



Everyone is the same, everyone is different

By: *Liisa Hale and Claire Bainer*

Early Childhood Education has lots of these esoteric platitudes to express their far reaching and practical principles. Lately we've been thinking and talking about "Everyone is the same and everyone is different". What does that really mean? Obviously we human beings look and behave in many similar ways. We have similar features, our senses and bodies are similar, we can have similar interests and aptitudes. We come from families, and have pets and friends and neighbors. We function in our diverse communities, with societal norms that we conform to. With reasonable variations we are in many, many ways the same. When working with young children we draw the child's attention to these elements of sameness because this understanding, feeling and seeing this similarity, builds empathy and compassion and insight. In turn this awareness creates trust in the predictable reactions of one's fellow man.

Human emotions are also similar. We all have feelings. Learning to manage and understand our feelings, and to see their similarities as we relate to one another, is particularly important and impactful as we teach this concept of sameness. Many people are afraid of feelings, and can feel confused and threatened by emotion whether it is their own or that of others. This is particularly true of children. Understanding the normalcy of feelings, how they come and go, and ultimately how to manage one's feelings, reduces fear and strengthens this concept of self-empowerment and again shines the light on sameness.

All over the school, in every age group, when emotions rise one is likely to hear the teachers say "Oh look at his face, he looks so sad. He is crying. See her sad face, see her tears. He is just like you, he doesn't like it when his hair gets pulled, that hurts. He is just like you, it hurts when your hair gets pulled too, you don't like it either, do you?" Drawing attention to the emotion being communicated helps the child learn to read others' feelings, and helps them understand their friends and themselves. It normalizes the expression of emotion and explains its role in human communication.

Identifying the feeling being communicated leads to the second part of the communication, the "so what do we do now?" part of the conversation. From the "same and different" perspective, most emotion is addressed to begin with in the same way: acknowledging and seeking understanding, then responding appropriately. The teacher's goal is for the children to understand and manage their own feelings and reactions through helping them strengthen and manage their relationships with others, normalizing and reducing the fear that can drive us to react from a self-serving place rather than a place of acceptance. The teacher knows that this understanding builds empathy and compassion, and trust in oneself and in others.

"She is sad because mommy has gone to work. You know about that don't you? Sometimes you are sad when your mommy has to go off to work in a hurry too. Shall we see what we can do to help? Let's ask her what she thinks might

Upcoming Events

Thursday, Feb. 1

Hedco House Meeting

Thursday, Feb. 9

Parent Scholarship Committee Meeting
6:15 - 7:45 pm

Monday, Feb. 20

BlueSkies Closed for Presidents' Day

Wednesday, Mar. 1

Parent Ed Event: Bringing BlueSkies Home
6:15 - 8:00 pm

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Co-Directors Report Cont...

help.” or “Andy really doesn’t like the big noise the fire alarm makes, does he? It scared him. It made him jump and oh dear, I see his tears coming down. Remember how scared you were when you first heard that loud noise and the teacher helped you? And now you know just what to do, and even though you still don’t like the big noise you do know just what to do and you don’t need to get upset anymore.”

When we understand each other’s feelings we can be kind and compassionate, we can be reasonable and understanding, we can support each other, and we can build connection, safety and friendships. We learn that we are the same, regardless of how we may look or talk or move about. Compassion and understanding goes a long way in cultivating a full, happy life regardless of culture, race, ability, gender, etc. Learning to see sameness and difference gives the child a sense of options as well; not all differences are even known in early childhood, but when they are the child will continue to find himself within a positive framework.

Teachers teach to this sameness because it is important to building community, even as they see each child as an individual with slightly individualized needs. Seeing the value in conformity grows out of understanding sameness. It builds from the idea that we can work together, understand each other, and that the sum is greater than the individual parts when we work together. Seeing our sameness allows us to agree to follow the same traffic rules, conform to agreed-upon behavior at the basketball game, and then to a different set of behaviors at the ballet.

As a child gets ready to enter kindergarten understanding and experiencing this community of sameness helps children conform to the school’s rules. Knowing that they are basically the same, the entering child realizes that she too can sit and listen, raise her hand to ask a question, and line up at the door when the time comes. She is confident in her differentiated sense of self: I am different and I am the same. I know who I am so I can conform without losing track of who I am in the conformity. The intense individualization that occurs in the baby experience helps the child learn about who he is, and by the time a child is school age he has assimilated this information; that is what allows him now to join the group. This adage looks at the trajectory of growth, acknowledging that at first we do need to see and know our differences but that once children have learned about who they are their focus can shift from difference to sameness. This ability to know oneself, while also seeing the similarity among others, allows the child to grow into a reasonable and self-managed human being who can listen to and respect others. This adage reminds us that it is our responsibility to the changing child to assess and change our behavior and expectations along with the child’s growth so that she will be able to carry forward the norms of the culture we live in.

This adage also holds the seed of one of our democratic principles, that we are stronger and can do better when we are aligning our different-and-same selves to work together. It is why in school children are, within reason, treated equally; it is also why speaking up for fair treatment for all is so important in the child care classroom and in the world we live in. In the microcosm of BlueSkies we are building a utopia where equality and justice for all is part of the child’s normal expectation of life. We see how important it is to avoid corrosion of these foundational belief structures, for they preserve our happiness and our freedom.

We’re hiring!

We are currently looking for a talented Afternoon Teacher to join our team. Please help us spread the word!

Find the full job description here:
<http://www.blueskies4children.org/jobs>



Snapshot in the Playroom

Several Playroom children are bundled up and busy managing rainwater as it flows along the cement curb between the sand area and the walkway. Some children are seated out of the rain under the roof working on puzzles; another rocks in the pod swing watching the coming and going of the children managing the water. The water-managers have thought of a new and different way to use the little plastic brushes and dust pans generally used to brush the sand off their shoes or clean up the sidewalk. The children are very engaged and focused on sweeping the rain water as it trickles down the little path and along the curb. They catch it, dump it, sweep it, and direct it. The broad dustpan can stop, start, and direct the flow of the water; it also functions as a scoop which the children can use to lift and dump the water back into the sand or around a corner. Using the brushes, they sweep the water into the dust pan or occasionally just on down the sidewalk with the flow. Scooping and sweeping it into the flat dustpan as the drizzle of rain increases they catch more, blocking and redirecting the flow and moving up and down the long walk. They are deeply engaged in their own experimentation and glad to play in the harmony of parallel play.

The play has already been going for more than an half hour and the children show no sign of being done. Children squat and move carefully to keep the knees of their pants, their shoes, and their jacket sleeves dry. There is no need to talk; all is done in silence with deep concentration. It feels like watching a dance; the work is carried out with a little dump here, a rivulet there, push that water up hill and see it flow down, step over the water, squat over the water, and stop it between your legs. The teacher is nearby speaking to the puzzle makers: "This piece goes to this puzzle and that to the other one; I see the pieces are mixed up. Let me scoot you over so you'll know which pieces go into your puzzle." This mundane conversation lets the child know I'm here if you need me, I'm watching you, and will help if challenges arise. This benign watching and protecting is often as important as the stream-of-consciousness communication we often talk about; in this case the teacher's quiet presence says You've got this, You don't need my help, I see you can manage this activity very well on your own. The child feels I'm big; I can manage; I'm important and supported. Then all of a sudden, like birds taking flight from a wire, the children are done. Back into the basket go the brushes and dust pans, and off the children go to warm up inside and find something else to work on.

This wonderful opportunity to watch the learning process and to see the intentionality of the play took place because the teacher trusted the children. She let them work at their own pace and according to

their own interest, and to think creatively about how a small broom and dustpan could be used. While she remained quiet and kept her distance, the children could feel her attention and engagement, which allowed them to feel held and supported and to become lost in their play. The child's play always lasts longer and the attention span is deepened when the activity comes from the child rather than from the teacher, and finding a new way to engage with and study nature is particularly fulfilling.

BlueSkies-isms

Parents often hear their children using phrases that they suspect they learned at BlueSkies. Each month's "BlueSkies-ism" will include a phrase the teachers use all the time at BlueSkies, and some context to help you use the phrase at home too.

*"Touch gently" or
"touch softly"*

...usually accompanied by the adult modeling a soft touch on the body of the child being redirected. This helps when children want to touch other people but may not yet realize that they also have feelings and rights. A young enthusiastic child

may be rough with another person's body,

grab hair, pull clothes—or even a gentle hug may be unwanted and thus not feel friendly to the recipient. Reminders to touch softly may also be followed by "oh, that was so soft but it looks like he doesn't want you to touch him at all right now."

Staff Members out in February



The following staff will be on vacation this month:

- Ben out 2/3 - 2/7
- Claire out 2/9 - 2/13
- Sandy out 2/14 - 3/3
- Tianna out 2/16 - 2/21

The NightSkies Auction

Saturday, May 6, 2017 @ Pandora!



We are thrilled to be hosting this year's Night-Skies Auction at Pandora's HQ in Oakland!

NightSkies is our single most important fundraising event of the year, providing the bulk of the funding that supports need-based scholarships for families here at BlueSkies. But the event is also so much more – It's an opportunity to get to know other BlueSkies parents, teachers, and staff, a chance to score some great, locally-sourced items and services through the raffle and silent auction, and a rare, kid-free night out for parents to enjoy food, adult beverages, and fun!

Last year's auction was a great success, raising critical scholarship funds and creating a great sense of community with many BlueSkies parents attending the event or participating in some way.

With your help we can make this year's NightSkies even better!

The NightSkies event could not happen without the help of parent volunteers – whether you can only spare a little time, or want to be more involved – we have a variety of ways parents can help with NightSkies – and **it's a great way to fulfill parent participation hours!**

A few ways you can help...

- Help us secure donations of auction items: Items or services from local merchants, restaurants or service providers your family frequents is a great place to start!
- Participate on the Parent Scholarship Committee: Meetings are monthly.

To learn about ways to get involved and help a great cause supporting families at BlueSkies, join us at an upcoming Parent Scholarship Committee meeting. The next meeting is March 9th from 6:15pm—7:45pm in the Copenhagen Classroom. Dinner and childcare are both free, but we need to know if you plan to attend.

For more information, please feel free to **contact Julia Owens, Office & Fundraising Manager, at juliao@blueskies4children.org**, or sign up for a PSC meeting in the lobby.