

Cooperatively Speaking

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Parent Involvement...the Cooperative Preschool "Niche"

by Lesley Romanoff

While our school has never worked with a hired marketing consultant, over the years there have been consultants in our parent base and I have a first-career background in marketing and training video production and scriptwriting. Our school is over 60 years old and, I am proud to share, was built on a firm foundation. But, around fourteen years ago, our membership was lagging, our director was getting ready to shift careers, and our church rental agreement was about to be terminated.

Our first order of business was to revitalize the program and rebuild our membership. In short, we returned to our "roots". Many PCPI members have stressed parent training and its importance and I feel this directly relates to what others have shared regarding "finding your niche". A parent cooperative's niche IS parent involvement. We have to give parents a reason to get involved -- build a strong educational program for the children, add a strong educational program for the parents and members will come. As we increase membership, we increase resources, income, and keep the program relevant and vibrant.

This may sound strange, but cleaning out the closets and uncovering our founding director's lesson plans, library, photographs of children in the school, and looking at old board minutes and handbooks provided much inspiration.

I feel that knowing the history of the cooperative movement is important. There are many wonderful books on the subject, but

this article about the early years of cooperative preschools is a quick read for more info. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2005/is_/ai_n9487431.

I feel SUPER fortunate that I found a copy of Silver Spring Nursery School's 1949 handbook at an estate sale -- it is a treasure. We then proceeded, without apology, to tell parents that commitment level would be demanding and high. We established "practices" that directly related to marketing ourselves. In the beginning, this was most evident in the way we approached enrollment season. We wanted this to set the tone for parent learning opportunities. We added formal information sessions and guided tours in order to infuse learning into the experience of being introduced to the program. We pulled out all the stops during admission season to show parents how their work manifested in improvements in the physical environment, the financial health of the school, and the well-being of the children.



Cooperative Preschool "Niche"...cont'd

We established and considered parent skills and interests for admission. Once enrolled, we pooled parent skills and talents and used these to make the program stronger. This included finding a viable fundraising option that suited our culture and finding other sources of income which enabled us to buy our own building. Maintaining the educational program and financial health of a school requires constant nurturing. A lot of the nurturing begins by defining the culture of the school and understanding and then reflecting the community in the program's approach. In our case, a lot of this was done by instinct. Again, we looked back to our roots and how these women (and eventually men as well) approached organization.

In closing, the Board of Directors are stewards of the school and honestly, must be recognized for their work and held in high regard. We strive to make improvements through parent feedback and most importantly parent education. I took over the directorship about six years ago and hope to make the parent training and community outreach goals of our school even better. We have instituted a formal parent curriculum, we are in the process of redesigning our website to include an educational outreach blog, and hope to create a social networking site for parents.

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In Memoriam - Marika Townshend

Marika Townshend was a true friend and advocate of children of all ages. She was President of PCPI from 1996-1998 during a difficult time for our organization. Never one to accept the word "no" or "it can't be done," she refused to accept that PCPI might cease to exist. Thanks to her efforts, PCPI is able to look forward to celebrating its 50th anniversary next year.

Both cooperative preschools and public schools benefited from Marika's commitment to the welfare of children. She shared a joint Presidency of the Vancouver Island Cooperative Preschool Association. As a strong supporter of public education, she was an elected school trustee for her district in Saanich, BC. Marika brought wise counsel, incredible energy, and dedication to all of her endeavors. We will truly miss her leadership. Marika died of breast cancer on April 23, 2009. PCPI wishes to express deep sympathy to her husband Ron, their three children and her many friends.

In her honor, PCPI has named the fund that supports members to attend our annual meetings the Marika Townshend Travel Grants and welcomes tax deductible donations in her name.

START PLANNING NEXT YEAR'S PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAM NOW

BECKY ALLEN PARENT EDUCATION GRANT

APPLICATION DEADLINE DECEMBER 1, 2009

Becky Allen devoted her life to early childhood education and the importance of parent involvement. The Becky Allen Fund honors and continues her important work by offering an annual grant to one or more parent cooperative preschools or councils to help fund a parent education project. The total grant amount is up to \$500 to fund one or more programs.

U.S. preschools with their own direct membership in PCPI are eligible. In addition, U.S. member councils may apply for a grant to fund a council parent education program. Both are invited to submit grant requests for the 2009-2010 school year. Grant requests should include the following information:

- ⇒ School or Council name and address
- ⇒ Contact person's name, address, phone and e-mail
- ⇒ Your parent education program goals
- ⇒ The number of participants you hope to have
- ⇒ Your program content
- ⇒ The length of your program and timelines
- ⇒ Your program staff/presenters
- ⇒ Your program budget

Your request should describe a program that will be of value to your school/community clearly and with as many specifics as possible. Please send your requests via e-mail to Lisa Meyer (Chairperson, Becky Allen Fund) at gnsk@greenbelt.com. (Applicants please request receipt notification from your e-mail program). Application information will also be available on the PCPI website: www.preschools.coop. The Grant application deadline is December 1, 2009. The grant award decision will be made by January 5, 2010 so you have time to implement a spring parent education program. Please consider taking advantage of this wonderful opportunity to enhance a key component of cooperative preschools--parent education-- and to continue the work of Becky Allen.

Thanks to those of you who have made contributions in memory of Becky Allen. If you would like to contribute, please send your check to PCPI, National Cooperative Business Center, 1401 New York Ave. Suite 1100, Washington, D.C. 20005. Make your checks payable to PCPI with a notation that it is for the Becky Allen Fund. It is tax deductible.



PARENT COOPERATIVE PRESCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

Presented in Vancouver, British Columbia May 23, 2009

Congratulations to the following award winners who exemplify leadership and passion for the Parent Cooperative Preschool Movement

HONORARY LIFE MEMBER: Presented to WILLA BURKE – British Columbia, Canada
This singular recognition is reserved for those individuals who have made lasting contributions to the parent cooperative movement. Willa is known for her outstanding organizational skills, depth of knowledge and ongoing support of co-op preschools, and one of her greatest contributions to PCPI is her mentoring of current and future leaders. Willa has served as a mentor to many in the Vancouver Island Cooperative Preschool Association (VICPA) and PCPI. Her ability to look to the long term health and leadership needs of the organization has served PCPI well. As a “treasury of history and good judgment” Willa has given dedicated and effective service to her local Association and to PCPI for three decades, and she is highly deserving of PCPI’s highest honor.

NATIONAL AWARD: Presented to JEAN BEALE - British Columbia, Canada
Recognizes those members who have demonstrated leadership which has had a positive impact on parent cooperatives at more than a local, council or regional level including service on the PCPI Board, liaison with other related national organizations, original research, writing or editorial work or any unique contribution to the Parent Cooperative Movement.

DISTRICT AWARD: Presented to LINDA ROMANOWSKI- Oregon, USA and
PATRICIA SAUER - British Columbia, Canada
Celebrates those members who demonstrate at the local, council or regional level: effective leadership, dedicated cooperation with parents and teachers, tangible benefits to children and dedicated commitment to local parent co-op or council.



Willa Burke, PCPI Honorary Life Member and
Jean Beale, National Award winner

**PCPI Supports and Encourages:
PARENT Involvement, PARENT Participation and PARENT Education
in Early Childhood Education Programs**

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Submissions are welcome; please send to:
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Join PCPI to Learn Together

Membership Year: January to December
Dues for 2009 are

Individual \$40

Council \$200

School/Group \$50

Library \$ 40

Mail Membership to US or Canadian Office

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS INCLUDE:

A LINK TO YOUR WEBSITE, NETWORK WITH OTHER CO-OP TEACHERS AND PARENTS ON OUR YAHOO CHAT GROUP, RECEIVE OUR NEWSLETTERS AND DIRECTORY, APPLY FOR OUR ANNUAL GRANTS, NOMINATE YOUR MEMBERS FOR AWARDS, JOIN OUR ANNUAL MEETINGS AND CONFERENCES.

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A child's self-image is more like a scrapbook than a single snapshot. As the child matures, the number and variety of images in that scrapbook may be far more important than any individual picture pasted inside it.

Lawrence Kutner, U.S. child psychologist and author

For a small child there is no division between playing and learning; between the things he or she does "just for fun" and things that are "educational." The child learns while living and any part of living that is enjoyable is also play.

Penelope Leach, British child development specialist