Director’s Corner:
Building Self-Esteem & Independence

The Children’s School’s educational philosophy is based on theories and research in Developmental Psychology. We use “developmental goals” as a systematic framework for focusing our program design. Beginning with this newsletter, I will highlight one set of goals each month to make the rationale underlying our design decisions clearer, as well as to support families in fostering their children’s development with similar intentionality.

**Self-Esteem & Independence**: encouraging each child’s pride in individual characteristics, families, experiences, and accomplishments and each child's responsibility for personal care, actions, and words.

Psychologist Erik Erikson emphasized young children’s need to develop a sense of autonomy, the confidence to take initiative, and the motivation to industriously master culturally valued tasks. Jean Piaget highlighted children’s innate disposition to explore the world as curious scientists. In both theories, the role of adults is simply to provide a safe and encouraging environment for exploration. At the Children’s School, we view this developing self-esteem and independence as foundational for all of their other achievements. We let children know that they are special and that they belong by using their names and photographs throughout the classrooms, by displaying the products of their efforts, and by inviting them to contribute meaningfully to the group. By learning to value and manage themselves, including their bodies, their actions, and their emotions, children acquire a positive and proactive stance toward learning to interact, to communicate, etc.

Within each theme, educators highlight each child’s uniqueness in a variety of ways. In September, we encourage children to share their families and experiences with each other, while also teaching them to follow the rules and routines that keep everyone safe and comfortable. Units like the recent kindergarten emphasis on the Medieval Times afford opportunities to develop individual crests, use personal initials to note ownership, and learn from the ways people in another time and place resourcefully met their daily needs, had fun, and expressed themselves through the arts. The preschoolers’ current recycling unit strengthens children’s ability to impact their community by taking responsibility for managing resources and using existing materials in creative ways.

Carefully building mathematics skills, or skills in any academic domain, provides children with tools for solving problems that they encounter in their daily lives. They can use measurement to share equitably or tally votes to determine which game to play or snack to make. Practice noticing patterns encourages children to predict what will happen next, and basic counting and arithmetic procedures help children organize both time and materials. In all of these ways, children begin to view themselves as capable individuals with a “can do” approach to new situations.

Families can promote self-esteem and independence by allowing time and providing encouragement for children to master a wide variety of self-help skills, such as feeding, dressing, and bathing themselves, as well as taking care of their belongings. Finding age-appropriate ways for each child to contribute to the household work helps children to understand their value to the family and to feel confident offering help elsewhere. You’d be amazed at what children can do when given clear training and plenty of practice. Their satisfaction in accomplishment is a joy to witness!