may seem to you that you are reducing the possibility of conflict and it may also seem as though you are encouraging an opportunity for some social cooperation between two children. But very likely the opposite will happen. The frustration level for the child whose activity has been disrupted probably increases the possibility of conflict and discourages the opportunity of cooperation. Lots of times this is when someone tries to sock the other party. Try to imagine how you would feel if you were writing a letter and someone you didn't even know came up and started writing over it. None of us would tolerate it, nor should we. Children's ideas and pursuits are every bit as worthwhile as any adults. We all need to respect and support them. So how do teachers intercede?

One vital step we want kids to learn is asking. Asking is the key to reducing lots of collisions and conflicts throughout the day. If you want to play with someone you have to ask. And guess what? They have the right to tell you no. If someone wants that bike you're on you have the right to tell them "When I'm done." For very young kids coming up with the words is tough at best, so for a long time teachers may be doing it with them or saying it for them. The child who is turned down may not be very happy about it, but we will try to help them find a different activity until it is their turn. And very quickly they begin to figure out that the system works in their favor when they are the one riding the bike.

By this time we bet you're asking "One reason I sent my child to school was to learn social skills. With a rule like that how will it ever happen?" Good question.

First of all there are some common areas in the room that cannot be monopolized. Sand, water and the playhouse are some of these. Also, teachers try not to generalize each situation. Sometimes a different solution may be called for depending on the circumstances and the children involved. For example if one child is hoarding all of the magnitiles without really playing, then it is ok for other kids to have some. Most importantly we believe that if kids understand that their work can be protected, they will begin to relax and view other kids with interest, curiosity and possibly as potential playmates. At some point the attraction to find out more about someone will outweigh the need to have an activity all to themselves.

There is a short but very insightful little story we read at school called Tom and Pippo Make a Friend. Tom is a little boy and Pippo is his beloved sock monkey. One day they go to the playground and Tom finds a bucket in the sandbox. The illustration shows a little girl behind him with a very indignant expression on her face. "She said it was her bucket." The next illustration shows the two children in a tug of war over the bucket. "The little girl's mommy said we should share our toys. But Pippo is mine." The illustration shows Tom hugging Pippo

tightly followed by another one of Tom still holding Pippo but looking back at the sand box. “I really wanted to play with that bucket, and Pippo wanted to play with it too.” The following illustration shows them all together in the sand box and the little girl is holding Pippo while Tom feeds him sand. The story closes with these words “Today we’re going to the park again. I hope the little girl is there with her bucket.” For Tom there comes a point where playing with the little girl and her bucket is so desirable he can even surrender some control of his favorite Pippo. That is what we’re trying to foster for everyone.

Towards that end we’ve introduced a couple of games to our playtime. We started with a board game called Snail Race. The board is comprised of a grid of rectangles six across and eight long. At either end there are colored spaces that match the six wooden snail figures to identify the starting gate and finish line. Kids throw a colored die to see which snail to move one rectangle at a time. This aspect of the game really baffles and frustrates a lot of kids because most of them usually insist on picking one snail to be their piece. It often takes a long time before they will accept the premise that each player can move any snail. Some kids just turn the die repeatedly to the color they would have chosen.

As with any activity the level at which kids approach the game may vary greatly. Some may just want to manipulate the pieces much in the same way they use the dollhouse figures or animals. Others may like to try the addition of the die but will turn it purposefully to the color they desire, especially when it’s the color that matches the snail closest to the finish line. Still others may proceed with most of the procedures in place, but find the grid of rectangles confusing. They may wander onto another snail’s path or move many spaces at a time. One group of kids devised a version where after throwing the die, that snail could go the whole distance to the finish line. In many ways this was a really satisfying solution. The games were fast and exciting and they played four different rounds.

But apart from all the action and excitement, these games also provide an introduction to turn taking. They stimulate kids to come together in small intimate groups to pass and share the implements of play and observe the other gamers while they are waiting. Cooperation is included in their common effort and concentration. Sometimes those who grasp the game quickly are keeping track of the order of play for everyone else. For all these reasons we’ll continue to add new games into the mix.

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