

Putting a POSITIVE Spin on It

Why Positive Discipline Matters

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Head of School



At WSMS, one of our guiding beliefs is that learning is a lifetime pursuit for everyone—not only for our students and their families, but for our faculty and staff.

One of the ways in which we further the professional development of our teachers is by offering several special “scholar in residence” programs each year. At our invitation, noted experts in various areas of childhood education come to WSMS to share their insights with our teachers, both through workshops and through personal consultations. The teachers are soon able to apply their newfound knowledge and techniques to their work in the classroom, where our students reap the benefits firsthand.

One of this year’s visiting scholars is Chip DeLorenzo, Executive Director of the Damariscotta Montessori School in Nobleboro, ME, and a Montessori consultant. Prior to the start of the 2009–2010 school year at WSMS, Chip led a two-day faculty workshop focusing on how to build character in children over the long term by using discipline. Yes, you heard right: discipline. And by that I don’t mean resorting to yelling or time-outs. I’m referring to the concept of positive discipline, a field in which Chip is a longtime expert. Chip based his workshop on the book *Positive Discipline* by Dr. Jane Nelsen, a licensed marriage, family, and child counselor and a childhood discipline expert. In preparation for the workshop, participants were given copies of *Positive Discipline* and *Positive Discipline for Preschoolers* (also by Nelsen) to read.

Nelsen believes that truly effective discipline doesn’t involve the use of punishment or rewards, the two ends of the traditional discipline spectrum. Instead, she suggests approaching discipline as a goal shared by adult and child. Positive discipline teaches mutual respect and gives children the social and life skills to find solutions on their own. The more children are involved in identifying and resolving discipline issues, the greater their potential for long-term success and increased self-esteem.

Workshop participants discussed the concept of encouragement vs. praise. Nelsen sees encouragement as a means of helping a child develop courage, resilience, and a sense of self-worth. The child learns to take risks, and to approach failure as something to learn from, not something to fear. Praise, on the other hand, takes the sense of accomplishment away from the child, and leads her/him to base her/his sense of self-worth on the validation of others. The child may become hesitant to take risks because they can result in failure.



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– WSMS Teacher

According to Nelsen, “Encouragement invites self-evaluation, while praise turns children into approval junkies.”

Another element of positive discipline is class meetings (or family meetings, in the case of the home environment), in which children meet individually with teachers on a regular basis to bring up issues and problems and to work through solutions and agreements together. A child who works with adults to set mutually acceptable rules and agreements is more likely to be cooperative when it comes to infractions of those rules or agreements. And the fact that adults take time out of their day to meet with and listen to the child fosters the child’s sense of self-worth.

Cooperation is also more likely when children are allowed some element of control over their environment. For example, saying to a child, “I see that there are some books scattered on the floor. I am free now to help you pick them up and put them away, or you can do it by yourself later on. Which would you like to do?” is far more empowering than, “Pick up those books.” Allowing children to have a choice and to be involved in the decision helps them to take responsibility for their actions in the future.

Positive discipline supports the practice of practical, non-punitive discipline strategies that not only encourage children to improve their behavior, but also help children develop a healthy sense of capability and self-worth, the foundations of good character and social and life skills that will serve them well through adulthood. The prepared environment in the classrooms at WSMS provides an ideal staging ground for achieving these goals in a

seamless fashion.

After Chip’s workshop, I sought feedback from WSMS teachers on their experience, and was pleased to hear so many positive responses.

“I feel so grateful for the ongoing professional development I receive at WSMS. And this workshop was particularly helpful. The word *discipline* so often has a negative connotation, and for this reason I really liked the idea of *positive discipline*. Dr. Nelsen’s theories fit very nicely with the Montessori method and the work we are already doing at WSMS, and I am eager to get into the classroom and try out some of her strategies.” (WSMS Teacher)

“While punishment or rewards can work to stop undesirable behavior in the short term, they are not effective over time, and even their short-term effect is not worth the price children have to pay. For this reason we don’t use punishment or rewards at WSMS. And after Chip’s workshop, I feel that I’m armed with even more tools to help children reach their fullest potential in a positive way.” (WSMS Teacher)

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON POSITIVE DISCIPLINE, VISIT WWW.POSITIVEDISCIPLINE.COM. AND STAY TUNED: IN FUTURE ISSUES OF *GREAT BEGINNINGS* I WILL CONTINUE TO BRING YOU INFORMATION ON CURRENT RESEARCH IN THE FIELD OF EDUCATION, TOPICS WE ARE DISCUSSING AT WSMS, AND OUR ONGOING EFFORTS TO PROVIDE THE BEST MONTESSORI EXPERIENCE POSSIBLE FOR OUR YOUNG STUDENTS.



Locavores in Training: Joan Shisler, Nature Teacher

As interviewed by:
Lorén DeNicola, WSMS Administration

WSMS teacher and nature specialist Joan Shisler is the most in her element when she's sitting on the classroom floor surrounded by a class of wide-eyed three- to five-year-olds. Colleagues readily describe Joan as a master teacher, a valued mentor, and a tireless cheerleader for kids and for all things Montessori. To the children gathered around her for nature class, she is their engaging guide to the natural world. Her enthusiasm is contagious; the scope of her knowledge is immense.

Throughout her childhood in rural Pennsylvania, Joan got to see firsthand how plants grow, and how living creatures such as insects and worms aid in the growing of food. Her backyard had a fruit and vegetable garden large enough to feed not just her own family, but a few neighboring families as well. The property extended past meadows and hills filled with various trees, wildflowers, and grasses where she and her siblings and friends explored and played.

While it's clear that Joan grew up in an ideal environment in which to develop a love and understanding of nature, what about city kids? How can they learn to cherish the world in which we live? I recently had the opportunity to talk to Joan about this question and about her vision for the nature program at WSMS.

Tell us a little about the nature program.

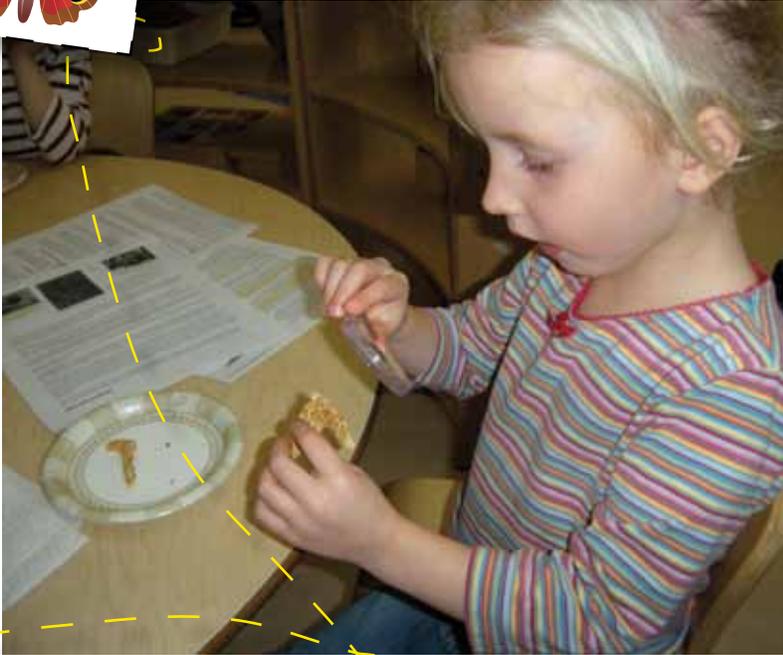
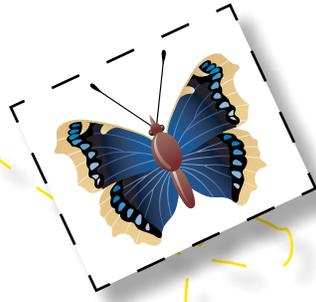
Nature class is a fun-filled half hour filled with discussions and questions. There are lots of opportunities for everyone to see, touch, feel, smell, and occasionally hear from objects pertaining to animals and to the world we all live in.

How is a typical nature class structured?

The nature program always begins by placing ourselves into nature: we are a part of nature, we are animals. We begin by exploring our own five senses, because that is what we use to learn. Then we can begin to look at animals around us and explore how they use their senses to find food, to be safe, to find shelter.

Do you have a set curriculum, or is it flexible based on children's interests?

Well, both, but typically we begin to explore different aspects of our natural world: life cycles; habitats; hibernation; the different categories of animals such as vertebrates and invertebrates; then the different vertebrates such as mammals, birds, reptiles, fish, and amphibians. We most often have an animal to hold or simply observe. We do experiments having to do with animals and nature, such as, "How many blocks will a chicken egg hold before it smashes?" and [we] make murals of animals hibernating.



loc▪a▪vore (n)
 one who eats
 food grown
 or produced
 locally as often
 as possible

Why is learning about nature important for children living in New York City?

My belief about the nature program is that the experiences of young children with nature play a critical role in shaping lifelong attitudes, values, and patterns of behavior toward natural environments, and to that end, we are helping to inspire empathic values and flexible thinking.

Your program focuses on “local nature.” Why?

One of the most important parts of the nature program is that it revolves around animals and plants that are a part of our world in and around New York City. Our natural world includes plants that provide us with food. So imparting that connection and making nature real to children and not just a trip to the zoo is something I would love to see. That is why I place an emphasis on cows rather than elephants, coyotes rather than hyenas, ants and grasshoppers rather than Komodo dragons.

What are your goals for the nature program?

To foster the children’s sense of wonder, to provide a sense of respect and caring for the natural environment, to provide positive interactions with the natural world, and to teach love and respect for both the environment and ourselves.

What advice can you give to parents so they too can inspire a love for nature?

Start very young, take children outdoors to the park in every season, observe everything that crawls or walks or flies...Take the time to allow your children to ask questions, and provide opportunities for them to figure things out. Do research online... let them discover! Join a community garden, or grow one on your roof; buy from local farmers markets; and most of all, show [your children] that you care about the environment too.

Joan concluded the interview with a classroom story. She was speaking to a class about dissecting fish. The children responded with shrieks of “Yuck!” and “Ewww!” Joan explained to the children, “Today we are going to be scientists, and scientists say things like, ‘Oh, wow,’ and ‘I wonder.’” And almost as if by magic, the chorus of repulsion from the children shifted to echo those words of wonder and curiosity. From moments like these emerge the respect and caring for the environment that Joan is talking about—and, ultimately, the wider understanding of global connectedness that is what WSMS is all about.

ABOUT JOAN SHISLER

JOAN’S EXPERIENCE AS A MONTESSORI CLASSROOM TEACHER SPANS THREE DECADES. SHE HAS TAUGHT IN BOTH NEW YORK CITY AND PENNSYLVANIA. JOAN EARNED HER BACHELOR OF ARTS FROM PENN STATE UNIVERSITY AND LATER A MASTER’S DEGREE IN EDUCATION FROM HUNTER COLLEGE IN NEW YORK CITY.

AFTER COMPLETING HER FORMAL TRAINING AND THEN TEACHING FOR MANY YEARS, JOAN PURSUED HER PASSION FOR NATURE AND DEVELOPED AN EARLY EDUCATION PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN. ACCORDING TO JOAN, THE NATURE PROGRAM AT WEST SIDE MONTESSORI SCHOOL GIVES CHILDREN A CHANCE TO “EXPLORE THE WONDERS AND WORKINGS OF ANIMALS AND NATURE.”