



# the PACIFIC PRIMARY SUN

WWW.PACIFICPRIMARY.ORG

WINTER 2006-2007

## Following Our Children's Interests

By Paul Herman



*Jinan, Coyote teacher, talks with Nevin and Camille about Palestinian items that families brought in to share. Palestine is the country of origin of Jinan's family.*

When my partner and I were first investigating preschools in San Francisco, I was introduced to the concept of “emergent curriculum” during our tour of Pacific Primary. As soon as director Belann Giarretto began to describe the basic concepts, I recognized it as something that I wanted my children to experience. At Pacific Primary, she explained, the teachers develop curriculum as the year unfolds, following the particular curiosities of the children in their classroom and their own interests. The specific example that I remember from the tour—and it’s a great one—is the story of how the Coyotes began studying maps. One day, while the Coyotes were having lunch, a child turned a fork over and asked what the words on the back said. A teacher explained that it said “Made in Korea,” which led to the obvious next question: “What’s Korea?” The teachers explained that it was a country, and they brought out a big map to help the children locate it. But the children weren’t satisfied. They wanted to know more about maps and how they worked. Soon, the Coyotes were immersed in an exciting maps-and-places project. Over the following weeks and months, they learned how to read maps, drew maps of the school and the surrounding neighborhood, located their homes and neighborhoods using pins on a map of San Francisco, and used world maps to place more pins in China, where two of the Coyotes had been born.

This September, when the school year began, I was eager to see how the year’s new projects would emerge in each classroom. As a new parent, I didn’t know quite what to expect, and I half expected that the Rainbow Dolphins would be deep in a project within a few weeks. Perhaps it would reflect one of our daughter’s ongoing obsessions (trains? dragons? donuts?) or even one of my own (sleep? coffee?). I couldn’t wait to find out.

I soon learned that it takes time for new curriculum to percolate and emerge in the classroom. Before the year’s themes and projects can develop, students need time to get to know each other, to feel comfortable together, and to explore a variety of activities and topics. Teachers also need time to learn about the children’s interests, to think about possible projects, and then to plan a rich, rewarding, and age-appropriate curriculum.

As I got to know the school better, I also learned that the concept of emergent curriculum embraces far more than just “project-based” learning. Even when students are not engaged in a thematic project, teachers follow the goals of emergent curriculum each day by observing the children, responding to their questions, and staying alert for new learning possibilities. For example, if a student looking at pictures in a Halloween book asks a question about skeletons, a teacher might answer by starting a discussion about how bones work or bringing in an animal bone for the students to see and touch. The unexpected death of a pet at home or school presents an opportunity for talking to children about grieving and loss. Or the discovery of a new plant growing in the school garden might spark student questions about seeds, plants, life cycles, and the environment. As Coyote lead-teacher Brian Silveira observes, every “ordinary moment” at Pacific Primary presents an opportunity for children to learn about themselves and their world.

The goal of emergent curriculum is to allow children to explore new horizons every day and to learn in whatever way works best for them. The result is that children learn to be curious, independent, and resourceful. In other words, they learn how to be good learners.

*See pages 4 & 5 for more examples of Pacific Primary’s emergent curriculum*

### Annual Auction Happy Trails to You!

Saturday, March 10, 2007

Herbst Pavilion  
Fort Mason Center

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This newsletter is published annually by parents, teachers and friends of Pacific Primary.

## Being a Good Neighbor *By Ben Elgin*

In the bustle of our daily routine, few Pacific Primary families have been able to connect—besides a passing “hello” to and from our cars—with the neighbors around 1500 Grove Street. Outreach to the neighborhood has increased as part of developing a second school site across the street. Unfortunately, the recent shooting of a teenaged neighbor awakened us to how truly interconnected we are to the community around the school.

This tragedy has sparked concrete action on the part of the Board and other parents to forge tighter ties with the surrounding neighborhood. In fact, Pacific Primary’s board has tabbed it as a priority for the current year, hoping to eliminate any feeling that this school exists in a bubble. “It goes back to the foundation of the school,” says Amy Haiz, a parent and board member who lives close by (Pacific Primary gives limited priority to neighborhood families in the admissions process) and is helping to brainstorm ways to interact with the community. “We want to extend Pacific Primary’s philosophy beyond our doors.”

Indeed, Pacific Primary was established more than three decades ago by nine families, some from the neighborhood, seeking a better school environment for their children. Some of these early ties still exist. Sandpiper teacher Roxie Jones was one of the school’s founders; while mentor teacher Helen Powell has been involved with the school for 30 years and still lives nearby. “The school has always been well liked in the community,” says Powell.

But extending these connections to the majority of Pacific Primary’s families who live outside of the 94117 zip code is an ongoing commitment. Already, it has surfaced in a number of small ways. A Halloween celebration organized by NOPNA (North of Panhandle Neighborhood Association) included closing the street in front of the school and creating an old fashioned trick-or-treat experience for the children. The street was adorned with cobwebs and ghouls, and even a haunted house was assembled a few doors down. Pacific Primary opened the back gate and gave out over 120 bags decorated by the children and filled with spider rings and stickers donated by the parents.

Plans are also in the works to connect the children with the 200 senior citizens living at Mercy Terrace across from the school. Some kids may visit to sing peace or favorite songs to the elderly. Meanwhile, some of the seniors may be invited to read to the children. Other possible activities could include a neighborhood clean-up day, which would not only serve the community but instill a sense of responsibility and ownership for the area in the children.

Such efforts aren’t lost on the surrounding community. NOPNA president Leela Gill, a 16-year resident of the area, says she had felt Pacific Primary to be somewhat disconnected from the community until recently. She lauds Belann’s engagement with the community on behalf of the school and was warmed to see Pacific Primary families bring meals and comfort to the parents of the shooting victim last summer. “That was huge,” she says. “Parents at Pacific Primary really do care.”

Still, Gill hopes these ties can be developed and sustained not only in times of turmoil, but in times of peace. “Children that age can bring so much joy to people’s lives,” she says. “Pacific Primary has a wonderful opportunity before it.”



## New Beginnings, A Bright Future

*A message from Director Belann Giarretto*

Every day at Pacific Primary we are inspired by the children—children who have the courage to try to work out problems without hurting each other, (self-control that we wish many adults could emulate) children filled with compassion for their friends and teachers, children who literally jump into each project with a love of exploring their world. Our exemplary staff's most important job is to create a childhood that is rich in experience, creativity and values.

When Pacific Primary children graduate at five or six years old, this courage and strength make a difference at their new schools. They actually become agents for change, along with their parents, because they welcome difference and have the skills to solve problems. A recent Pacific Primary graduate was surprised to find that his Kindergarten class was not going to have a Peace Parade for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. This recent alum informed his teacher and class about the need to celebrate the holiday and, for the first time, his school had a tribute for Dr. King.

Our dynamic curriculum builds the highest form of cognition. Many think that highest

level of cognition is knowledge, which is naming and remembering. However, it is evaluation, which involves solutions and decision-making. Pacific Primary children demonstrate their ability to solve problems and make thoughtful (most times) decisions every day.

In this time of disturbing world events, how do we find the optimism to feel that we can make a difference? Pacific Primary children, with guidance from their parents and the staff, build our optimism that this can be a better world. We build that future one child, one family, and one community at a time. We know that realistic optimism is a vital disposition to foster because it builds emotional resilience and prevents depression. We want to spread that optimism—that we can and will make a difference for our children and our community.

Pacific Primary has a problem that other schools would relish. We are no longer as accessible because of the number of applicants. Accessibility is a cornerstone of our  
*continued on page 7*



***You can learn more about the Second Site, view a video featuring conversation with founding families and alums, as well as read up on lots of other Pacific Primary news, by visiting our web-site at [www.pacificprimary.org](http://www.pacificprimary.org).***

## A Renewed Commitment

*A message from Board President Fif Ghobadian*

One of my life's biggest challenges was finding a preschool for my son. As I checked out the possibilities, I saw schools that met only the basic needs of the children and others that focused on tuition payments rather than on the child. When I went on the Pacific Primary tour, I found perfection! I saw diversity at all levels, free expression of art, happy kids having a blast, music everywhere and the respect for young children that is such a fundamental part of Pacific Primary. I fell in love with the school!

Then came the waiting period. Would Spencer be accepted? For our family there was a happy ending (or new beginning) to the story. Everyday I thank the stars for being accepted into Pacific Primary. This preschool search experience has propelled me into being an advocate for all those parents who waited and waited only to be met by disappointment.

These feelings animate my commitment and that of my fellow board members to make Pacific Primary accessible to more families and thus we are pursuing with vigor the plan for expansion.

Currently, the second site steering committee, headed by David Lahar and Molly Dwyer (former board presidents), is working diligently to blaze the way toward opening our mirror campus. While one team is sharpening the financial model, another group is focusing on the silent phase of the capital campaign. A clear picture of how the new building will be financed will emerge within the next two months.

In addition to focusing on expansion, the board is taking on the very exciting responsibility of developing the strategic plan for  
*continued on page 7*



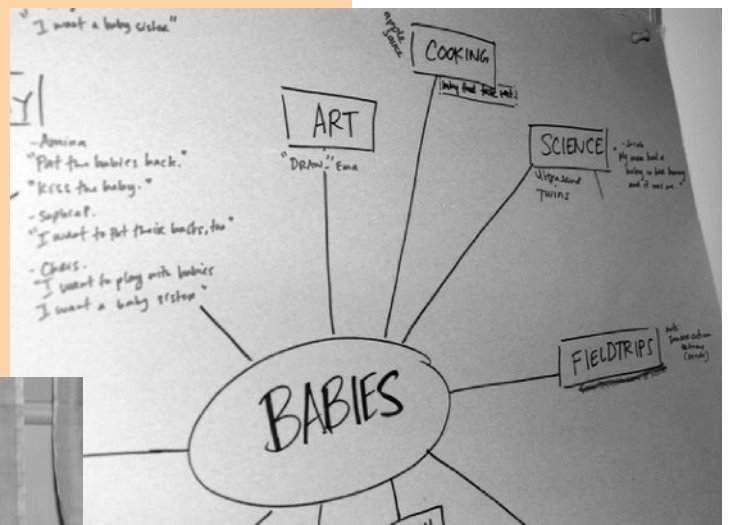
# Learning to be Good Learners *By Paul Herman*

## PROJECT LEARNING

The Gray Whale classroom's current project on babies, the first project of the year, is a good example of how circumstances and interests can lead Pacific Primary students into exciting paths of exploration and learning. At the beginning of the year, the Gray Whales were excited to meet teacher Darby's new baby, Malia, who was only three-months-old then. It didn't take long for the group of young child-experts to start offering tips and advice about what babies do and don't like and how best to care for them. The subject of babies was also relevant because several Gray Whales had recently welcomed—or were soon expecting—new siblings. Gray Whale staff developed a “web” to map out a variety of possible activities for the students to explore, united by the overarching theme of “babies.” Webbing enables staff to plan exercises that address the full array of early childhood developmental goals, including language building, mathematical and problem-solving skills, fine-motor and gross-motor development, and emotional intelligence. By posting the web in the classroom, the staff also invites students, parents, and school community members to brainstorm new ideas and to offer expertise, materials, or support.



*Group of students help give Darby's baby a bath*



*A view of the Baby “web” chart in the Gray Whale room*



*Gray Whale teacher Neil discusses the taste and texture of baby food with Sonia Seldon.*

## SEASONAL CURRICULA

Throughout the year, holiday celebrations give Pacific Primary students an opportunity to learn about the meanings and significance of their own cultures and also of those in the world around them.



*Dia de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) offerings from the Coyote classroom*

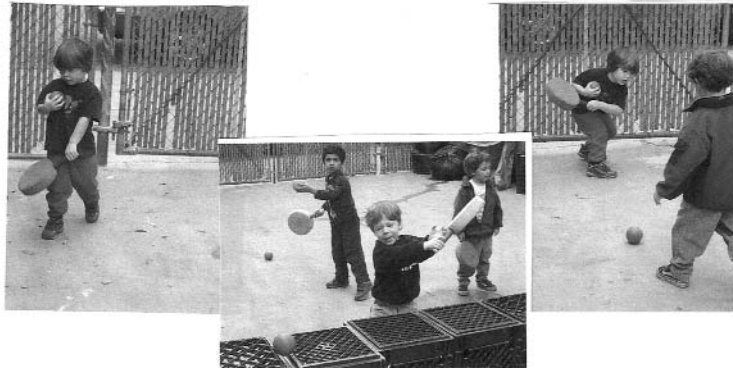


*Rainbow Dolphins celebrate the Indian holiday of Divali by creating a painting out of colored salts, a holiday tradition. Brinda Emu and Sunil Parikh, Khelan's parents, shared some of the traditions surrounding this special occasion.*

## EMERGING CURRICULUM IN THE "ORDINARY MOMENT"

Daily Journals, prepared by teachers and posted in each classroom by the end of the day, provide staff and parents with a snapshot view of emergent curriculum in the context of the school's daily activities. Daily Journals often focus on an "ordinary moment" in the classroom (e.g., playing, painting, singing, negotiating, eating lunch, resolving arguments, cavorting) to show how every moment presents each of us with an opportunity for learning and growth.

### Gross Motor Mondays



*Sandpiper Class  
November 20, 2006*

Monday mornings is the Sandpiper Class' day to set up a gross motor activity on the cement. With SP teachers on the cement, the children are usually the first to try the activity, with enthusiasm! Today's activity was tennis.

With designated time and space for such great challenges, the children are provided a wonderful opportunity to "stretch their wings"...and large muscles as well!!

PACIFIC PRIMARY STAFF  
2006-2007

*Director*  
Belann Giarretto

*Business Manager*  
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*Program Facilitator*  
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Daniela Capurro Hubacek

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*Expressive Arts Specialist*  
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Mahroushka Papazian, *Lead*  
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Laura Galvin, *Co-Lead*  
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**COYOTE STAFF**  
Brian Silveira, *Senior Lead Teacher/*  
*Diversity Coordinator*  
Tony Torres  
Jinan Mahmoud

## Teachers Learn, Too! *By Laura Galvin*

Staff development is at the heart of the Pacific Primary program; in order to maintain a level of excellence, teachers must continue to learn and grow. Staff training underlines for teachers the importance of the values cherished by Pacific Primary, and gives us cutting edge information about best practices in the field of early childhood education. Throughout the school year, we have many such opportunities to be learners.

### Work Week

The last week of August is truly “back to school” time for the teachers. In addition to preparing our classrooms, we have that essential time to renew our spirits for the opportunities and challenges of the year ahead. Last August, one extremely valuable workshop, “Pacific Primary’s Journey to Equity and Diversity,” was presented by consultant and parent Hedy Chang and teachers Cherie McGee and Brian Silveira. A timeline of events in the life of the school over the past 32 years showed how much change and progress has been made, building on the school’s initial commitment to equity and diversity. Both experienced and new staff members found this workshop very helpful. Heidi said, “It was an absolute delight. Cherie took us on a journey that made us conscious of Pacific Primary’s great development. Hedy encourages new ideas and initiatives.” Observed Daniela Capurro Hubacek, Sunroom Coordinator, “This reinforced my thoughts that we are not the same, we are all different and we celebrate the diversity and our differences here at Pacific Primary.” After the presentation, the staff met in small groups to discuss specific next steps that might be taken.

Other recent Work Week presentations have helped staff learn how to link sensory experiences and brain growth, make the classroom environment in effect another teacher, support anti-bias gender play, and create a greener school. These are some of the big ideas that the staff returns to and strives to implement throughout the school year.

### Staff Development Days

The first Pacific Primary Staff Development Day was held in the fall of 1999, and since then has become a twice yearly occurrence. These days bring new ideas to the teachers

and provide an energizing boost for the months to come. Last October, the day focused on “The Big Four: Observations, Daily Journals, Emergent Curriculum and Documentation.” Viewing several professionally prepared “videatives” (short clips of children involved in dramatic play or art



projects) with an explanation of the children’s likely thoughts made the teachers more aware of how video can effectively provide teachers with an extended opportunity to observe what children are doing.

### Conferences and Workshops

Staff Development funds allow staff members to attend national and regional conferences, attend workshops and take classes. Each fall, several staff members attend the annual National Association for the Education of Young Children conference. This conference draws twenty to thirty thousand teachers who hear from leading experts in the field of early childhood development. Many good ideas have come to us from this venue. For instance, for the past several years, hundreds of children’s kind acts have been recorded on links of paper chains (“Kindness Chains”) that have been proudly displayed in the classrooms.

As a teacher at Pacific Primary, I am incredibly grateful for all the training opportunities that have come my way in the more than 10 years that I have been on staff. These opportunities for growth and reflection have made me continue to be enthusiastic about my work! It is the job of the teacher to “give” to the children, and of course we in turn are replenished by interacting with them. But staff development creates the professional climate in which teachers can do their best work.



## New Beginnings, A Bright Future *continued from page 3*

mission but because we have over 300 applications, only about 10% of the families applying can be accepted. The Board decided this problem had to be solved. We borrowed the courage of our founders and are moving forward to create a second school that will allow more children to have the Pacific Primary experience. We found the perfect site—across the street at the former Hicks Temple.

We've designed the second site to combine all of the qualities that makes Pacific Primary a model school and that is why we will use the same model—a small, diverse and strong community, mixed ages, excellent staff, dynamic curriculum with an emphasis on emotional intelligence and the creative arts. We must cherish what we value, and

therefore will develop and build the second site in a way that enhances Pacific Primary.

Parents worry that if they have another child there will not be enough love to go around. Parent educator Jane Nelson uses the metaphor of lighting candles. Each candle represents a parent or a child—the more candles, the more light and the more love. Pacific Primary will not be diminished. Instead, when we light this second candle—the second site—with your help and generosity, we will be able to spread the Pacific Primary experience to more families and in doing so, will make a brighter future for us all.

## A Renewed Commitment *continued from page 3*

the next five years (2008-2013). Our board retreat in October focused on planting the seeds for the new strategic plan. We centered ourselves around the key values of diversity, accessibility and affordability. New initiatives will also be incorporated in the strategic plan to respond to changes in our world. "Greening" the school, expanding our diversity to include children with disabilities, reaching beyond our own community to educate others, expanding our tuition assistance program, and other ideas will be integrated into the new plan, which will be presented to the community by the spring.

To help meet the challenges and opportunities that come with spreading the gift that is Pacific Primary, the board grew this year to 19 members. The increased size provides greater capability for addressing both the needs of our community at 1500 Grove Street and the demands of establishing the new site.

We look forward to building on the past accomplishments as we work with current families and alums to share Pacific Primary with more children and their parents.

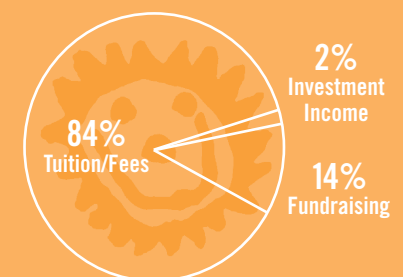
## Financial Highlights

- In fiscal year 2006-7, Pacific Primary anticipates total revenues of \$1,353,722. Tuition and fees account for 84% (or \$1,133,319) of that total.
- The 2006 annual auction raised \$110,000.
- Staff payroll costs comprise 87% of the \$1,354,085 in projected operating expenses for 2006-7.
- In 2006-7, Pacific Primary has 25 staff members.
- The endowment fund now has about \$880,000. Endowment investment income pays a portion of our tuition assistance fund each year.
- 17% of students receive tuition assistance this year, totaling \$80,728.

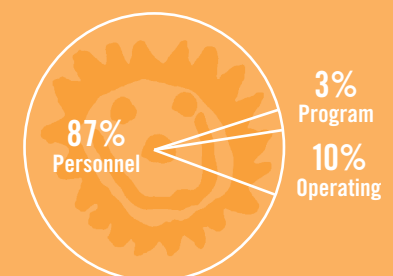
### **Help us reach our endowment goal!**

*The generosity of Pacific Primary's parents, friends and alumni makes it possible for the school to remain visionary. We are truly fortunate to have such loyal support! Our "Shine Brightly" 30th Anniversary endowment campaign goal is within reach: \$1 million by the end of 2007. Please help us make Pacific Primary affordable for all families by making a donation to our endowment fund.*

### Source of Funds



### Use of Funds



# Alumni Notes

## HELP US FIND LOST ALUMNI!

Contact Pacific Primary at 415.346.0906, alumni@pacificprimary.org, or write us at 1500 Grove Street, San Francisco, CA 94117.

**Ilana Kaufman (76)** is currently the Assistant Head of School at Lick-Wilmerding and was just appointed Head of Windrush School in El Cerrito.

**Tara Siegel (76)** and Ivan Chabra recently welcomed a baby boy, Declan. Tara lives in Manhattan and is the Rose Architectural Fellow at Pratt Institute.

**Annalee Schafranek (91)** is a junior at Reed College with a major in Sociology. She worked as a summer assistant for many summers at Pacific Primary and wants to teach preschool.

**Emily Baker (95)** competed at the State Cross Country meet with the varsity girl's team at Acalanes High School last year. She is now a junior.

**Max Raynor (95)** goes to Urban High School and

plays soccer and lacrosse. He loves working with young children, including at Pacific Primary as a summer assistant.

**Sean Schafranek (96)** is a sophomore at Arts and Tech Charter High School. He plays clarinet and is pursuing acting.

**Dominique Butler (97)** is thriving in his first year at the Putney School in Vermont. He loves the school and is fast acclimating to dorm life including an introduction to laundry.

**Sophia Raynor (98)** is in middle school at Claire Lilienthal and sings, plays the piano and loves to do theater.

**Wade Warren (01)** is in 5th grade at Nueva School and is part of 2006 Futures which is a kid "think

tank" for taking on the world's challenges and coming up with innovative solutions. He was in the San Francisco Opera's performance of Carmen.

**Yasmeen Butler (03)** is attending 4th grade in Washington, DC. She swims competitively with her neighborhood swim team. Her favorite stroke is the butterfly.

**Serena Warren (03)** attends Live Oak and is enjoying third grade.

**Nina Solinas (04)** is loving school at SF Day and loves to come back to visit, saying Pacific Primary is very much a beacon for her life.

**Alexander Standish Bair (05)** is enjoying Grattan School. James Bair, one of his dads, is the President of the PTA.

# New Families Share First Impressions

*Interviews of parents by John Aquino*

**How did your children feel on their first day at Pacific Primary?**



Tatum, *Sandpiper*

*Maroushka held Tatum when she felt sad and missed her mommies. And Tatum was happy to meet her new best friend, Lola, on the first day of school.*



Amina, *Gray Whale*

*Amina was sad. She missed her mommy and daddy. Her teachers were silly and, oh yeah, they were very nice.*



Sophia, *Gray Whale*

*She liked her new friends and had fun.*

**How did teachers and classmates make your children feel welcome at Pacific Primary?**



Aidan, *Rainbow Dolphin*

*Even though they didn't know him, the kids shared their toys. The teachers sat next to him and told him all the names until he remembered.*



Jordan, *Sandpiper*

*His teacher, Maroushka, took him outside to the playground and he wasn't scared after playing with the other guys.*



Ally, *Coyote*

*Brian helped her because he was making clay dough. And then it was fun because Willie and Ally played with the clay dough.*

**How has Pacific Primary helped your family make the transition to a new school?**



Barbara Cohen (Sam and Jake - *Rainbow Dolphins*)

*The New Parent night was a wonderful, welcoming way to meet teachers, see the school and begin to form friendships with other parents in our children's classroom.*



Saeda Fuller (Amina - *Gray Whale*)

*They provided a unique transition to accommodate for our child's specific needs. We met with teachers and Belann throughout the process, revising the schedule based on our daughter's needs, their expertise and our ideas and feelings. We were amazed how the teachers and staff extended themselves towards our daughter—building her trust and security.*



Jane Echlin (Willie - *Coyote*)

*Simply by welcoming Willie into the classroom. He had a shaky moment after he'd been there 3 weeks. I called Brian, who was incredibly reassuring, and from then on Willie has moaned most week-ends when he realizes he's not going to school!*