

The Magic Of Teaching

By CHIPS ROSS

The happiest and most magical place on earth may not be Disneyland but the kindergarten class at Forest Ranch Charter School. As Kindergarten teacher Theresa Palmarini explains, creativity, enthusiasm, and a sense of wonder abound in her class. The students express a love of learning: “Everything is new to them and they’re open to what you teach.” Theresa wants her classroom to be a happy, magical place; “I want them to feel like this is special place for them to learn. I want them happy to be here, that this is where they want to be.” Of course, there’s also the boundless enthusiasm. “They have so much energy!” she says, “You have to balance their enthusiasm with where they are developing.” While teaching numbers, Theresa will incorporate their energy and senses by having them count as they jump up and down or using their fingers to write the numbers in shaving cream.

Theresa was drawn to teaching through the indirect path of environmental science. She graduated from Chico State in 1996 with the major of Environmental Science Writing. The degree now exists, but Theresa had to create it herself, combining studies in Science, Journalism, and English. Following graduation, she worked as a naturalist at the Chico Creek Nature Center and then later as the community coordinator and naturalist with the Los Molinas School District. Both positions required her to engage students in environmental science through camps, outdoor work projects, and hikes.

In the meantime, Theresa married her husband Chris, putting down roots in Butte Creek Canyon. She received her teaching credential in 2001, gaining experience as a substitute, especially in Kindergarten. While she desired to teach full time, Theresa waited to raise her two children, Niya and Paige. This helped further develop her as a Kindergarten teacher, making her very familiar with that age.

“I feel real fortunate and blessed to be part of this school,” Theresa says, expressing her gratitude to the Forest Ranch community for the “... passion and dedication that went into saving this school.” She appreciates the interaction her students have with older ones. On Wednesday, they have reading buddies with the 3rd and 4th grade class. Every other Friday is mentor time, growing friendships between the younger and older students.

The great reward as a teacher is seeing your students grow. They began their first year of school asking her help with every problem; now, she watches as they solve the problems on their own. Reading is also another exciting development, both for Theresa and the students. Tapping into their energy and creativity, they enjoy ‘giggly sentences’ – sentences that get a laugh like ‘the fat cat sat on the rat’. Having progressed from letters to words, the students are starting to read ... and laughing out loud as they read these giggly sentences for themselves. Now, there’s something truly magical!