

Park West

Cooperative
Nursery
School

Little Link

Information for families



2335 North Orchard Chicago, IL 60614 (773) 327-1115 www.parkwestcoop.org

JK-1

5 November, 2007

Dear parents,

TOMORROW, Tuesday, November 6, is our walking trip to the Notebaert Museum at Fullerton and Cannon Drive.
Arrive at school at 12:30.
Pick up in front of the museum at 4:00

Last week when we were deciding whether to look for triangles or squares on our walk to the park, we started a voting procedure. Perhaps most of the kids have done some form of voting in the past, but we want to establish a certain procedure that we hope will make the confusing aspects of voting more clear.

First of all, it is difficult for many kids to understand, and then accept with grace, that what they want is not necessarily what they will get, that what they vote for is not necessarily what we will end up doing as a group. They pretty much understand voting as "what do you like?" rather than as a group decision. The first few times always draw a lot of comments of disappointment and disbelief, but it doesn't take long until the idea of a group decision catches on and then it becomes a team sport, or competitive tribalism. Then kids may start to cheer for their choice gathering more votes and beating out the other choice. Some kids even make or change their vote according to which choice is "winning."

Well, all of the above are general observations of past groups, we didn't have any issues come up on our first vote. But when they do, we use those opportunities for soliciting kids' opinions and having group discussions (the real reason for nursery school). On this occasion, it may have been just a coincidence, but after the first 5 or 6 votes for triangles there seemed to be a momentum and heightened enthusiasm for each new vote. It was unanimous.

Here's how we do it. On the whiteboard, or a sheet of paper, we list the two (eventually more) choices above and below a line. Then a teacher asks "who votes for triangles?" and says the name of each child with a hand up, making a mark after "triangles" as each name is said. Then the same for the other choice. Some kids vote for both, but we are reminding them to just pick one. If they did vote for both, it wouldn't really change the comparison of totals to see which got more, and the opportunity to indicate they like both can be more satisfying. But we still tell them to pick just one because we want them to think more clearly that they are making a choice, and that their choice can affect the outcome of the choice of the group as a whole. Ultimately, for all its frustrations and tangled motivations and discussion, they will realize that when they vote, the group abides by that result, **EVEN THE TEACHERS**. We hope that will help them feel that their involvement is worthwhile. We will try other methods later, but we want a clear procedure to be well established first.

Another aspect we are focusing on is one-to-one correspondence. Some kids do this pretty consistently, but many are still in transition; sometimes they do, sometimes they don't. Knowing how to count is one thing, but that's just a list that can be memorized. Applying that list to the quantification of concrete objects can be a powerful tool, but if they do not make one-to-one correspondence, they are not understanding quantity as a stable concept.

In one of our games, Elephants On A Spiderweb, kids have a chance to say how many elephants are in the middle of the circle. Even at this age, we get two or three different answers, as kids say the numbers in order, but don't apply each number to one person. Sometimes they're just in a hurry, or don't count the teacher, or themselves, or don't want to include somebody. But mostly when there is an inaccuracy, it is because they are not making a one-to-one correspondence. You can't just tell them, because they do not see a logical necessity for doing it that way. But that's when teachers step in to say "let's count together," touching each person's head as the number is said.

So likewise when we are voting we make a point of finding the total of each group of votes by counting out loud together. We can't make them get it, but with enough chances to think about it, and argue about it, they will.

A reminder: call or come into the office to sign up for a conference.

Friday afternoon, November 16.

Monday morning, November 19.

Wednesday afternoon, November 28. No school for kids on this day.

MAJ