

This Week at Central Academy

February 17, 2010

An old song from *South Pacific* reminds us that, "You've got to be taught..." The song speaks to the teaching of hate and lack of tolerance, saying that we all have to be taught to hate and fear others who are not like us. Placing this song during WWII, and releasing the play immediately after that, was a groundbreaking event. Theater critics wrote about, and audience members later discussed, the impact of these lyrics, and the underlying commentary about our society as a whole, as well as each of us individually.

Many years later, and after many struggles, we realize that not only do you have to be taught to hate and fear, but you must also be taught to truly recognize and appreciate cultural and individual differences. Learning to embrace and appreciate individual differences in others is not something that necessarily comes on its own in the absence of thought as we grow up. In fact, it can be hard work. The practice of having conversations around differences, listening carefully to each other, and gradually coming to not only accept, but to also appreciate those differences takes careful practice and thinking.

At Central those kinds of conversations take place daily, as students begin to recognize at very early ages that we are each unique, with our own way of thinking and perceiving the world around us. This edition of *TWAC* continues our focus on embracing diversity. As you look at the various classroom articles, it is clear to see how conversations begin developmentally with our youngest students around individual interests, and gradually expand and deepen as our students increase in years and understanding. At Central we want our students to learn to love learning, and to see that as a process which expands their thinking and enriches their daily lives.

Dianne

Central Academy's Website

Find out what's going on at Central by frequently visiting our website. The website includes:

Important Dates Newsletters Classroom Web pages

Pictures of Students (**You can search by student's first name, teacher name, or by level!**)

www.middletowncityschools.com

(click on Central Academy)

IMPORTANT DATES

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| Feb. 16 | Middle School Conference Week (Wed. late night conference w/teachers until 8) |
| Feb. 17 | Parent Meeting w/Marcia Andrew (Bd. Member)-6:30 in the library |
| Feb. 18 | Skating Party – 6:30-8:30 |
| Feb. 22 | Conference Week (K-5) & Book Fair (Thursday night late night until 9:00) |

EARLY PRIMARY CLASSROOMS

-Something we have learned in Mrs. Brooks' Early Primary class is that we all like different things. We have noticed this in many ways within our classroom. We have learned that we like different types of foods, colors, games, and even TV shows. Recently, our class observed that we even have differences when we participate in one of our favorite class activities, reading!

All of the students in Mrs. Brooks' class love to read! As a class, our favorite books have been *No David!*, and *Skippy Jon Jones* during read-alouds. However, when choosing books from the school library and class library, there are many different types of books to choose from. Students are able to pick a book that interests them. For example, *Tristan* loves to read non-fiction books about skateboarding, and *Morgan* enjoys Arthur books by Marc Brown. *Aby* likes to read books about kittens and *Eli* loves fictional and informational books about dinosaurs.

We have learned that not everyone likes to read the same books and that is okay. It is our differences that make it possible for us to learn from one another.

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Mrs. Jantausch's Early Primary classroom is a room full of diverse thinkers. We are not all the same; therefore we do not approach situations or problems in the same manner. This diversity is quite evident during our CGI math lessons. After we read the day's problem together, the students all have an opportunity to solve the problem using various methods and manipulatives.

Often students tackle the problems differently. For instance, *Jayden* may try to solve the problem using unifix cubes. *Michael* may decide to use square tiles. *Corinne* and *Alysha* have recently discovered that they can successfully use the hundreds chart. Regardless of the tool, each student brings a fresh new way of looking at the math problem. By sharing these different ways to solve the problem, students are learning from each other. Instead of me telling them other ways to use the tools or other solutions, they teach each other – and a much more powerful form of learning takes place. Without this diverse set of thinkers, this powerful learning could not happen!

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The students in Ms. Roe's class look forward to Project Time each day. I believe this is because the activities are so diverse! The themes and content areas addressed vary every two weeks. The students have a chance to shine in their strengths as well as to be challenged to build strategies to overcome weaknesses. Project Time stations could be: Science, Math, Blocks, Reading, Art, Make a Book, Computers, Snack, Phonics, Calendar and/or Writing. At the start of Project Time, the students choose which stations they would like to work at and they also are in charge of determining the duration they spend at the station they choose. This too makes Project Time diverse because the same group of students never work together!

One day this week *Christian, Ronnie, Dallas, Alayna* and *Chloe* worked at Make a Book to practice their measurement skills learned during our current Math Investigations Unit. *Katie P., Heath,* and *Emma S.* enjoyed making their own February calendars at the calendar station. *Ian, Gabe* and *Curtis* chose new books for the silent reading book bags at the Reading station. While *Shawvontae, Andrew, Rowyn, Payton* and *Emma C.* wrote and delivered a plethora of kind "love notes" to their classmates at the Writing stations. I must confess that this too is my favorite part of the day! The students are always so busy working at whatever station they choose. The conversations and actions from the students in Ms. Roe's class during this time are exciting to hear and watch!

Mrs. Uhl & Ms. Stillwell's Early Primary Class noticed that if we were all the same then we would not have any experiences to share and learn from one another. Just the other day, the class was presented with several pieces of tape on the carpet that needed to be measured. The students had to pretend that they didn't have cubes, square tiles or a ruler with them to measure the tape. Together, they had to figure out what they should do.

Madelyn shared that she has seen people use their feet. She added that they step one foot in front of the other to determine the length of an object. By using her prior experience, she was able to help the class figure out that they needed to count their own "kid steps" for this activity. Another time, the students were using square tiles to measure keeper fish. *Nathan* knew that you had to start measuring at the mouth of the fish and go all the way to the tail of the fish. Using his knowledge about measuring, he was able to help some of his classmates that weren't sure of how to accurately measure their fish.

At other times, we find that situations that arise in the room are merely due to a misunderstanding based on our different interpretations of what we think is happening. One time, during a comprehension activity, I told the students they could skip a particular section if they wanted too. *Trey*, trying to be helpful, marked out that section on *Ashley's* paper. *Ashley* came to me upset and wanted to talk to *Trey* about what he did. Using an "I statement" *Ashley* conveyed to *Trey* that she was upset that he had marked on her paper. She also informed him she wanted to try to complete that part even though I told them they didn't have to do it. *Trey*, in turn, told her that he didn't mean to make her upset but he was trying to help her out by showing her that she didn't have to complete that part. Once they understood each other's perspectives they were able to forgive each other and complete their work.

Another time, *LaTeria* came in from the bus upset. I asked her what was wrong and she said that *Addison* didn't want to be her friend anymore because she didn't sit with her on the bus that morning. So, using an "I statement," *LaTeria* told *Addison* that it really hurt her feelings when they didn't sit together on the bus and she felt like *Addison* didn't want to be her friend anymore. *Addison*, in turn, told her that she still wanted to be friends and she never meant to hurt her feelings. She just wanted to sit with another friend that morning on the bus. Together, they realized their misunderstanding and decided to work out a schedule. They decided that a few days out of the week, they would sit together and on the other days they would sit with some of their other friends.

As we learn and work together as a community, we realize that our differences and unique talents are what make our room and community so special!

INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOMS

Understanding that everyone is not the same is a part of embracing diversity. In **Mrs. Larison's Intermediate** class, we have regular discussions about the importance of accepting individuals for who they are and for the unique contributions that they can make. This acceptance requires tolerance and empathy.

To build tolerance and create empathy, students share their lives with each other through daily circles, shared work experiences, and creative endeavors. *Emma* and *Tristan* are two students who exemplify the capacity to understand and embrace their classmates' diversity. Although they may be of a different race or socio-economic level, come from a different family dynamic, or possess different defining characteristics, *Emma* and *Tristan* are always able to put themselves in the "shoes" of their classmates.

They rejoice when a classmate has achieved a personal goal. They are saddened when a classmate is upset. They smile when a classmate smiles. Even when the joy, sadness, or frustration is not their own, they share in it with classmates who are directly experiencing those emotions. They understand that not everyone is the same and they appreciate and celebrate the differences.

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As we continue our focus on embracing diversity in **Muenchenburgey Land**, we again looked at opportunities the students take to hear each other's perspectives and acknowledge their differing viewpoints each day. They shared examples with us of times that they've had a differing viewpoint from another student and their reflections on the situations.

Lindsey reflected on an experience last year when she had a conversation with a peer about their different political views. They each listened to each other's reasons why they wanted their preferred candidate to be the President and ultimately agreed that they each had valid reasons and our country would be in good hands with either candidate winning the election. Their acceptance of each other's opinions certainly displayed maturity and growth.

Amari and *Eboney* discovered that they have had several disagreements, but because they have acknowledged how the other one has felt, they have been able to make things right again. *Lizzy* and *Mary* realized there are often times when they are in a situation when one perceives something as a joke, but the other perceives it as serious. This is not uncommon for students this age; however, sometimes even though the different perspective is understood, it's not always accepted. This acceptance often comes with maturity, which is why some students still struggle with accepting other's perspectives.

Nehemiah and *Cole* originally debated about which sport was better, football or soccer. *Nehemiah* comes from a football family, and *Cole* comes from a soccer family. The boys eventually began learning more about each other and their passion for each sport and have concluded neither sport is better than the other. They now support each other since learning more about each other's sport and their involvement in it.

An activity that students completed this year involved them writing something nice about each student in the classroom. They had to take the time to think about the interests, strengths, and personalities of each of their classmates, and create a compliment accordingly. *Lindsey* felt somebody knew her well when they recognized her love for math. *Will* was surprised that his classmates recognized his love for music. *Lizzy* was happy to see that somebody recognized her talents in magic, as she has been working on experimenting with various magic tricks.

The students in **Muenchenburgey Land** continue working on embracing each other's differences everyday. We have all acknowledged that our differences are what make our classroom family special; therefore, we need to celebrate and appreciate these differences. Keep up the good work, **Muenchenburgey Land!**

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Students in **Ms. Thinnies' Intermediate Class** embrace diversity in several ways. For example, the Math Investigations Program and CGI caters to several different learning modalities such as the kinesthetic, auditory, and visual learning modalities. The lessons provide opportunities for hands-on activities, several interesting auditory discussions, and visual stimuli as problems and questions are posed to start each lesson. These different learning modalities meet the needs of how all students learn, despite their cultural differences and socioeconomic status. Activities and lessons are student centered and provide all students with academic success despite diversity. Learning contracts also provide chances for all students to learn

and embrace diversity through cooperative learning activities that are created to teach to individual learning styles.

Students are also given chances to embrace diversity through other classroom experiences. Students share books that they have read or are reading to the class in a literary circle. Students are encouraged to think about the books that they are reading in Silent Sustained Reading (SSR), and are asked to share these books with the rest of the class. They have student choice of the books that are shared including topic and genre of text, and are asked to share their thinking about the book. Students (*Austin and Yulia*) then “Think Aloud” about the books that they feel are interesting, and the rest of the class can ask questions or make connections to their thoughts. Diversity is embraced by providing students all the opportunity to share text that is valued by them and their culture, as well as create chances for academic success and student growth. There are some cases where a student may share a book together cooperatively with another student (*Bailey and Alyssa*) if they have connected to the text and value its importance. The books that are chosen can reflect one’s culture and embrace the diversity of others in **Ms. Thinner’s Intermediate Learning Environment!**

MIDDLE SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

Central embraces curriculum that allows ways for students to investigate and act on a social issue which defines our society and continues to shape human relationships as well as influence public policy. Literature and social studies are excellent subjects in which to teach diversity because they deal with real-life issues and people. In Humanities, *Paige* and *Kashley* both completed their book comparison presentations. They both selected books written by Dr. Sharon M. Draper. Draper tackles problems that are a part of everyday life for some people. She provides real options for those problems. In addition, she writes about positive African American role models to whom teens can make a connection.

Mrs. Hodson’s Humanities classes received several copies of Draper books from Miami University. Because of the discussions students have had with each other about the books, several students are waiting their turn to read one of her books. *Charles* recommended one of Dr. Draper’s books to *Jacob*, sharing that he had read it in one week because he couldn’t put it down. Since her topics and situations are so real to life, students who read her books frequently have more reflective entries about what they are reading. Learning to love reading is as important as is learning the various skills needed in reading. In Central’s humanities classes, we learn both!

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Analyzing primary sources has given **Kristi Joseph’s Humanities class** an opportunity to view issues from multiple perspectives. A primary source is a photograph, newspaper article, artifact, document, diary or anything that provides direct evidence of life from a former time period. Analyzing primary sources for bias, and examining issues from multiple perspectives of an issue leads to discussions of diversity and equity in the classroom.

Raven, Samantha, Lydia, Lexi, Braden, Emily, and Kayla are all completing their independent eighth grade project dealing with a social injustice. As they research and complete their projects, **Kristi’s** class will have multiple opportunities to engage in equity and diversity discussions. Other students who have chosen to research a social injustice project, or have one in the works, to enrich the diversity discussions are *Miles, Sam, Caleb, Angel, and Allana*.

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In the midst of writing narratives for the Middle School conferences next week, I became very reflective of the students that I encounter on a daily basis. I find that our current group of middle schoolers is in and of itself very diverse. We have students of mixed ethnicity as well as social economic status. Our students work well together as if they have an innate understanding of the person living inside the skin of the other person. They have a tolerance for one another as well as a grand desire to stand up for one another.

In Mrs. Smith's classes I find many students willing and able to stand for their friends. I find Central a wonderful place to work and I know that even though feelings are hurt at times by an unkind word, there is always someone there to support and express kindness to another. I find these frequent acts of kindness apparent on a daily basis. The students that pop into mind today include *Davey, Julia, Kashley, Carson, Ashley D., Ethan, Sam, Travis F., Charles, Izzi, Braden* and *Aleah* just to name a very few. I can safely say that every student at some time comes to the aid of another without concern for him or herself. Diversity is really the mix that holds us all together. Tolerance is the key to success.

Other Places and Voices Around Central

Mr. Perdue has noticed that several of the students that he works with are embracing diversity in a lot of different ways. *Jacob* has been working on embracing diversity by reading more African American literature, and studying their culture. *Jacob* is also helping elderly patients in an assisted living home with their daily task for his internship. *Paige* is showing her understanding of diversity by volunteering at the Salvation Army for her internship. They are really showing us what diversity is about!

In Mrs. Carroll's advisory *Julia* presented at our Celebration of Learning on Friday. She shared with the school community about her internship with our local Food Pantry. She is learning that while they have only a few workers, the organization is supported by hundreds of volunteers like her. Although she was hesitant to speak in front of the school, her belief in the Food Pantry and it's work in our community helped her to speak with ease and commitment.

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Embracing diversity is about getting to know one another's culture and true identity, which is explored through our individual and collective relationships. However, our inquiry-based math instruction also fosters and depends on sharing ones' divergent thinking. We ask and expect our students to share their strategies not only to respect their thinking, but also to help their peers learn and become more mathematically flexible. Giving students time to think and respect that different students need different prompts, time and support to answer questions is honoring everyone's diversity, while having high expectations for each student.

In math we celebrate, question, and defend our thinking. Learning to truly listen to others' thinking, explore it, question it, revise it and possibly adopt it are skills that our students will need in their lifetime to address problems and situations we cannot even imagine. Embracing diversity and learning to respect other's thoughts and ideas is helping get your children ready for the future. Math at Central depends on and is strengthened by our students' diversity! Go Central's mathematicians! (Mrs. Brubaker, Math Coach)