



association of children's services

about
us

children's
programs

teacher
education

community
programs

news
and events

fundraising
info

contact
us

news and events

newsletter

calendar

bulletin board

in this issue:

[From the
Co-Directors](#)

[Caution! It's
Halloween](#)

[Take a Peek](#)

[The Fall Mailer
is Coming!](#)

[A Painting
Party!](#)

[Workday
Coming Up!](#)

[Our Kids are
Listening...](#)

[Snapshot in
the Todds](#)

[AOCS Staff
Profile:
Frances Van
Zile](#)

[AOCS
Anniversaries](#)

[Comings and
Goings](#)

[Birthday
Books](#)

[Newsletter
Archives](#)



October 2004

From the Co-Directors:

October already! Time seems to move so fast these days; soon the holidays will be upon us. Teachers are all getting to know the children who have recently moved into their groups, thinking about the growth and changes in their abilities over the summer, and the changes in their play.

Summer's outdoor fun has increased the children's confidence—we see the growth in what they do, and changes in their sense of self. From mastering toilet training to learning all about that big, big swimming pool, the children themselves see that they are bigger and that they can manage a bigger world. Teachers are thoughtfully choosing toys that encourage the kind of play that supports the learning we see the children working on.

As teachers we think carefully when we choose toys, and why we like some toys and not others. Toys that have a linear structure, like tinker toys, can be difficult. Young children don't really see the "outline" of things, but the whole block of a form, so toys intended to create the outline of an object, when used in the preschool setting become swords regardless of the designer's intention. In the pre-school years, while learning is ego-centric and social skills are "in process," very often it is just as interesting to see what happens when you poke a friend as it is to put something together! (As the child becomes interested in reading, and begins to see the line, and wants to follow directions, the value of this type of linear toy increases). This may be a good toy for a child playing at home, but not so good for children in a school setting where we are helping children learn to respect each other's space, and engage with each other in verbal rather than physical ways. Sticks, brooms, rakes and "guns" (fist with finger pointed out) can all become "pokers;" no matter how careful children are not to poke, their spatial awareness is still so underdeveloped that the teacher will say "even when you are trying not to, sticks will poke. Best to just leave them down on the ground." Guns are also classified as pokey because of that finger pointing out - "people just don't like to have a finger poking at them; they think it isn't friendly." That statement is followed with a question like "You didn't want him to think you weren't friendly, did you?" This often shifts the play, because these children do so want to be friends...they just aren't yet very skillful at taking another's perspective in the process.



Another category of playthings that may not work in a group are things that move in unpredictable (to children) ways. Things like balls, ropes, necklaces, hoses, and bugs can trigger feelings of chaos, and the children may act out in silly or aggressive ways because they just don't know how to manage the unpredictable. Children are working so hard to gain control of themselves in a chaotic world, that experiencing the random and erratic action of a fly or a ricocheting ball can bring them too close to the unmanageable feeling of being out of control. As children get bigger and feel more able, they also feel more vulnerable; their increased awareness includes awareness of how big the world is, and how much there is for them to manage. With this sense of vulnerability comes the desire for power; all children want to feel powerful but they know that mom, dad, and teachers really do have power over them (we are supposed to—our judgment is better developed than theirs and they wouldn't be safe with us if we didn't use our power to help them stay safe and learn to manage the world). So while children crave power that they are too young and inexperienced to manage, adults work to hold theirs in reasonable balance, relinquishing when they can (letting the child choose "Milk or Juice?") and insisting when we know best ("we hold hands to cross the street"). The same goes for toys and play; the grown-up makes the call based on the answers to questions like "is it safe? does it give my child the messages I want him to get?" Some families hate Barbie because they don't like that persona of the female. We resist Barbies at school mostly because the children can't manage to dress them without a lot of adult help (we'll leave those long arms and legs that don't bend, with narrow sleeves where tiny fingers get caught, to the school-age kids). Dramatic play toys that roar like dinosaurs and monsters and fight like ninja turtles, or sassy dolls looking like TV characters, can all become toys that elicit play which will require the adult to guide and correct the child's behavior. If we want to avoid all that, we just don't provide that toy.

Parenting grows as the child grows; at first we do our best to simply be responsive to the baby and figure out what she needs, but as the child gets older we as parents need to become more objective and less responsive. We do this by asking ourselves "does Jimmy really need what he's asking for? Does he really need to climb on the coffee table?" Well, "yes" he needs to climb, but "no" not on my front room furniture! Then, as the parent, I'll make a climbing place that will work for both of us. Doing this I'm helping Jimmy avoid trouble at grandma's and other houses he visits, because he will know that it is not ok to climb on grandma's glass table either. If we don't want our child to speak to adults in a sassy way, we don't give them toys that look like television characters who mouth off to their parents (and better still, don't let them watch that stuff on TV.) Even if we don't mind a little "mouthiness" and think it is kind of cute, part of parenting is anticipating how a child's behavior will be seen by other people. Behavior that gives another adult or child the impression that a child is worrisome or unfriendly will cause trouble for the child socially. When a dinosaur-loving child charges a child at the park, roaring and growling, we need to say "that's a loud growl, Anne; remember it is best to say 'Hi! Want to play dinosaur with me?' so this child knows that you are friendly and that you want to play." As the mother of a little boy who loved

dinosaurs, it was an interesting process to come to the conclusion that the toys that provided such pleasurable play at home really didn't promote positive play at school. When my now-24-year-old son was three and four, dinosaurs filled our house. He knew every name, color, growl, and habitat. We read books about them, sang songs about them and visited them at museums. He had a set of small, five-inch plastic replicas which came to AOCS (with his permission) when he had outgrown his interest in them. That is where my learning began. I put some sand in the bottom of the big water play table, and some rocks and short sticks, and created a habitat. Then I waited to watch how the children would play. Interestingly, children who usually played nicely together couldn't seem to think of anything to do with the dinosaurs but fight with them; inevitably someone would end up in tears. Some children were really afraid of the dinosaur toys, others just seemed to have no context for them and used them for some sort of monster play.

My goal as a teacher is to keep the classroom atmosphere relaxed so the children can settle into their play and work on the things that they need to be learning. I want them to listen to each other and use their words. I realized that the dinosaur toys were not really helping me achieve my goals for the children's learning, but rather set up play situations that elicited fighting, aggressive behavior, and that encouraged children to roar and growl and pretend to bite each other, promoting exactly the kind of play I wanted to discourage in my classroom! I took the dinosaurs home and packed them away for grandkids somewhere down the road...

Remembering back to my son's play at home, none of these things came up; like most three or four-year-olds his play at home was mostly him doing his thing while the baby did hers. We parents did what we needed to do around the children's needs; occasionally a friend or cousin would visit for a little while. His play at home was with us or near us, and mostly all about him—very different from the peer-related, socially demanding play at school. It made me realize that the value of a toy varies with the situation. It is in fact the toy that gives the child the idea of what to play. A child who is given a drum will bang on it; he may not have been thinking of playing the drum, but seeing it gives him the idea. Careful teaching, like pro-active parenting, is a job that requires thought on so many levels; by thinking it through and paying attention, problems can be avoided before they arise.

-Claire

[Back to Top](#)

Caution! It's Halloween!

By: Claire Bainer

Halloween can be a confusing and scary time for pre-school children. Little children depend strongly on body language and facial clues to be sure that they understand all the meaning of language, so painted faces and masks can be very disconcerting. Young children often have a hard time telling the difference between what is real and what is pretend, so often the "pretend" of Halloween is very confusing and really not too fun. You can help your children to enjoy this holiday by

trying to match the fun to their ability to comprehend and process its events.

At AOCS we ask that the children save their dressing up for home. It's hard for the children to concentrate and play constructively in a classroom full of monsters and princesses. Candy would just add to the insanity, so please keep that part of the celebration at home too.

At school we have been talking about Autumn and how the weather is getting cooler now and leaves are changing color. The children are watching the squirrels busily harvesting walnuts and hiding them for winter, and the children are busy finding walnuts on the ground that the squirrels miss. Listen for the fall poems and songs the children are learning, and watch for the fall colors coming home on your child's art work. As the month progresses there will be pumpkins, gourds and dried corn in the classrooms for children to touch and discuss.

While we are on the subject of Halloween, pay a little extra attention to what your child is seeing on TV. Commercials and cartoon specials often give children scary ideas about monsters and make a safe world seem full of unpredictable and dangerous things. Be forewarned and try to protect yourself and your child from having to deal with nightmares and the acting out that scary monsters seem to elicit.

[Back to Top](#)

Take a Peek!

The Hedco Porch is looking fabulous!

Everybody come stop and admire the new resilient surfacing.

In early September, a group of dads (and Claire) pulled up the Hedco and Todds decks and replaced the wood with cement. They also pulled up all the indoor-outdoor carpet on the Hedco porches. After the cement was cured the following week, the "poured-in-place" resilient surfacing was installed in all the central Hedco play areas by Ross Recreation. (Unfortunately some bad math resulted in insufficient material to complete the job...last bits will be done in early October).

Thank you to everyone for their patience during this process. A big thank you goes out to the following dads who ripped decking and poured cement: Brent Newman (Tess' dad); Scott Wikstrom (Eleanor's dad); Cory Veverka (Paige's dad); Paul Smith (Abigail and Margaret's dad); Jon Van Heuit, Jerrott's dad); Jeff Johnson (Grant and Paige's dad); Phil Hankin (Sophie's dad), and Bart Wright (Michaela and Mara's dad). And lastly, thank you to the Class of 2004—we are all grateful for this wonderful class gift to the school—and to the Parent Fund (your 2003 Auction/Raffle dollars at work) which covered the costs.

[Back to Top](#)

The Fall Mailer is Coming!

The Fall Mailer is one of two primary fundraisers for AOCS. It brings in an average of \$35,000 each year, which funds

parent activities, childcare for parent events, and AOCS subsidies and scholarships. These are all things that make AOCS the wonderful place that it is.

Each Fall, the mailer is sent directly to relatives, friends, acquaintances, and businesses asking them to help support AOCS. The mailer describes all that AOCS offers (wonderful care for kids, the Neighborhood Accreditation program, the AGAIN support Program, TLC counseling services, and scholarships for children in the community) and how they can help. Each mailer contains pictures of the children, and will specifically include a picture of the grandchild, niece or nephew, or neighbor that the addressee knows.

We ask AOCS parents to help by providing names and addresses for the mailing list. Continuing parents received lists of names that they submitted in the past with a request for updates and new names. New parents received a form for submitting names of people whom they believe support the idea that children deserve the best. Parents then have the opportunity to include a personal letter along with the mailer that their list receives. You get 1 parent participation hour for every 4 new names you submit!

In addition to submitting names, you can also assist with putting the mailer together: gluing photos, writing notes, and, of course, stuffing and addressing envelopes.

It is our goal to have the mailers out by mid-November, so please turn in your names now! If you are interested in volunteering or if you have any questions, please contact Tanya.

-From the Development Committee

[Back to Top](#)

A Painting Party!

We are very excited to announce that Deloitte & Touché will be painting the interior of upstairs Hedco on October 8th! While the last of the work will be done on the Hedco porch, the upstairs of the Hedco building will be painted.

A few months ago, the woman at United Way who has been helping us with grants and giving called to ask if we would like to have a group of volunteers from the firm of Deloitte and Touché come and do service. The catch is that they want to send thirty people on a work day. At first we asked if these folks would be willing to go to Every Child Counts and offer free financial systems consultation for the child care center directors, but that was not what they wanted to do.

All of Deloitte's offices close on October 8 to do community service so we decided to have them work upstairs in Hedco where children are not present. They are supplying paint and will paint all six rooms. If there is time, they will also paint the low porch edge and the small Brookdale office upstairs. We have been talking and coordinating and are looking forward to getting a fresh clean look upstairs in the staff kitchen, lounge, and bathroom, the small adult classroom and the play therapy room!

[Back to Top](#)

Workday Coming Up!

Have you just paid off incomplete parent hours for the past year? Here's a chance to get a jump-start on the new fiscal year's requirement, with the Parent Workday on Saturday, October 23. Anyone interested in helping to organize the day is also invited to join the planning meeting on October 13 at 6 pm in the Conference Room.

This Fall workday is all about preparing for the winter – making sure all the outdoor lighting is functional, cleaning out rain gutters and drains, changing furnace filters, etc. Not only is it a chance to earn parent hours and meet new AOCS parents, you might also get some tips on winterizing your own house!

[Back to Top](#)

Our kids are listening...

As we were sharing a nice hug the other day, my son asked me, "Mom, why does Ninang always say, "Eew, I don't want a hug!". Ninang is a close friend of ours and visits often. Then I said, "Do you really think that Ninang doesn't want a hug?" And he said in his 3 1/2-year-old way, "No, I think she does want a hug, but why does she always say she doesn't want one?" I could see why this was confusing to him, especially since my husband and I always encourage our son to tell us exactly what he feels (even if he thinks we won't like it), what he needs and wants (even if he thinks he won't get it), and to respect other people's thoughts (even if we don't agree with them). This includes accepting "no" as "no". He understands that when someone says "No, I don't want to play with you," or "No, I don't want you to touch me" that we should respect that and try to really listen to what they're saying. So, it wasn't surprising when I heard him ask me that question about Ninang refusing hugs.

I am sure that this is my friend's way of using "reverse psychology"--when we say "let's give our goodbye hugs and kisses" after a visit, sometimes our son will refuse, but sometimes he'll go ahead and give lots of hugs and kisses. But this has been Ninang's little "trick" since he was a baby, and I can see that the effect it's had is my son's questioning the truth behind the statement! The fact remains he will hug her when he wants to, and he won't if he doesn't feel like it. But lately, from what he's told me, it seems that when he thinks about hugging this particular person, he thinks twice about it or feels weird when she says, "I don't wanna hug" in a silly way.

This reminds me how important it is to understand our children and what they learn from the examples we set. It became clear to me that my son is used to trusting what is said to him, and is respectful of others' feelings. He doesn't like getting mixed messages, and I am glad he is this way. Of course, my friend means no harm, and my son adores her more than anything. My son's simple little question reminded me that if we want our children to grow into truthful and respectful adults, we need to start with

ourselves – let’s say what we really mean, let’s tell the truth, and our children will trust us and do the same.

-Tanya M.

[Back to Top](#)

Snapshot in the Todds

Just-transitioned Joe walks to the shelf, selects a tray containing a box of small cubes, carries it to the table and sits down to play. He pulls the blocks out and spreads them over the box lid and tray, and begins to replace them methodically into the box. Sue sits in the chair next to Joe and tries to take some blocks; Joe protects them with his hands and says “No!” Sue says “I’m playing with you, Joe” and puts her hands out again to take blocks; again Joe covers them with his hands, pushing hers away. The teacher squats down where he can look each child in the eye and says casually, “Joe is playing with the blocks.” Sue says “I’m playing too.” Joe looks worried till the teacher says “I see that Joe took the blocks off the shelf and is using them all by himself.” Joe relaxes while Sue looks perplexed. The teacher resumes, “Sue, I see more toys on the shelf that you can use while you’re waiting for the blocks. When Joe puts the blocks back on the shelf it can be your turn.” Sue gets up to choose another toy, brings it to the table and sits down to play next to Joe.

Two-year-olds can be amazingly verbal, yet the reciprocity of social interaction is still a mystery to be unraveled in the coming years. Learning to communicate in words opens up an exciting new world of interaction with adults, but adults will readily understand and compensate for the child’s social egocentricity. When the child attempts to use language with an equally egocentric child, the results can be spotty. In her immature understanding, Sue thought that by telling Joe that she was playing with him she could make it so. Joe is less verbal, and while unable to verbalize more than “No” in response, his body language clearly said that he was NOT sharing the blocks. The teacher’s role in this interaction was to clarify the situation for each child; by acknowledging Joe’s need for ownership Joe was able to stay focused on his play, and Sue was reminded that it’s up to the person using a toy to decide whether or not it’s being shared. With very few words, and simple statements of the facts rather than overtly directive behavior, the teacher helped each child proceed successfully through his or her play. As Sue has repeated experiences like this she will learn that language is a two-way business, requiring sensitivity to the other person’s needs as well as articulating one’s own desires. The teacher knows that, typically, Todds “talk without listening;” when children get to be 2½ or 3 and the desire for social interaction outweighs the need for ownership they will begin to see the need to listen as well.

-Lisa

[Back to Top](#)

AOCS STAFF PROFILE: FRANCES VAN ZILE

Most parents and supporters who visit AOCS quickly become

aware of how the teachers keep the children flowing from one activity to another, but the school is well supported by a number of other staff people, including bookkeeper Frances Van Zile.

Frances was born in Concord. Because her father worked in the oil business, she never stayed anywhere for more than 3 years. "I said that when I grew up I wanted to live in one place." After studying math at UC Berkeley, she decided to stay in the Bay Area.

Before coming to AOCS in 1991, Frances worked in the banking industry for 20 years. "When I started, banking was a customer service job," Frances says. "The industry went way downhill. After 20 years, it was all about the almighty dollar—forget the customer."

Frances decided to work as a part time accountant, and found her way to an engineering company that soon hired Linda Copenhagen, daughter-in-law of Anne Copenhagen. Linda told Frances that said she knew of a place that needed her help—AOCS.

"When I came to AOCS, it was such a dicey financial thing," Frances says. "We had some very lean years. We were trying to keep the checks from bouncing, and we hadn't figured out how to make the finances flow."

As bookkeeper, Frances is charged with overseeing the accounting, payroll, and bill paying at AOCS. Although some of her duties are similar to other jobs, she says she really enjoys returning to customer service driven work at AOCS.

"I never get people yelling at me about money, and I don't have to chase people down to pay bills," Frances says. "You can't get more appreciation than you get in this job."

When Frances first started at AOCS she did more than bookkeeping, by helping with other jobs like weekly shopping trips to the grocery store. Frances says she also likes working at a place that has such a significant effect on the lives of children.

"I know that I don't have the energy or the ability to do the actual teaching. That takes a whole different set of skills than I have," Frances says. "But I can see it and I can appreciate it."

Although AOCS now runs a tight budget, tight financial days are a thing of the past. "It's now balanced out and we can do what we have to do," Frances says.

When she's not tending to the books at AOCS, Frances likes to tend her garden of fruit trees, roses and flowers at her home in Albany. "I like things that are self-seeding that bloom nicely and are easy to pull out," Frances says. "I also want them to come out next year." Frances also reads mysteries by women authors at the rate of 10 every two weeks.

by: John E. (Sahaas' dad)

[Back to Top](#)

AOCS Anniversaries

We celebrate the following anniversaries for our staff in October:

Ma Leong since 1983—21 years!

[Back to Top](#)

Comings and Goings

Welcome!

Nia Bella L., parents Karya L. and Emmanuel E., joins the Wobbly Walkers. Big Sister Anisya is in the Homeroom.

Malcolm A., born to parents Carina L. and Michael H. on October 5! Big sister Leah is in the Todds.

Francisco R., new P.M. teacher's assistant joins the Nursery school.

Jennifer T., new TLC intern.

Welcome back to Ameena!

Goodbye...

Alexandra A. leaves the Todds
Ce-Andra G. leaves the Nursery School

[Back to Top](#)

Birthday Books

Squirrels and Chipmunks & Sing-Along Songs from Mara W. for her 5th Birthday.

Going to the Hospital from John C.k for his 3rd Birthday.

Lily's Chocolate Heart from Maya N. for her 3rd Birthday.

Baby Beluga CD and Al Agua Patos from Nia Bella L. for her first month with the Wobbly Walkers.

Moonlight, the Halloween Cat from Jonah I. for his 3rd Birthday.

Books and CD's you can purchase for AOCS in honor of your child's birthday or other special occasions are displayed in the front office.

[Back to Top](#)

[about us](#) | [children's programs](#) | [teacher education](#) | [community programs](#) | [news and events](#) | [fundraising info](#) | [contact us](#)