

Tara Redwood Newsletter



Happy New Year !



Creating Compassionate Cultures

Founder Pam Cayton has just returned after one month in Europe and two months in Australia where she offered training seminars on the work developed at Tara Redwood School. The primary focus of Creating Compassionate Cultures (CCC) is to offer trainings in



these methodologies for teachers, parents, psychologists and anyone anywhere to develop more compassionate cultures. We also have a range of tools

and materials for home, school and the workplace that offer support in this unique approach to nurturing the innate positive qualities in oneself, our families and our communities!

Don't miss the **Parenting Series** on Thursday 6:30 – 8:00 pm for six evenings through January and February, beginning January 12th! It's a great way to connect with other parents and discuss parenting strategies specific to your needs. Discover more about how CCC can be integrated into your life and strengthen the compassionate culture in your home.

Tara Redwood School will sponsor the classes so there is **NO CHARGE** for Tara Parents. For participants **NOT at Tara or Wishing Well**: The series of 6 classes is \$90 or \$15/class.

While visiting our website, **check out our shop! CCC and From Kids to World (FKTW)** have a unique range of quality products that would make great gifts for the home and workplace. All our products are produced with the sincere intention to benefit and so are: **good for the body, good for the mind and good for the planet!**

Your orders can be delivered to the school for convenient pick up and there is **NO SHIPPING!**

2012 CCC Parenting Series

Thursday Evenings: 6:30 - 8:00

January: 12, 19, 26

February: 2, 9, 16

Classes will be fun and interactive. They will include: presentations, mindfulness practice, reflection, discussion and activities. We will explore practical tools and their application in our homes, workplace and life. Each session will allow time for questions, solution seeking and sharing ideas specific to individual needs.

Class #1: Living with Intention: Exploring what we really want

Class #2: Structure & Scaffolding: Building dreams

Class #3: Power in Change: Our natural potential

Class #4: Attitude is Everything: Creating our world

Class #5: Emotions: Freedom to Choose

Class #6: Empathy & Compassion: Living Loving Kindness

For your convenience, classes will be held in a central location, but **we need to know how many people will be attending, so please write to: info@creatingcompassionatecultures.com**

Preschool

Dear Preschool Families,

The autumn semester at Tara Redwood School seems to speed by much too quickly as the children settle in and become part of the "Preschool Mandala"! Joy and I try to keep you updated in Joy's weekly emails with information concerning current events and procedures in our classroom, and in recent parent/teacher conferences we have shared with you our observations regarding your children's academic progress and social-emotional development. Three times a year we also send out a lengthy newsletter to explain in detail our curriculum at TRS. In this way you will come to have a deeper understanding of the basic framework for our curriculum (based on the "Seven Steps to Knowledge, Strength, and Compassion" as developed by Pam Cayton, founder of TRS), and you will also be able to better understand the children's work you see around the classroom, and the projects they bring home.



Essential Education: Creating Awareness

The center of the preschool "mandala" is, of course, learning to be a good friend- a very advanced practice requiring lots of patience, effort, humor, forgiveness, courage, and above all, a kind heart! Although being a good friend to one or two others is natural and desired, learning to embrace or at least accept the many others, with all their foibles, as potential good friends, really requires some skill and training. This is one of the goals of our school, and we begin with the little ones.

The very first step is just awareness- coming to an awareness that this is the project: that everyone wants to be happy; no one wants to be sad. We can all help each other to create these conditions with our thoughts, speech and actions. We start at the beginning of the year asking the questions: Why do we come to preschool? How do we want to feel when we are at school? How can we help each other to be happy, to be a good friend? Through the answers elicited from these questions we construct the beginnings of our morning mandala (a round bowl filled with sand), **which expresses our daily intention (Step #1 of the "7 Steps")**. In the first weeks we place a crystal jewel in the center of the mandala, which symbolizes that just as a crystal contains the potential for creating all the colors which shine out in every direction when the conditions are ripe, so we have the potential for being a good friend to all. Around the crystal each child places a glass heart, thinking of various ways in which s/he can be a good friend. Once we have brainstormed many ideas, I write their ideas on smooth, shiny black stones, and we choose one each day to be in the center of the mandala, to inspire us throughout the day. The mandala is placed

in a central spot in the classroom where we can notice it as we pass by.

Essential Education: Inspiring Growth, Change and Transformation

In October when the acorns begin to fall from the oak trees, we gather some as we go to the playground and add them to the mandala **to symbolize potential**; just as acorns are seeds that may grow into large trees if protected, and nurtured by the elements, so our friendships can grow by practicing the skills we've previously named. In November we add a brass ring to the morning mandala, symbolizing the cycle of life- interconnection, and **change or impermanence- the second and third of the "7 Steps"**. Just as all forms of life have continuous cycles in which the organisms may flourish and provide for the continuity of its species, so also they are subject to potential impermanence. In the same way, our friendships will flourish if nurtured by the qualities and practices we previously named, but as with all of life, they can perish if abused or neglected. Fortunately we are learning many skills to repair or revive our lapses in friendship and we practice them every day!

Preschool

Essential Education: Inspiring Growth, Change and Transformation Con't

After the winter break we will be adding “flowers” to our morning mandala, symbolizing our senses through which we may apprehend our friends and notice their feelings and activities (**perception, the 4th of the “7 Steps”**).

Finally we will begin to add “heart jewels” of five colors to our mandala as we investigate our emotions and how to transform unhelpful feelings into positive energy and actions. We will notice how our friends experience similar feelings, and begin to understand how their sadness affects them in the same way ours affects us (**steps #5-7; transforming emotions, empathy, and compassion in action.**)

Using Art to Reinforce the “7-Steps”: Collage, Self-replicas, Mandalas



The projects we create at the brown table (the green table is a free art table) in the “mandala room” reflect our journey through the “7 Steps” as introduced in the morning mandala. We begin the year with a collage of our redwood forest and its inhabitants to spark the children’s awareness of the importance of including our environment in our morning motivation: We practice this every day as we walk to the playground and back- looking out for and moving banana slugs and other little critters, marveling at the proliferation of acorns, at the diversity of the mushroom family, at the height and majesty of the redwood trees.

Our second project of the year is the creation of small replicas of ourselves that are glued onto popsicle sticks and which now surround our morning mandala. The children love to look at this symbol of the unity and interconnection of the members of our class circling the morning intention, and I try to change the miniature children’s placement in the circle every now and then so they can stand beside new friends!



In order to become familiar with the concept of the “mandala”, this year we made little booklets of pictures of various mandalas taken from magazine pictures chosen by the children. The mandala is such a useful model for explaining the structure, motivation, and behavior of so many objects and processes in life. To emphasize the mandala of our feelings, so powerful and the root of friendship, **I traced the children on paper, and they drew their own faces, painted their clothes, and created a pictorial model of the mandala of their feelings which they then placed on their paper replica’s heart center.** The children have been so happy to see how they are connected to each other!

“The World Inside and Outside”

The preschool curriculum encompasses the traditional two years of preschool (3 and 4 year old years) and over the years **I have created what we call “the world inside of us” and ‘ the world outside of us”**. **Although all topics are touched on in both years, in the “inside year”** we learn in detail about our bodies and its structure and function, our senses, and our feelings, moving through the framework of the “7 Steps” toward the understanding that all humans and many animals share the same basic components, though we may perceive and live our lives quite differently. Because of this understanding we realize we can be of help to each other- in fact we need each other, and the year culminates, as does every year, with the theme of “compassion in action”- step #7.

This year we are focusing on the world outside of us, and we have begun to look at where we live. We inhabit this body; we live in a family, in a neighborhood in a town, in a state in a country, on a continent of planet Earth, in the solar system, in a galaxy of the universe! These are overwhelmingly big, difficult concepts for many children, and we approach it all very lightly. **We are making a little book which reflects these ideas, and will add pages throughout the school year.** During the months of October/November we introduced various aspects of life on our own continent.

Preschool

An important reason for introducing such an advanced subject to children of this young age is not just to increase their knowledge of geography, but to foster the understanding that we are all interconnected, and we need to work together to keep our planet healthy and happy- just as we are now learning to do in our classroom.

Celebrating Cultural Holidays and Traditions

We really began this study of the continents in October, with that great North American invention, Halloween. One of the main goals of the preschool curriculum for Halloween is to nurture a culture of fun and excitement, while helping to de-mystify or normalize those aspects which might be quite frightening to young children. So we sing the songs and talk of some of the history and significance of witches and ghosts, cauldrons and skeletons, spiders and bats. We introduce the children to "Z-Bob" our large model skeleton, and we learn the names of the bones of our bodies; we speak of this time of the harvest and the coming of winter (field trip to Live Earth Farm); and **this year, for the first time, we celebrated the "Day of the Dead", a feature of Mexican culture.** Joy created a beautiful altar, and we have been having many interesting conversations about the cycle of life, the aging process, how old is old, people and animals in our lives who have passed away, and sending good wishes to animals and people who are old or ill, and who could use some of our helpful energy. Unlike many adults, the children are not depressed or fearful about bringing up these subjects, having had very little first-hand experience, and it seems like a very good opportunity to introduce the notion of impermanence into the subject of the cycle of life. The children had fun making flowers and decorating sugar skulls with Joy, drinking hot chocolate, and talking about the pictures they brought in for the celebration- And it seemed that many parents really enjoyed this theme too!

During lunch and in circle we **talked and read stories of North America past and present**, and went on a field trip to the Natural History Museum to learn about the history of the local native Americans, the Ohlone people. In December we had a peek at the continent of Europe and its customs, especially the traditions of the solstice and Christmas.

Thanksgiving is the beginning of the "Season of Giving" and of the many festivals of light celebrated throughout the northern hemisphere in this darkening time of the year. I hope you are enjoying the little mice we made for the Thanksgiving celebration, holding their tiny lanterns. No matter how small we are, we can bring a little light into the lives and hearts of others in all sorts of ways. As usual, our class made cookies and pies with Joy to give to local families who do not have the means to bake Thanksgiving treats, and the children were so good and kind, not asking to eat the cookies themselves, but being quite satisfied with one chocolate chip each! **We performed some small Thanksgiving time skits as an offering to you kind parents**, and hope they brought light and laughter into your hearts! In December we supported the **"Adopt a Family" program**. Families only have one opportunity to ever be in this program, and it is a great joy to us to be able to help them. We made some little holiday gifts for our families, and decorated our annual "solstice tree", a little redwood sucker harvested from our forest, with symbols of the season.

Announcements and Thanks!

Wow, this has been an extra long description of our fall curriculum! I'm sorry to have taken so much of your adult-reading time, but hope it will help you to understand and appreciate the preschool curriculum at TRS. If you have any questions concerning our classroom activities Joy and I are always happy to talk, and I hope you will all go to Pam's parenting classes coming up, and learn more about our methods and the research behind them.

As always, thank you so much for all the help you offer to assist our class in functioning smoothly and harmoniously; field trip drivers, hot lunch and snack providers, laundry, project prep, photography, gardening, sewing, and many other small and large acts of kindness- we are so appreciative! Thank you also for reading the emails we send out, and for responding so quickly when needed. It helps us to be able to focus our energies on teaching and caring for your wonderful children, and that's what we love to do!

Lots of love,

Bev and Joy

Primary

Dear Primary families:

It is hard to believe that 2011 is at an end!! **We have seen such tremendous growth in all of the children** since the beginning of the year.

Learning the Four Elements

Each school year we cycle through the **four elements: Earth, Water, Air and Fire**. We started out the year in the Element of Fire. In our science lessons, we began by focusing on the Sun and all of the ways that it helps sustain life on our planet Earth. The children learned about light. What color is sunlight? We used prisms to show that they create a rainbow of light, **which reflect the seven qualities: (Blue) compassion, (Yellow) respect, (White) patience, (Red) generosity, (Purple) courage, (Orange) forgiveness, and (Green) rejoicing.**



We learned **where some common foods come from (sun=food) and had fun taste testing our Science lesson** ☒. We also studied about the equator and the equinox exploring the seasons, where heat comes from and why it is hotter in some places than others, and volcanoes. We also took a look at warm-blooded vs. cold-blooded animals and their differences.

In week 6 we switched into the **Earth Element**. Asking the question, "What kind of Earth do we

really want to live on?" For Science, we began this by exploring the science of our minds, where we have our own inner compass. We related this to seeds. **Where do we find our wishes? Deep inside our mind, like the seed in the ground. We each planted a seed in our own pots and blew our wishes for the Earth into them before planting them.** We planted carrots, kale, and beets and watched as they became seedlings that will eventually be planted in the Primary Garden out at the big playground.



Continuing our study of the Earth, we learned about the **three components of the Earth: land, air, and water**. And also the parts of the Earth and what types of rocks there are that make up the Earth.

Just in time for Halloween we began **our study of the human body by making skeletons**, always a fun activity! As thanksgiving approached we began our study of trees. The children **made their own tree paintings** and had so much fun painting their fingers, hands, and wrists for the tree's trunk and branches. We enjoyed taking nature walks to collect leaves and sticks for our Thanksgiving centerpieces, which turned out beautifully!

Elementary

The Three "R"'s

Continuing to explore what kind of Earth we want to live on we turned our focus to the three R's: Reduce, Recycle, Reuse. In our study of transformation we learned about composting and decomposing. The children were fascinated to watch it in action as they watched a container of lettuce decompose in the classroom over several weeks. We concluded Science for the year with a discussion of mammals, particularly those from South America, the continent we have been learning about for most of the semester. The children loved watching the video on sloths!

We ended the semester with talk of the upcoming holidays and we'd like to thank everyone for contributing to our Adopt-A-Family program. It was a wonderful experience for the children to participate in!



We hope this letter finds you happy and healthy, and we wish all of you a peaceful and relaxing holiday break. See you in 2012!

Warmly,
Margaret, Sirena and Kat



[Above] The children are exploring how to make peace and happiness throughout their day. The artwork now displayed on our mural in the classroom is the result of our discussions in our CCC/ UWE classes. Each student has voiced their individual wish to create happiness by acting on one of the positive qualities in their heart, then sharing that with their friends, teachers, and family. We then created "ourselves" with our wish across our chests to remind and inspire us of our deepest wishes. This living mural, which began in the Fire element, will continue to grow and be created by the children demonstrating their understanding and commitment to creating a happier more peaceful world, one classroom at a time.

Elementary

Dear Elementary Families

Getting in the Groove!

Well here we are, already past the first trimester of school! Our class has become such a sweet, cohesive group! **We feel so lucky to be able to spend our days with your children**, teaching and learning from them as well. We have had a great three and a half months so far, with many fun activities together. Starting off the year, our beach bonfire was a great way to get to know all the families in a relaxed and fun setting. The field trip to the planetarium was an entertaining way to learn about the legend of Orion, and to explore our current winter sky. The annual trip to Crystal Bay Farms for Halloween was enjoyable as ever, especially finishing off with our whole school potluck at the playground. In November, we had a wonderful time at our



class celebration for Thanksgiving. That was such a nice time to reconnect with everyone and share in our gratitude for our classroom community. **We have also been enjoying consistent hot lunches, provided by our classroom families. The children love the chance to have their parents in the class and especially enjoy the opportunity to help cook, and taste the creations** along the way! **Thank you so much for your involvement** in that way!

The group has really gotten into its 'groove' in the classroom. They have learned and are practicing the routines of the room. Students are helping other students in their learning and many new lessons are being presented. The children are showing their enthusiasm for learning and are quickly moving through materials on the shelves.



UWE

In our studies of our inner selves, we have gone through the 7 Steps to Knowledge, Strength, and Compassion one full time thus far. We started the year off with our investigation of **'What do we really want?' (step 1) in our classroom mandala.** We all agreed on having a group and place to come to that was respectful, kind, peaceful, and full of friends would make us happy. We can accomplish this by practicing 'the Golden Rule' and decided on a few model behaviors that will aid us along our journey. We developed our own Golden Agreements that help us achieve our ideal place each day. We went on to study **step 2 ('Everything Comes from**

Something/Everything is Connected') and **step 3 ('Everything Changes')** during our study of the Universe. We discovered that we all have come from and are a vital part of the Universe. The students traced our place here starting with the biggest environment (the entire Universe) and coming down each step closer to us (Universe-Milky Way Galaxy-Solar System-Earth-North America-United States-California-Monterey Bay-our Soquel forest-Tara Redwood School-me!). This was a fun way to be reminded of how very small we are, in relation to all that is around us, but how we are totally connected as well.

Elementary

UWE con't

Our interconnection is easy to see within our classroom also. **When we practice helpful qualities (compassion, generosity, respect, etc.) we create a place that we like.** On the other hand, when we let our negative emotions carry us, we are in a place where there are things happening that we don't enjoy. Even one person acting in a negative way affects the group and takes us farther from our goal. We need to work together to all create the happy times we want. Good thing everything is always changing!

We started with **step 1** again when our continent studies began with North America. **We revisited what we wanted, and looked into what those originally living in North America must have wanted as well (freedom, peace, connection to the Earth, safety).** We investigated **step 2** by learning about the Huichol Indians of Mexico's way of life and **interconnectedness to Mother Earth. The children**



werconnected to where they came from by honoring their family's ancestors for Dia de los Muertos. Making the altar was a nice way for the kids to get to know about family members they didn't all know, and to learn a bit more of their family's history.

For step 3, we looked into how "Everything Changes". We notice change around us everywhere, and just as the physical world changes quickly, so do our emotions. **When we are feeling sad, we can feel relief in the fact that our**

feelings will pass and we'll feel different soon. Even just taking some space helps us realize that our emotions can and will change. Once we've become more aware of how we're feeling, **we can be open to the idea that 'Our Mind Creates our Reality' (step 4). Our emotional state, whether happy, neutral, or sad, creates how we experience life.** We have our own view of each situation, regardless of what others experience. If we learn to respect others' opinions and perspective, then we can work out misunderstandings and learn more about each other. We can work out problems more readily when everyone's perspective is heard and respected. Sometimes hearing another's perspective is a good catalyst to introspection, and learning about ourselves. When we practice taking space and checking into our center, we learn to **transform our emotions (step 5).**

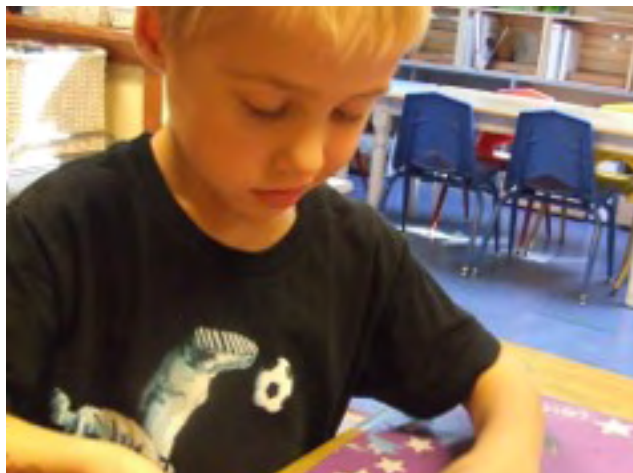
The practice of breathing and using courage to transform can be an amazingly empowering practice. We made power bead bracelets to help remind us of the power we have inside to do amazing things and are a good reminder that we are always changing. We rejoiced when we discussed times that we were able to do the hard work and transform our sadness and anger. The children are surely powerful already! 'Extending Your Understanding to Others' (step 5) gives us the chance to look into how others are feeling and relate to them. Understanding how our friends feel because we've also experienced that helps us want to help them. **When we can be empathetic with each other, opportunities for kindness are boundless!**

Elementary

UWE con't

Extending Your Understanding to Others' (step 5) gives us the chance to look into how others are feeling and relate to them. Understanding how our friends feel because we've also experienced that helps us want to help them. **When we can be empathetic with each other, opportunities for kindness are boundless!**

The final step of 'Compassion in Action' is the final piece that helps us become agents of change. When we can act compassionately with each other, because we can empathize with what our friend is going through, we are truly creating a change. We can use compassion to help our classroom mandala improve, our family life, our community, and the even out to the world! This is a great chance to look into what is needed around us and feel empowered to be the one to help make it better.



The children visibly were empowered and lit up with happiness when we discussed the social service projects to donate to. They were especially excited to help children in need in Haiti. They showed their empathy and compassion in their enthusiastic responses. Some even wanted to bring in old clothes and toys to send directly to the children in need. There are the agents of change right before us!

Social Studies

Through our studies of North America, we learned first about the physical geography of our home continent. We discussed how the landforms and plants determined how people could live there and what resources they may have used in ancient times. We learned the theory of how people migrated to North America from Asia, and discussed other ideas of how we came to be here. We learned about the Huichol Indians of Mexico, who had a deep connection to the Earth and the elements. They are one of the only indigenous cultures still carrying out their traditional ways of life now. Their respect and admiration for the Earth made them feel a deep connectedness to all of nature.



We also studied the native people in the US, focusing a short time on the Pacific Northwest natives, and their use of totem poles to represent their clan. The class began the first big art project for the auction, thanks to Tese, and began constructing our own totem pole. Each child chose a

quality that they associated closely with (kindness, peace, strength, to name a few) and built a representation of the animal associated with it. The class totem will surely be a beauty to see finished! More of that to come. We remembered that European people came across on boats and settled on the East coast. Our studies continued on to learn about the exploration and expansion out west, later in US history. The struggles that pioneers went through and ways they lived their lives were an interesting lesson about perspective, especially when we feel like our common day struggles are so difficult. The studies of North America concluded with learning about our National Park system and how that came to be to protect our natural beauty.

Elementary

Science

Our science began this year in the study of the solar system. We learned about the interconnection between the planets, the sun, and the moon. We also learned how the seasons change on earth and how we are all affected by this constant change. The upper elementary students researched a planet and gave a presentation to the class. This is an example of how we are connecting our literacy program to our science and cultural studies program.

We have completed several experiments. The experiment process of creating prediction and following careful investigation processes is an important part of our science program. The students have been learning about states of matter, melting points, freezing points, and mass. Experiments will continue through the year in science and independently during work period.



We have been studying about native plants, trees, herbs, and animals of North America. Our botany lessons have included identifying living and non-living entities in nature, parts of the roots, parts of the leaf, and parts of the plant. We are so lucky to have materials available first hand through the garden and the forest. We will continue our botany study focusing on herbs and trees of North America.

In December students began research and presentations of North American animals. We also began learning about the history of the naturalist and explorers of North

America, the development of State and National Parks, and the continued need to support the preservation of wilderness in North America.

Yoga

We are so lucky to have the opportunity to have yoga in our class two mornings a week. The children are amazing at staying focus on their balance, learning to dedicate their practice, and flowing though many positions. We have begun our “guest teacher” program, which allows for a student to guide the class in the opening meditation and lead the yoga practice for the day. It is amazing to see the dedication and pride the children have in their yoga practice. We always have an extra mat for anyone who is interested in joining the class. The movements we are practicing in yoga help to stimulate the brain for learning and to balance the mind and body.

Social Service

The end of this continent study marks when we decide where we want to donate our hot lunch money. We decided to give some money to all three types of social service projects: those that help people, animals, and the environment. **We had a whopping \$400 dollars for this continent, due to your generosity in our hot lunch program! Huge thank yous for that!** The children decided to send \$100 to help children still in need after the Haitian earthquake of 2010. We will send \$100 to World Wildlife Fund to help the endangered species in North America. We will also send \$100 to the Environmental Defense Fund, who help defeat the most urgent environmental threats to the climate, oceans, ecosystems, and people’s health.

Elementary

We decided to also donate \$100 to the National Parks system, to help preserve the natural beauty here in the United States. **Again, thank you so much for your kindness in donating to our hot lunch program, which gives the children an opportunity to really feel that they are helping make a change in the world.** The projects they donated to all have meaning to them, and they feel inspired to help.

Work period

The morning work period in our elementary class is a very special time of focused learning. The work period begins by recording the date and the daily intention into a journal. This will create a beautiful memory of all the thoughts and intentions generated by the class. To foster independence the students choose activities



from their individualized work plans. The work plans are created during a conference between the student and the teacher. Students also attend lessons each day to continue their academic growth. Our curriculum incorporates the California standards into the Montessori method of teaching. The students have become very fluent in their operations of the classroom and are showing increasing independence in their work. The students take pride in the classroom and their work. We all strive to create a peaceful learning atmosphere in the classroom. Please feel free to visit to observe this wonderful time in progress.

As the New Year begins, we will dive into our studies of Europe for the first few months of the year. We will investigate more closely where

we come from, being that many families can trace some family heritage back to Europe. The class will also be working on more beautiful art projects for the auction.

Let us take this chance to thank you for your interest in the holiday cards. This is a fundraiser that directly benefits our classroom, providing monies to buy new materials and supplies. We are excited to decide what will be the newest additions to the classroom, and so appreciate your generosity! The children's art work is so beautiful, and everyone you send them to surely will enjoy them, while getting a little Tara love along the way!

Warmly,

Ami and Lisa