



LNS Philosophy in Practice

October 19, 2021

Developing a learning community at LNS

At the beginning of the school year teachers strive to create a learning community among the children and adults by facilitating a sense of belonging. Children are making a shift from “me,” the individual, to “we,” the group.

Family Partners are asked to make the same shift from focusing on their child to be in relationship with the children in the Studio.

What is LNS's pedagogy?

How do we teach? What guides our teaching practice?

- We teach by listening, observing and through inquiry.
- We are inspired by the schools of Reggio Emilia – integration of many educational theorists, based in constructivism.
- Your Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins by Loris Malaguzzi

Your Image of the Child: Where Teaching Begins

- “Each one of you has inside yourself an image of the child that directs you as you begin to relate to a child. This theory within you pushes you to behave in certain ways; it orients you as you talk to the child, **listen** to the child, observe the child.”
- What is your Image of the Child?

PLAY

I Learn from Children by Caroline Pratt

- Every day, every hour of a young child's waking life is devoted to adventure, exploration, discovery of the world around him/her. This is how children learn.
- The play impulse in children is really a work impulse. Childhood's work is learning, and it is in his or her **play**-that a child works at his or her job.



Constructing Knowledge

Embarking on Research



Child Development

Some Characteristics of 3-5 year olds:

- **Curiosity: they are scientists! What are they trying to figure out?**
- **Social Awareness: through play they experiment with power and control which is often uncomfortable for adults.**
- **Thinking moves from Concrete to Abstract Thinking as their brains develop.**
- **Physical expressiveness - movement!**
- **Striving for independence**
- **Children live in the moment and benefit from previewing.**

In our role as teachers, we set consistent expectations of respect for the children and the environment.

Children need “fences” to push against because that is how they learn. As adults, our role is to keep the “fences” strong, providing consistency which will give them both understanding and security. When the fences are weak, children become anxious.

When we proactively provide a secure and responsive environment, children are engaged and self-regulated.

In your role as a family partner you will support the teachers in helping children practice social pragmatics and respect for materials. This helps children learn the culture of being in a group.

Teachers preview important information of the day at 8:45. However, many gray areas will surface throughout the day. Please ask teachers when you are unsure of how to handle a situation.

Children make meaning of their world through play.

Play provides a place for agency. This is how children learn about themselves and others and how to live in the world.

We are watchful of “scripted play” that can come from the media and the commercialization of childhood. We will try to help children shift the play to make it their own story, to engage their imagination. Please support this effort by following the LNS policy of commercial free clothing and backpacks.

Social-emotional work in the Studio

Arguments, disagreements and debates happen every day in the Studios. It's all a part of learning to be with each other. Learning to take another's point of view. Learning to be part of a community.

In the context of conflict, adults strive to connect to children through **empathy**, by viewing and verbalizing to a child what they may be trying to accomplish, simultaneously managing safety first.

Examples:

On the playground, Sam builds a boat with the curvy boards. Bob is watching his play. When Sam turns away from the boat he built, Bob knocks the boat over. Sam becomes upset that his boat is in pieces so he throws wood chips at Bob.

- Stop the throwing -safety for Bob & Sam-Is everyone ok?
- Help children check in with each other. Is there anything you want to say to each other?
- The adult acts as the translator between the children. Depending on the child:
 - **I noticed**...Sam that boat was important to you. Would you like to tell Bob and me about this boat.
 - **I wonder** Bob, if you wanted to play with Sam. Is there something you could do to let Sam know you want to play with him?

In the studio, Mary “tattles” frequently.

- “I see you understand the rules. Thank you for telling me, I’ll take care of it.”
- “What are you going to play now?”

Social Emotional Dynamics

- **Conflict** is a natural by-product of community building.
- Teachers approach each conflict as a ***learning opportunity***, affirming the important work of conflict resolution and community building.
- As mediators, we do not always know which responses will be most useful. Children's actions and words (or their silence) give us a continuous flow of information about what is working and what isn't. We adjust our responses accordingly.
- Democracy is messy and supporting the "rights" for all children is the teachers' role. The process takes time, calm careful listening, repetition and patience!

Conflict Resolution

- *You Can't Come to My Birthday Party! Conflict Resolution With Young Children* by Betsy Evans
- Children experience conflicts over needs not met, things taken, attention not given, and clashing of ideas.
- Problem solving is based on several basic adult-child interaction strategies: listening actively, acknowledging/naming feelings, and encouraging decision-making. Clarifying the children's plans and intentions may diminish or end the conflict

Or the children may solve the problem themselves...

Listen closely to the following video.

Johnnie wanted to walk back to the classroom with Eliza, who went with another friend. Watch Sylvan solve the problem.



One approach to conflict mediation

The adult's role is to act as a neutral facilitator.

- Approach calmly, stopping any hurtful actions
- Acknowledge/name children's feelings
- Gather Information (“What was your plan?” “What happened?”)
- Restate the problem
- Ask for ideas for solutions and choose one together
(If the children resolve their conflict by agreeing on a solution, go with it even though as an adult you perceive it as unfair.)
- Be prepared to give follow-up support.
- Move on! Re-engage the child.

Describing the Behavior You Want – children often respond to the verb

- “No throwing the toys!” (and the toys continue to fly).
Instead, say, “**Toys need to stay in your hands.**”
- “No running in the classroom.” – “**Walking in the classroom keeps everyone safe.**”
- “Whining is driving me crazy.” – “**I understand you better when you speak clearly.**”

Teachers strive to **be present with the children.**

We ask parents to join us in our practice so we are listening together.

Documenting play is a way to practice listening.

Excerpt from *Everyday Blessings, The Inner Work of Mindful Parenting* by Myla & Jon Kabat-Zinn

Mindfulness means moment-to-moment, non-judgmental awareness. It is cultivated by refining our ability to *pay attention*, intentionally, in the present moment, and then sustaining that attention over time as best we can.



Something's more interesting than this?

And now, that's *always* true.
Whatever you're doing.
No matter who you're with.
Something, somewhere, is more interesting than this.
And it's in your pocket.
All the time. As long as the battery lasts.
There's an alert, a status update, breaking news.
There's a vibration or a text, just waiting. Something.
Right now.
Until infinity.
Unless we choose to redefine whatever we're doing as
the thing we've chosen to do, right here and right now.

Engaging with children.

- Get down at eye level, on the floor or on a chair. Watch quietly for a time. You could imitate what the child is doing (e.g., simply flattening a piece of play dough)
- Acknowledge what the child is doing by reflecting the play back to the child. “You’re pouring water into the tube.” This extends their thinking and may build engagement with other children.
- Ask, “What’s your story?”
- When children are engaging with each other meaningfully, the teacher/parent helper listens to how the children are connecting with each other. For example...

A child's questions can play
a role in his or her cognitive development.

How do we respond to children's questions?

For example: *"How did it turn orange?"*

Before you respond to a child's question, consider what purpose your answer serves:

- A direct response gives the child information, but may shut down further inquiry.
- Redirecting the question to a classmate fosters social connection and further inquiry:
"Sally, let's ask Owen how it turned orange?" (Then wait.)
- Answering the question with a question promotes further inquiry:
"Hmmm, you want to know how it turned orange." (Then wait.)
"What do you think?"
- Encourage learning alongside through research:
"I don't know. How could we find out? (Then wait.)

Adults may ask questions to extend exploration:

- “How did you do that?” (Instead of “Nice Job!” or “Good Girl”)
- When a child poses a problem, “My wagon is stuck.” Ask, What could you do?
- Can you find a way to _____ with another material?

Adults (teachers and parent helpers) interact with children in ways to sustain the children's thinking about a particular topic of interest and/or activity.

- Begin a sentence with: *maybe, perhaps, I wonder.*
- Do not judge ideas as right or wrong: they are the children's theories and may change as they test their validity.

Wait Time

- Give children ample time to respond to your question. Be willing to “wait for the surprise”!
- If they don’t respond, don’t answer the question yourself unless the child asks you to. (*This is more difficult than it sounds.*)
- The child may be pondering the question.

What are the unique gifts of childhood?

Our greatest problem is that we underestimate what children can do. We underestimate their will to make sense of themselves and the world around them.

Children are curious and want their curiosity satisfied.

But we don't [always] know the interests that arouse their curiosity, nor the learning process well enough to know how to respond to them.

[Documentation and reflection are tools, teachers use to help us discover children's interests so we know how to respond to them.]

[An effective classroom] should be filled with the stuff of what children know and what they want to know more about.

Donald Graves, 1985

Another way to ask:

What are the unique gifts of childhood?

What are our unique birthrights as human beings that seem to be especially alive in childhood?

What powers of creativity, imagination, curiosity, and empathy are especially strong in childhood?

What about the drive to play, the capacity for story, the search for meaning, the need to belong?

What interests and insights and perspectives do children have access to because of these unique gifts which may not be as strong in adulthood?

What might happen if we valued this stage of life for the particular wisdom that is available then - and replaced over time with other kinds of wisdom?

What might children help us remember to see, feel, and understand?

- Matt Karsen and Susan Harris MacKay, Story Workshop Studio,
facilitators of LNS professional development, 2021-22

Documentation
makes children's
thinking visible.

Documentation
visible in the
Studios.



It swirls up again.
This one's cool, you see?
It's a square with a triangle inside.
Now it's just a triangle.
Hello, you're a triangle! - Annie

Documentation as books (teacher-created)

WHAT GOES IN PIPES?



by the Blue Class

HOW DO WE GET THERE?



by Cassius, Charlotte, Graeme
and Lilah

Videos as Documentation

Making Theories Visible

The adult's role in a small group is to make the children's theories visible to the group by repeating children's words so all the group members hear and become aware of different ways of thinking. The teachers also make children's theories visible through documentation.

In the following video, listen to how the adult repeats the children's words.



Documentation on Storypark

**We hope that all parents
read Storypark weekly so
you can follow the
children's engagement
with the curriculum.
This is essential before
family partnering.**

Family Partnering

- Family Partnering will deepen your awareness of how profoundly interesting children are. However a child's repetition may feel boring at times to adults. We get it!
- Working alongside teachers, we learn about the many ways adults can support children's development.
- Please take the opportunity to ask teachers why they do what they do. Over the years, many parents have stated that parent helping is better than taking a course in child development!
- When you play with the materials, we ask that you refrain from teaching children how to copy your work.

In Summary:

Enjoy your family partnering days

- Be your relaxed self.
- Have a sense of humor.
- Arrive on time so teachers can talk with you and share the intentions for the day.
- Work at being present with the children – No cell phone use in front of the children.
- Read The Family Handbook for suggestions for observing and playing with children.
- Plan to nap in the afternoon ☺ or have a cup of caffeinated tea!



Confidentiality

- We expect parents to respect the development of children and to honor their confidentiality.
- No “parking lot” chatter. If you are approached by fellow parents about how the day went, please share activities and a general feel to the day not about difficulties a child(ren) may have had.
- Storypark consent form reads: “You will not share outside of Storypark any content, photos, videos or stories that feature or have been created by children other than your own, without the permission of those children’s parents or guardians.”