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THE  
**COMMUNITY SCHOOL**

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**NEWSLETTER**  
**November 13, 2006**

**Director's Commentary: The Value of Little Moments**

The past few weeks have been filled with the widest possible range of things to think about. Two weeks ago, we put a lot of focus on the structure of our schedule, making sure that the days are set up to create the safest environment that still allows for a lot of interaction. Last week, we met with our curriculum consultant Sheryl Robertson to review and refine our academic plan, ensuring that we are on track with the high school students' course work. All of that stuff is incredibly important. But something that happened last week reminded me of the value of the little moments, and how important it is to remember that the interactions between and among the kids contain the core of what we're doing.

Here's what happened. Kenny and Alex stood in front of the cubbies in the hall, and Alex, who had brought his metal detector to school, tried to scan Kenny's body. Kenny said, "Please don't scan my body." This was said in a curt, but not inappropriate, way. Alex responded with, "Shut up!," or words to that effect. This seemed like a disproportionately irritated response, but it wasn't clear why. I shuttled Alex down to my homeroom with Will and Bowen. Since Alex was so bothered, this incident became the basis of our discussion at homeroom. I began sketching out what had happened in pictures and words on the chalkboard. At first, Alex indicated that he was furious at Kenny, but he couldn't quite explain why. As I tried to help him calm down and reflect, another part of the story emerged.

On the sidewalk in front of the building, Alex and Kenny were walking in to school. Alex had held the detector up to Kenny as if to scan his body. Kenny didn't like this, and had put his hand up as if to push away the detector, saying, "Don't scan my body!" Alex had not understood why Kenny had rejected his idea of scanning his body, and he secretly fumed about this as they came upstairs. This is what led to the moment in the hall in front of the cubbies (there's almost always a back story to these things!).



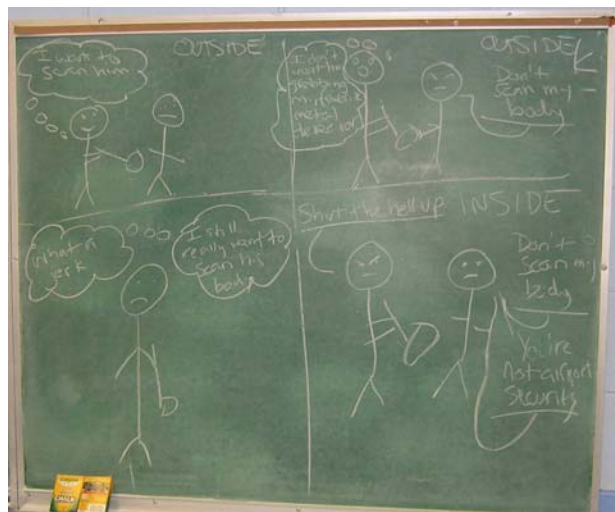
Group Communication Activity at the YMCA

In homeroom as the whole story came out, Alex was struggling to explain exactly why he was so bothered, but it gradually became clear that he had simply been excited about the metal detector and really wanted to scan a wide range of things, including other people's bodies. He simply hadn't stopped to ask first. When he got



up to the cubbies, his desire to scan someone's body was still so strong that he decided to try for Kenny a second time, unable to temper his desire long enough to ask permission.

Once the story was clear, Alex continued to be angry, suggesting that he was going to file a



A Storyboard of the Metal Detector Incident

charge against Kenny. “For what?” Bowen, Will and I asked. Alex couldn’t quite say. Bowen unexpectedly began to review the story we had written on the board, and in a calm and comfortable voice, he asked Alex a few clarifying questions. Then he said, nonthreateningly, “Alex, it sounds like you invaded Kenny’s personal space, and that Kenny responded pretty ok in the circumstances” (or words to that effect). Alex, who likes Bowen and is comfortable with him, didn’t reject this notion. Instead, he began to calm down quickly, and within a few minutes had figured out how to put the entire event behind him.

There are lots of good moments within the bigger moment here. Kenny didn’t overreact to Alex’s over eagerness with the metal detector. Bowen was able to offer an opinion that risked his friend being angry at him. He also got some experiential learning around the idea of the justice system, which he has been curious about but nervous about as well. And, Alex didn’t just put the incident behind him; by the end of the day, he and Kenny had spent study hall together working on a drawing project. Alex had apologized to Kenny about the metal detector, and then asked him to help him work on his drawings. Kenny accepted the apology and was happy to join in with Alex and his project. I’ve never seen them have so much fun together.

I won’t bore you with a deeper analysis of this set of events. Suffice it to say that the kids are getting a lot of chances to improve their communication skills, their emotional regulation, their social cueing skills, and their “repair” skills.

### Thursday Update

Last Thursday was the start of a new activity at the Alpharetta YMCA. We will be working there for the next five weeks, completing a series of team-building and communication activities, including the challenge (ropes) course. Last week it was fascinating to watch as the group



Nicole from the Y Coaching the Group



Working Together to get under the Jump Rope

struggled to complete some “get to know you” exercises; at times it was very uncomfortable for specific kids to participate, and hard for everyone to think like a group (instead of simply as an individual). Over the course of the hour, though, it was possible to see a gradual change as the nervousness went down and the enthusiasm for specific activities went up. Challenges included getting the whole group to stand together on a small platform; tossing a rubber chicken and other items back and forth in a coordinated way within a circle; and running through a jump rope in motion one at a time, but in an evenly paced

sequence. We also visited the site of the high ropes course, previewing some of what we will do in future sessions. Nicole, our leader from the Y, did a great job for us, and we’re looking forward to the rest of these sessions.

### **Cooking with Gas (well, electricity)**

**By Tim Black**

For the past three years I have been teaching different forms of cooking classes to our students. In the past we have produced entire three-to-five course meals in an industrial kitchen. These meals found me dashing about the kitchen like an Executive Chef getting people to perform their assigned tasks. The pace could get hectic and stressful for everyone sometimes, but the experience wound up being a positive one overall. This year for our Friday cooking class, Lucie Canfield and I decided to take a step back and let the guys experience success in the kitchen without a terrific amount of help from me.

So far, we have worked on baking and making easy, five or six ingredient, five or six step recipes that each of them could reasonably make at home. We started two weeks ago with something real basic: Betty Crocker and Hodgson Mill Blueberry Muffins. All of the guys had success in contributing to the process of mixing, preparing, cooking and (of course) eating the muffins. The muffins served as a good introduction to the kitchen downstairs because they were easy to produce within an hour and provided them with more of an opportunity to learn about where everything is stored in the small kitchen as well as how to use the ovens and stoves.

Last week, we made easy popovers from the “Pretend Soup” cookbook by Molly Katzen (of Moosewood Cookbook fame). This recipe was from scratch but was also pretty easy to put together, and we produced tasty popovers that the entire school enjoyed. We got a big kick out of the look of satisfaction on each of their faces as their classmates in other classes and teachers

took a bite out of the popovers and told them how good they tasted. We sent copies of the recipe home with them and would like for all of them to give the popovers a try sometime this week (with your help, of course) in their home kitchen.

The kitchen is a good metaphor for the work we do, really. It is hard work, it gets warm sometimes (maybe even hot), and it depends on each of us listening to the recipes on the page and to each other. When we find the magic combination or balance of the right ingredients in the recipes, the end result is positive in many different ways. Among the ingredients we work to add to the “recipes” of each of these boys’ lives are cooperation, friendship, the ability to listen and attend, deal with stress, happiness, and sadness, and the ability to share their lives through emotion and ideas. The trick for us all is to find the right combination and lovingly put it together with these amazing human beings we get to call our students.

Next week, look for some easy breakfast recipes, including quick coffee cake and omelets. Let’s get these boys cookin’ !

### **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- This Thursday’s (November 16) drop off is at Island Ford. Pick up is at 2:30 PM at the Alpharetta YMCA at 3655 Preston Ridge Road (off of Northpoint Parkway, just north of Old Milton Parkway). Turn into the small parking lot to the right before you reach the main building.
- Next week, there will be no school on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday (Thanksgiving Break).