



## Welcoming the New Kid

### Session 1:

### Being With the Needy New Kid: Do We Care About Every Child?

#### Part One: Dear Parent

I'd like you to listen to this open letter from a teacher to parents. The author is Amy Murray, the director of early childhood education at the Calgary French & International School in Canada. The open letter is from her blog, *Miss Night's Marbles*<sup>1</sup> and was republished by Valerie Strauss in the *Washington Post* on November 14, 2014. Murray is also the co-founder of #Kinderchat ([www.kinderchat.net](http://www.kinderchat.net)), a twitter-based global community for educators of young children. She is a speaker and trainer on learning through play, self-regulation, behavior management, and the use of technology within the classroom.

Listen for the challenges this teacher experiences. And think about how we (as non-teachers) might be able to help.

Dear Parent:

I know. You're worried. Every day, your child comes home with a story about THAT kid. The one who is always hitting, shoving, pinching, scratching, maybe even biting other children. The one who always has to hold my hand in the hallway. The one who has a special spot at the carpet, and sometimes sits on a chair rather than the floor. The one who had to leave the block center because blocks are not for throwing. The one who climbed over the playground fence right exactly as I was telling her to stop. The one who poured his neighbor's milk onto the floor in a fit of anger. On purpose. While I was watching. And then, when I asked him to clean it up, emptied the ENTIRE paper towel dispenser. On purpose. While I was watching. The one who dropped the REAL ACTUAL F-word in gym class.

You're worried that THAT child is detracting from your child's learning experience. You're worried that he takes up too much of my time and energy, and that your child won't get his fair share. You're worried that she is really going to hurt someone some day. You're worried that "someone" might be your child. You're worried that your child is going to start using aggression to get what she wants. You're worried your child is going to fall behind academically because I might not notice that he is struggling to hold a pencil. I know.

Your child, this year, in this classroom, at this age, is not THAT child. Your child is not perfect, but she generally follows rules. He is able to share toys peaceably. She does not throw furniture. He raises his hand to speak. She works when it is time to work, and plays when it is time to play. He can be trusted to go straight to the bathroom and straight back again with no shenanigans. She thinks that the S-word is "stupid" and the C-word is "crap." I know.

I know, and I am worried, too.

You see, I worry all the time. About ALL of them. I worry about your child's pencil grip, and another child's letter sounds, and that little tiny one's shyness, and that other one's chronically empty lunchbox. I worry that Gavin's coat is not warm enough, and that Talitha's dad yells at her for printing the letter B backwards. Most of my car rides and showers are consumed with the worrying.

But I know, you want to talk about THAT child. Because Talitha's backward B's are not going to give your child a black eye.

I want to talk about THAT child, too, but there are so many things I can't tell you.

I can't tell you that she was adopted from an orphanage at 18 months.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://missnightmutter.com/2014/11/dear-parent-about-that-kid.html>



I can't tell you that he is on an elimination diet for possible food allergies, and that he is therefore hungry ALL. THE. TIME.

I can't tell you that her parents are in the middle of a horrendous divorce, and she has been staying with her grandma.

I can't tell you that I'm starting to worry that grandma drinks...

I can't tell you that his asthma medication makes him agitated.

I can't tell you that her mom is a single parent, and so she (the child) is at school from the moment before-care opens, until the moment after-care closes, and then the drive between home and school takes 40 minutes, and so she (the child) is getting less sleep than most adults.

I can't tell you that he has been a witness to domestic violence.

That's okay, you say. You understand I can't share personal or family information. You just want to know what I am DOING about That Child's behaviour.

I would love to tell you. But I can't.

I can't tell you that she receives speech-language services, that an assessment showed a severe language delay, and that the therapist feels the aggression is linked to frustration about being unable to communicate.

I can't tell you that I meet with his parents EVERY week, and that both of them usually cry at those meetings.

I can't tell you that the child and I have a secret hand signal to tell me when she needs to sit by herself for a while.

I can't tell you that he spends rest time curled in my lap because "it makes me feel better to hear your heart, Teacher."

I can't tell you that I have been meticulously tracking her aggressive incidents for 3 months, and that she has dropped from 5 incidents a day, to 5 incidents a week.

I can't tell you that the school secretary has agreed that I can send him to the office to "help" when I can tell he needs a change of scenery.

I can't tell you that I have stood up in a staff meeting and, with tears in my eyes, BEGGED my colleagues to keep an extra close eye on her, to be kind to her even when they are frustrated that she just punched someone AGAIN, and this time, RIGHT IN FRONT OF A TEACHER.

The thing is, there are SO MANY THINGS I can't tell you about That Child. I can't even tell you the good stuff.

I can't tell you that his classroom job is to water the plants, and that he cried with heartbreak when one of the plants died over winter break.

I can't tell you that she kisses her baby sister goodbye every morning, and whispers "You are my sunshine" before mom pushes the stroller away.

I can't tell you that he knows more about thunderstorms than most meteorologists.



I can't tell you that she often asks to help sharpen the pencils during playtime.

I can't tell you that she strokes her best friend's hair at rest time.

I can't tell you that when a classmate is crying, he rushes over with his favorite stuffy from the story corner.

The thing is, dear parent, that I can only talk to you about YOUR child. So, what I can tell you is this:

If ever, at any point, YOUR child, or any of your children, becomes THAT child...

I will not share your personal family business with other parents in the classroom.

I will communicate with you frequently, clearly, and kindly.

I will make sure there are tissues nearby at all our meetings, and if you let me, I will hold your hand when you cry.

I will advocate for your child and family to receive the highest quality of specialist services, and I will cooperate with those professionals to the fullest possible extent.

I will make sure your child gets extra love and affection when she needs it most.

I will be a voice for your child in our school community.

I will, no matter what happens, continue to look for, and to find, the good, amazing, special, and wonderful things about your child.

I will remind him and YOU of those good amazing special wonderful things, over and over again.

And when another parent comes to me, with concerns about YOUR child...

I will tell them all of this, all over again.

With so much love,  
Teacher



## Part Two: Every Child Made in the Image of God

Genesis 1 – 11 is aware of the challenge and question, ‘How do we treat other people’s children?’ Many people and nations asked the same thing. Genesis 1 – 11 and other ancient creation stories seem to follow the same five part structure. However, Genesis 1 – 11 aggressively critiques them. Here is a comparison of those stories:<sup>2</sup>

Stasinus’ Cypria (European)	Atrahasis (Babylonian/Akkadian)	Zoroastrian Avesta (Old Iranian)	Genesis 1-11 (Hebrew)
Problem: <b>Overpopulation</b> , wickedness, earth burdened	Creation (I.1 – 351): the work of the gods and the creation of humans	Creation: Ahura Mazda tells Yima (human) to be king over creation	Creation (1:1 – 2:3): God creates the world and humans and blesses them <b>to multiply</b>
First Threat: Zeus sends the Theban War; many destroyed	First Threat (I.352 – 415): Humans numerically increase; plague from the gods to limit <b>overcrowding</b> ; Enki’s help	First Threat: <b>Overpopulation</b> ; Yima asks the earth goddess Armaiti to expand herself	First Threat (2:4 – 4:25): Humans corrupt themselves; God promises a deliverer to undo it; Cain kills Abel and builds a city ‘on’ his son for his own security; Seth hopes in God
Second Threat: Zeus plans to destroy all by thunderbolts; Momos dissuades Zeus	Second Threat (II.i.1 – II.v.21) Humanity’s numerical increase; drought from the gods; Enki’s help	Second Threat: <b>Overpopulation</b> ; Yima asks the earth goddess Armaiti to expand herself	Second Threat (5:1 – 9:29): <b>Human violence</b> threatens Noah and family, the last family of faith hoping for the deliverer; God protects them through the flood
Third Threat: Momos suggests that Thebis marry a mortal to create Achilles and that Zeus father Helen of Troy; war results between the Greeks and the barbarians	Third Threat (II.v.22 – III.vi.4): Humanity’s numerical increase, Atrahasis Flood, salvation in boat	Third Threat: <b>Overpopulation</b> ; Yima asks the earth goddess Armaiti to expand herself	Third Threat (10:1 – 11:9): Humans build the city and tower of Babel, led by Nimrod the dictator; God disperses humanity
Resolution: Many destroyed by Trojan War, earth lightened of her burden	Resolution (III.vi.5 – viii.18): Numerical increase; compromise between Enlil and Enki; humans cursed with natural barrenness, high infant mortality rate, cult prostitution (to separate sex and procreation)	Resolution: Ahura Mazda sends a deadly winter with heavy snowfall to punish overcrowding; Yima told to build a three storied enclosure to survive; humanity destroyed outside while a boy and girl born in enclosure every 40 years	Resolution (11:10 – 26): Introduction of Abram as the heir of faith (In 11:27ff., God calls Abram and Sarai out of Ur to be a new ‘Adam and Eve.’)

In the other stories, human civilization is elevated at the expense of human life. Genesis 1 – 11 elevates human life at the expense of human civilization. In Genesis 1 – 11, human life is always good because each person is made in the image of God (Gen.1:26 – 28). God says, ‘Be fruitful and multiply.’ Kikawada and Quinn argue, ‘This command, so long familiar to us, is in its cultural context utterly startling, as unexpected as the monotheism.’<sup>3</sup> Frymer-Kensky says that this command to be fertile is ‘an explicit and probably conscious rejection of the idea that

<sup>2</sup> I have slightly modified the structure ascribed to Genesis 1 – 11 by Kikawada and Quinn and also Duane Garrett by placing a genealogy at the start of each subsection, which seems to me a more natural way to break up the text.

<sup>3</sup> Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was* (Ignatius Press: San Francisco, 1989), p.38



the cause of the flood was overpopulation and that overpopulation is a serious problem.<sup>4</sup> In Genesis, the flood happens not because of human overcrowding, as it does in the other stories, but because of human sin and violence threatening Noah and his family, the only family of faith left. They are important because they will partner with God in the redemption of human nature.

Kikawada and Quinn conclude: 'Genesis 1 – 11 then constitutes a rejection of Babel and Babylon – of civilization itself, if its continuance requires human existence to be treated as a contingent [or secondary] good. For Genesis the existence of a new human was always good.'<sup>5</sup> And that human being calls for an ethical and relational response from other human beings. Being made in God's image means to be generous to others with the created world, because God was generous to us with the created world.

C.S. Lewis aptly remarked, 'Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live for ever, and this must be either true or false... And immortality makes this other difference, which, by the by, has a connection with the difference between totalitarianism and democracy. If individuals live only seventy years, then a state, or a nation, or a civilisation, which may last for a thousand years, is more important than an individual. But if Christianity is true, then the individual is not only more important but incomparably more important, for he is everlasting and the life of the state or civilisation, compared with his, is only a moment.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 'The Atrahasis Epic and its Significance for Understanding Genesis 1-9,' *Biblical Archaeologist* 40 (1977):152. See also B.S. Yegerlehner, *Be Fruitful and Multiply* (Dissertation, Boston University, 1975) and David Daube's *The Duty of Procreation* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982). The point is still that a human life, once present, is precious and valuable, and must be honored as bearing God's image. Human overcrowding today is more of a legitimate concern than in this original phase of human history as narrated by these creation stories. Even so, the U.N. tells us that we have enough food to feed everyone in the world. We could eliminate desperate hunger. Other sources show that global poverty could be alleviated by 1% of the world's income. So why do we not do so? Because we lack the moral and political will to solve these problems. We would rather not trade grocery aisles full of choices so that other people could simply eat. It's seen as an infringement of our choices. 'We will not apologize for our way of life,' said President George H.W. Bush first in response to environmental concerns at the Kyoto Conference during his presidency (and repeated by several others). It is a mantra repeated by many Americans, even when our way of life shows a profound lack of compassion. We might as well say, 'We will not apologize for our lack of compassion.'

<sup>5</sup> Isaac Kikawada and Arthur Quinn, *Before Abraham Was*, p.51

<sup>6</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, NY: Collier Books, 1943, 1945, 1952), p.73



## Part Three: Action Steps to Consider

### Spotlight: Roots of Empathy

<http://www.rootsofempathy.org/>

Roots of Empathy is an evidence-based classroom program that has shown significant effect in reducing levels of aggression among schoolchildren by raising social/emotional competence and increasing empathy. The program reaches elementary schoolchildren from Kindergarten to Grade 8. In Canada, the program is delivered in English and French and reaches rural, urban, and remote communities including Aboriginal communities. Roots of Empathy is also delivered in New Zealand, the United States, Isle of Man, the Republic of Ireland, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

#### Emotional Literacy

At the heart of the program are a neighbourhood infant and parent who visit the classroom every three weeks over the school year. A trained Roots of Empathy Instructor coaches students to observe the baby's development and to label the baby's feelings. In this experiential learning, the baby is the "Teacher" and a lever, which the instructor uses to help children identify and reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of others. This "emotional literacy" taught in the program lays the foundation for more safe and caring classrooms, where children are the "Changers". They are more competent in understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others (empathy) and are therefore less likely to physically, psychologically and emotionally hurt each other through bullying and other cruelties. In the Roots of Empathy program children learn how to challenge cruelty and injustice. Messages of social inclusion and activities that are consensus building contribute to a culture of caring that changes the tone of the classroom. The Instructor also visits before and after each family visit to prepare and reinforce teachings using a specialized lesson plan for each visit. Research results from national and international evaluations of Roots of Empathy indicate significant reductions in aggression and increases in pro-social behaviour.

#### Empathy

The cognitive aspect of empathy is perspective taking and the affective aspect is emotion. Roots of Empathy educates both the mind and the heart.

Empathy is a key ingredient to responsible citizenship and responsive parenting. Information on infant safety and development helps children to be more aware of issues of infant vulnerability such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS), Shaken Baby Syndrome, Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) and second hand smoke. Observations of a loving parent-child relationship give children a model of responsible parenting.

#### The Roots of Empathy Curriculum

The curriculum is comprehensive and attuned to the development and interests of the children. The 639-page curriculum is divided into nine themes, with three classroom visits supporting each theme (a pre-family visit, family visit and post-family visit) for a total of 27 visits. Each of the nine themes is further broken down into four age ranges:

Kindergarten

Primary (Grades 1-3)

Junior (Grades 4-6)

Senior (Grades 7-8)

The ROE curriculum addresses the affective side of education, but the activities have many links to the classroom curriculum. For example, students use math skills when they calculate and chart the baby's weight and measurements. Literature is used as a way to open the door to feelings and perspective taking. The discussion and reflection that follows builds solidarity and empathy. Art plays a large role as children paint their inner feelings which they cannot say with words. Music stirs powerful feelings. It speaks to everyone regardless of language or culture and builds solidarity.



## **Spotlight: Vision San Diego**

<http://visionsandiego.com/>

### Who is Vision San Diego

We are working to see our County recognized as Americas most Loving Region. We support successful Government, Community or Faith based programs through promotion, advocacy and recruitment within the faith community of San Diego county. Additionally, VSD works proactively to inspire innovative solutions to both existing and developing community needs.

### Volunteer

There is no problem today that can be fixed by throwing money at it. There is no Government that can ever legislate a solution capable of meeting all of the needs of our community. There is not a non-profit, community based organization or church that has ever solved hunger, homelessness, abuse or any other evil in our world. But together, with the power of Government, the Passion of Business and the involvement of our entire Community we can make measureable, sustainable and Explosive impacts against the issues that plaque our region. We know that we are all better together, and we know that supporting each other, laboring together, and not accepting the status quo as good enough is how the San Diego Region will ensure that No One is Left Behind. Right now Vision San Diego is engaged in three Focus areas: Foster Youth, Elder Care and Education. We are working our hardest to find the best practices in our community that connect people who care to people who need them. You can find out how to get involved by clicking the buttons below to Meet the Needs of individuals or organizations, in your own neighborhood, or across the county.



Leader's Notes

Soylent Green  
Logan's Run  
Post-apocalyptic

<http://www.phalenacademies.org/mission/>