

February 5, 2008

News from Mr. Whiting's Class



Dear Family,

In past newsletters, I have focused on academics. Today I would like to write about how we help your child develop socially. In all of the classrooms in Sudbury, teachers use a program called Open Circle, developed at the Stone Center at Wellesley College. The program gives us ideas for lessons ranging from honesty to teasing.

Last week, we sat in a circle to discuss the issue of teasing people about their physical features. Even though I have not heard such teasing in the classroom, it can occur on the bus, during recess, or outside of school hours, not to mention in future years of the children's lives. It would be easy and quick for me to tell the students not to tease others about their physical characteristics. But instead of deciding *for them* what their future behavior should be, I prefer that the students arrive at the decision themselves. In the discussion, I commented, "An insult to someone's appearance says more about the speaker than about the target of the comment," and asked the class to discuss what they think that means. We continued to discuss the issue deeply. I asked, "If the victim is laughing, does that mean that he or she enjoyed your comment?" We also discussed the reasons someone might tease someone else about appearance. I was impressed by the number of intelligent ideas, some of which had not even occurred to me.

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Last week's discussion built on previous ones. We have discussed bullying, and how it differs from joking and teasing. We have also discussed the difference between tattling and reporting, and just how much courage it takes to report a problem to an adult. Students learned that stepping in as a bystander when witnessing bullying takes even more courage. Toward the beginning of the year, we engaged in what I believe are the most important lessons about character; the students discussed and role-played situations about honesty.

This or any topic that students have learned about in Open Circle can make for interesting conversation at dinner or in the car. I think you will be impressed by how deeply your child has been thinking.

Sincerely,

Brian Whiting