

Dear Parents,

The director of a summer program (not connected to our school) gave one of the highest compliments I can think of to our program here at LFS. She noted that she can always tell LFS students by the way they deal with conflict. She said that when a problem arises, a typical school automatically resorts to yelling or some other form of anger and violence. In contrast, the LFS student points out that there are other ways to solve a problem and asks the students to listen to one another and state their needs and point of view. Through respectful attention to each person's perspective, the LFS student helps work something out. This director noted how at first, the other students are puzzled by this approach, as though it never occurred to them to try this, and even more surprised that it comes from one of their colleagues, rather than an adult. What is even more astounding is how quickly these other students adopt this approach to peaceful problem solving. It is an example of how our students are changing the world for the better, one person at a time.

This approach to problem solving is not accidental. It comes through design and stems directly from our testimony of peace-making. Adapting the Responsive Classroom as a basis for our social curriculum further emphasized the importance of the beginning of the school year, as a time to establish community and lay the basis for future conflict resolution.

The Responsive Classroom has seven guiding principles:

1. The social curriculum is as important as the academic curriculum.
2. How children learn is as important as what they learn.
3. The greatest cognitive growth occurs through social interaction.
4. There is a specific set of social skills that children need to learn and practice in order to be successful academically and socially: cooperation, assertion, responsibility, empathy, and self-control.
5. Knowing the children we teach individually, culturally, and developmentally is as important as knowing the content we teach.
6. Knowing the families of the children we teach is as important as knowing the children we teach.
7. How, we the adults at school, work together is as important as our individual competence.

More specifically, the Responsive Classroom uses six teaching practices:

1. Morning meeting that happens each day. At this meeting, students are welcomed with a written message, greeting, news and announcements, sharing, and an activity.
2. Our rules are clear, simple, positive, and generated with children. Student hopes and dreams guide rule creation. Logical consequences are a consistent approach to discipline.
3. Classroom organization promotes a caring environment and maximizes learning.
4. Academic choice invests children in their learning.
5. A method known as [Guided Discovery](#) is used to introduce materials and how to

- care for them, and to encourage inquiry.
6. It is important to reach out to parents as partners in their child's learning.

Creating the routines and culture of the classroom that is caring, safe and respectful takes time and practice, and for this reason, the first six weeks of school are crucial to making the entire year a success. This investment pays enormous dividends.

The process for resolving conflict observed by the director of the summer program is what we routinely use. We know and expect that children of all ages will have conflicts on a daily basis. What is different at LFS is how we view conflict and how we resolve it. Conflict can be an opportunity to hear another's perspective, and learn how to get along with others, even people that we normally would not gravitate toward. Conflict is an opportunity for growth. We provide a place for children to work through conflict, while they have support all around them, and we model problem solving and support them as they try out these budding skills. We encourage them to take personal responsibility in solving problems. They are to use words to talk through problems, present their point of views, and share possible solutions. If their words do not work, they should come to a teacher to help them resolve the conflict.

At home, you can support these important lessons and skills by role playing with your children and by helping them practice how they might tell another classroom what is bothering them.

In short, all of this is designed to teach the skills of listening and negotiation and the habits of mind of resilience, empathy and courage. These are the skills and habits of mind which will serve your children well in the future as they go into middle school and high school and as they act as peace makers in the larger world.

Have a great weekend.

Sincerely,  
John