



We Believe...and So We Do

By: Claire Bainer

This poetic rendition of the school's philosophy is present throughout the adult spaces in the school now, but was first written about 20 years ago:

<i>We Believe</i> children should expect the world to be a beautiful and interesting place	<i>So We</i> create yards full of natural materials and growing things, and classrooms that invite exploration appropriate to the children's level of development.
<i>We Believe</i> people want to be friendly and kind	<i>So We</i> speak to children and each other in a kind and respectful manner.
<i>We Believe</i> all children want to please the people they live and work with	<i>So We</i> help children know that when something goes wrong it is a mistake, and the teacher will help them learn to do better next time.
<i>We Believe</i> learning and growth occur in calm, pleasant surroundings	<i>So We</i> arrange the day, the staff and the school with consistent routines and rules so that children know what to expect and how to manage themselves, gaining security and freedom through predictability and continuity.
<i>We Believe</i> all children deserve thoughtful, respectful care	<i>So We</i> welcome all children and families reflecting the world we live in, building open, loving hearts and minds through growing alongside a wide variety of people, families, abilities, and life circumstances.
<i>We Believe</i> development naturally unfolds when given a nurturing, supportive, interesting environment	<i>So We</i> accept each child as a human being with unique strengths and needs, and plan a curriculum that supports growth in all areas of development.
<i>We Believe</i> it is an honor and a responsibility to be part of the formation of a young family	<i>So We</i> offer support and services to parents and caregivers above and beyond child care, nurturing the adults so they can be their best for the children.
<i>We Believe</i> healthy meals, peaceful naps, vigorous play, and time for quiet contribute to the wholeness in a child's development	<i>So We</i> prepare wholesome food on site, appropriate to each age, help children get the sleep they need, and offer choices in their play to meet each child's needs.

Upcoming Events

Monday, Jan. 15

BlueSkies Closed for MLK day

Thursday Jan. 18

Parent Committees Host Envelope Stuffing Party 6:15 - 7:45 p.m.

Tuesday Jan. 23

Parent Ed Event: Managing Digital Media and "Screen time" 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

Thursday Feb. 1

Hedco House Meeting 6:00 - 8:00 p.m.

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Co-Directors Report Cont...

When BlueSkies started we were all on a steep learning curve, and while some of us were well-educated and experienced, there were also many on staff with no experience teaching and no units. It took a while for us to learn what we needed to do and understand to create a school based on the principles we carried. Our energy and academic focus was on the creation of the school which grew from 3 to 50 children in the course of a few years. Writing down a philosophy would have to come later. Those of us who were trained and educated with degrees in Early Childhood Education had a broad understanding of what children needed both academically and emotionally, and we understood that as we worked for the children we were also creating the third dimension of the school – the conscious intentionality of the work, which would create the culture of the school. The philosophy We Believe... and So We Do would follow that.

At first the philosophy lived in the handbooks and training manuals for teachers, mostly used for training and staff development. Of course when the employees understood the principles behind their work they felt more committed to align their work with that of others on the team, and took more pleasure and pride in their work. As teachers became more aware of the weight their words and actions carried, they quickly understood the importance of their own self-discipline. They saw their influence over the children's behavior and actions increase when they managed and controlled their own impulsive behavior. The harmony between the teachers' behavior and the school's belief and attitude toward the children and parents made the program run more smoothly and the teachers feel more job satisfaction. Confidence, self-esteem and professional acumen went up as everyone saw themselves working for a common goal for the children. This higher-level agreement among all the BlueSkies employees developed in different ways for different people; some were hungry to understand that guiding philosophy and were quick to get on board, and others needed more time to understand why philosophy mattered. Some culled themselves out, as the idea of a harmonious, supportive, peace-filled learning experience just didn't fit into their personal world view (some adults truly believe that children will be bad until adults chastise them enough). Each new teacher is explicitly asked if he or she will be able to join the culture of the school, setting aside life in the outside world and join us in agreeing that:

- this work is important and unique in its own right as a holistic experience of early childhood (neither lesser than nor teaching elementary school, nor parenting, nor babysitting)
- the qualities of the growing child's life experiences deeply and profoundly influence the adult the child will become
- we are responsible for intentionally creating optimal positive growth experiences for each child
- we will make decisions and create goals that teach to the mind, body and spirit
- we will use the physical environment to create an ambiance that supports the child and communicates a caring attitude toward all living things

The school community becomes self-perpetuating within the strong culture of the school, drawing new families and teachers to the school who want this philosophical base for their children.

None of these beliefs or philosophy grew out of a void – they are based on academic study, sound research, and years of both practical and academic practice. We did not make it all up based on feelings, but rather described the result of bringing the knowledge to the work. Often, to our delight, we have discovered that our academic knowledge and practical training came together just as theorists and teachers noted through their observations, centuries before scientific research proved their theories.

So we believe and respond, accept and prepare and create from a strong academic foundation based on scientific research about the development of the brain and the human nervous system, on ethnology and the influence of community, culture and environment upon us. We study the ways people learn, both knowledge acquisition and the development of logic, reason, and abstraction. We study psychology with special focus on the qualities that create stable foundations for mental health. We study typical development along with the anomalies in learning, development, and special needs – not to mention nutrition, children's diseases, public health and issues of safety and risk.

We do believe in the facts of human growth and development, and so we dream and work to create a new norm where people are loving, kind and caring, and help one another as needs arise. We set our intention to create the magical world of childhood where things work out and needs are happily met, based on a clear vision of

Co-Directors Report Cont...

what they will need in the future. We are very intentionally setting in place not only a memory of a way life could be, but actual skills to create a humane society where people use problem solving skills and good communication, and listen and care about each other. Putting our “manifesto” out for all to see helps the larger community understand that high quality care is not a random event but the result of education, experience, and intention. We believe [and those beliefs are based on facts]... and so we do.

Every child who has come through BlueSkies, or been influenced by a teacher who has carried her BlueSkies training with her to another program, has experienced life in a large group where peace and harmony prevail. So have you parents and grandparents, caregivers and neighbors. What a wonderful new year’s gift to the world we live in!

Happy 2018! May we all continue to learn from, care for, and appreciate those around us.

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.

“Look at my eyes.”

Young children often think that if they don’t look at you then they don’t have to listen to you either. Children listen and respond better when they look you in the eye – they know you are focused on them so they are more likely to be in relationship with you and do what you are asking of them.

THANK YOU!

We love what we do! We enjoy this work - it stretches our minds and bodies, and we get to spend our days with your children - but we don’t do it for the pay! So it means a lot to us that you contribute so generously each year to provide us with extra cheer for the holidays.

Thank you so much!
The BlueSkies Staff

comings & goings

Welcome!

Miles in the Baby House,
joining big brother Silas in the
Schoolroom

Agatha in the Baby House, with parents
Christoph and Marcela

Linden in the Baby House,
with parents Lucy and Wilmot

Farewell!

Sydney Faison in the Schoolroom

Staff out in January

The following staff will be out this month:

- * Liisa out 1/6 - 1/26
- * Maria C. out 1/17 - 1/26
- * Ling out 1/18 - 1/22

Meet Our Teaching Partners at BlueSkies

Dear Families, Many of you know about Bonnie Lockhart, the wonderful music teacher who comes weekly to the upper school at BlueSkies. She is one of the real treasures your children encounter on the journey through their Playroom, Homeroom and Schoolroom years. Bonnie has been singing with BlueSkies Children for about 16 years now.

Here is a little bio about Bonnie:

Bonnie Lockhart is a Northern California singer/songwriter who combines a love of diverse folk traditions with a gift for lyrics both witty and compassionate, and an active commitment to participatory, community-building music. She is a performer, educator, composer, and activist who believes in the transformative power of music in the lives of both individuals and communities.

For over the last twenty years, Bonnie has increasingly focused her musical energy on children and families. Along with Nancy Schimmel and Ann Hershey, she founded The Plum City Players, bringing songs and stories to families throughout Northern California and recording two albums for children. She studied child development at Pacific Oaks College, where she wrote a masters thesis on multicultural folk music and anti bias education. Dreams, Drums, & Green Thumbs is an affirmation of her commitment to young children, to the diverse folk traditions that enliven her original songs, and to the power of communal, participatory music making.

Bonnie give concerts for children and families at schools, libraries, festivals and community centers throughout the San Francisco Bay area, including La Pena Cultural Center, where she and her fellow Plum City Players began the ongoing series of weekly Saturday Morning Children's Shows more than twenty years ago. Bonnie has been an Artist in Residence, designing and carrying out multi-cultural vocal music programs in schools, Headstart programs, and libraries, supported by grants from the California Arts Council, the Oakland Arts Commission, and the Wolftrap Institute for Early Learning through the Arts. She leads children's choruses, teaches Music for Early Childhood to teachers and caregivers, and is musical editor of Pass It On!, the journal of The Children's Music Network.

Bonnie first began recording nearly thirty years ago with The Red Star Singers, whose folk-rock originals captured the passions of the Anti-Vietnam War movement. The quartet's "The Force of Life" is still available from Smithsonian Folkways. Bonnie continued writing, performing, and recording throughout the 70's and 80's, giving voice to feminist and other social justice causes. Several of her widely sung pieces are included in Rise Up Singing, the song anthology from Sing Out magazine. Both of Bonnies Cd 's Dreams, Drums & Green Thumbs and Growing With Music: Songs for Singing Families are for sale in the BlueSkies office. Bonnie is at BlueSkies on Thursdays from 9 to 11am every week.



For many years we have offered another special friend for the BlueSkies children -- a science teacher to talk to the children about the natural world they live and are so interested in. We have been looking for a teacher to replace good friend and longtime preschool teacher Cherida Gruenfeldt upon her retirement. We are very happy to introduce our new Science teacher Naomi Stein. She will come to BlueSkies for Children one afternoon a week from 2 to 4 to work with the Homeroom children and the Schoolroom children. The following is her introduction to you. We are very happy to welcome Naomi to our community- I'm sure you will be hearing about her and her adventures with your children.

Meet Our Teaching Partners at BlueSkies, Cont.

My name is Naomi Stein and I'm delighted to be serving as a science specialist for your children here at BlueSkies! I was with the Lawrence Hall of Science for 18 years, and left to have my own children, who are now 7 & 9 years old. BlueSkies Mom, Meg Horl, and I have children in the same elementary class together. We co-lead a family camping trip where she got to see me work with children and nature, and the rest is now history.

Claire and Liisa asked me to create a curriculum that is seasonal and tangible. So rather than engage in common pre-school science ideas like dinosaurs and space, we'll focus the students' attention on their environment and how it changes over the course of the year. Our fall curriculum included lessons on corn, acorns, and apples. We've just begun our winter curriculum, with our first lesson about wool and the next about snow and ice. Each future newsletter I'll be writing about one of these lessons.

While there will necessarily be a lag time between the lesson and my reporting of it, what I can do each newsletter is provide a timely suggestion of activities or resources that you can engage in with your children. These recommendations will be seasonal experiences that will build on what they're learning with me and provide you with opportunities to explore the seasons with them.

I have three recommendations this month:

One is Ardenwood Historic Farm <http://www.ebparks.org/parks/ardenwood> This is a wonderful year round resource as it is a living history park with costumed docents and re-enacted blacksmithing, farming and cooking. They offer many fun celebrations throughout the year, but in the winter the best thing is that they are an overwintering site for Monarch butterflies. The best time to go is in the morning, as when it's cold they cluster on the branches so thickly it looks like leaves until you look closely. Children under 4 are free. Check the website for naturalist led programs about the Monarchs. They also have many offerings specifically for the pre-school crowd, like feeding the farm animals.

Another is the Oakland Ice Rink <http://www.oaklandice.com> They have a Tuesday night cheap skate, and a Sunday family skate that are more affordable than their usual rates. You can win a free admission for next winter for your child if you enroll them in the Oakland Public Library's summer reading program. I'll remind you about that when it rolls around.

Finally I'll recommend the penguin and arctic exhibits at the California Academy of Sciences in San Francisco. They also have an ice rink this year, simulated snow flurries, and a schedule of performances. They offer a free day each quarter of the year.

Below is a photograph of me with some Blue Skies students during our first lesson together. Looking forward to a wonderful year of exploration with your children!

