

Jen Cort's presentation/activity about Socioeconomic Diversity.

The Lower School Diversity Committee chose Socioeconomic Diversity as its theme for the year. In our meetings, we have discussed issues that arise in and out of the classroom in regard to: birthday parties, allowances, tooth fairy gifts, Scholastic Books, etc. We met with Jen Cort in March to discuss these issues and asked her to come to a LS faculty meeting for further discussion with the LS as a whole.

On May 10, Jen shared an activity with the LS and facilitated a discussion. She assigned each person a "character" who had a particular background and socioeconomic status. She gave us information regarding our character's home life including:

- marital status
- job information
- children,
- comments heard in the household recently that related to finances

Jen also gave out (pretend) money to each person, the amount varied depending on the character's socioeconomic status. We got into groups, each group having one of each character. Since our society does not support the discussion of economic status, (with the exception of the wealthy) we were advised not to disclose our status, but to respond to discussions and questions as if we were that person.

First, we were told to spend (or not spend) our money on various expenses. These included sports lessons for our children, birthday parties, Scholastic books, special clothes for assemblies and other child-related (and mostly school related) items. Each item was designated by a flyer with amounts listed. For example, the sports lesson flyer indicated it cost \$150 per child. We were to budget our money and make decisions on how to spend it. Then, we got back into our groups and had a discussion about organizing a class pot-luck, still "in character."

Second, after the activities we rejoined as a whole group and information was shared. Each character described their status and faculty shared how they felt about being that "person" and what issues they faced in both spending their money and planning the pot-luck.

Jen reminded us that these issues are faced by the parents at our school everyday, but that socioeconomic status is not something generally talked about. The ideas behind the activity were:

- Illustrate how varied the economic spectrum can be
- Highlight to faculty the number of times parents are faced with financial decisions beyond the tuition
- Emphasis the background information people bring to each discussion and how financial status informs the participation in many conversations