Director’s Corner: Renewing Wonder

As this year’s Whole School exploration of Animals in the Wild draws to a close and spring commences (whether the weather aligns with the calendar or not), I find myself burrowing beneath the intellectual principles of life “in the wild” to focus on observing the amazing patterns of animal life with their young. Like many children and adults in Pittsburgh, I watched in awe as the Hays Bald Eagle Webcam showed the first eaglet hatching. What amazing persistence from a new life that is, at the same time, so fragile. Watching the adult eagles so gently care for their young and so fiercely struggle to protect them is a similar paradox, akin to human parenting that requires a balance of warmth and structure, attachment and letting go, devoted attention and distance, etc. With animals, much of the challenge of balancing these seemingly opposing qualities is instinctual, with each different species following a pattern of parent-child interdependence and communication that is uniquely adaptive. Human families have an even richer array of effective parenting styles that uniquely suit their heritage, current context, and individual profiles. At the same time, 25 years of collaborating with parents at the Children’s School has taught me that many joys and woes of parenting are widely shared across the surface level differences between families, such as pride in children’s accomplishments and worries about their futures.

At the beginning of our unit, I asked the group of parents who attended our theme introduction to view a series of photographs entitled “Parenting in the Wilderness”. You can watch the brief slideshow at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtE0FBHFyag. Here are a few that resonated with numerous parents.

Perhaps you can identify with the challenge of balancing an often overwhelming load, the simultaneous pride and pressure of constantly being a model, or the anxious gaze as your precious child takes first steps farther from home. All of these experiences are a natural part of the process for parents, educators, mentors, etc. One way to embrace them is to renew our sense of wonder, to admire the beauty of the child, savor the surprise of the unexpected interaction, marvel at the mistakes we make, admire the ingenuity - even of the challenging behaviors, and capitalize on our own and our children’s capacity for starting fresh each day with curiosity about what may transpire, what we can learn, and how we can support each other. As Socrates said, “Wonder is the beginning of wisdom.” May this season of our partnership in nurturing young children be wonder-full, so that together we become increasingly wise.