

Education environment proves contagious

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BEVERLY, MASS. - I was lying in chavasana pose at my yoga class. It's the final, climatic pose where we lie on our backs, in the dark, for five minutes of official, class-mandated, peace. Our instructor spoke in a low, calm voice. "Breathe in, and breathe out. It's just you and your mat." Brrrrzzzz, brrrrzzz. Somebody's cell phone was vibrating. The nerve. "Feel the day slip away from you. Breathe in and breathe out as you are aware of only you and your . . ." Brrzzzzzz!! Brrrrzzzz!!!

Honestly. It was soooo tacky, so annoy — so my phone. Sigh. There was only one person who would call me: My husband. And there was only one reason why: The girls were sick. With the school year underway, the first round of colds had begun and we'd succumbed a day earlier with runny noses and red-rimmed eyes.

I love the school year. I love the routine and creativity it provides my preschooler. I love my babysitter. Most of all I love getting to be on my campus for 12 whole hours a week where if someone yells "Mommy!!" it's not for me. But this whole cold thing that comes with each new school year is ridiculous.

Frankly I don't understand it.

Kids play together all summer. They roll around in the sand, stomp in mud puddles, eat ice cream in the middle of the day and stay up way too late. They get bug bites and sunburns and fall on rocks at the beach. They share popsicles and smoothies and other goopy food products. All this and nary a germ is spread. But put them together in a classroom and do a circle time or two; whip out a glue stick or have them trace letters at the same table, and suddenly they become walking phlegm machines.

Of course if any other parents are reading, our children don't really have colds. They're just allergies. I know better than to ever admit either of my children has a cold. My daughters may have swollen eyes, runny noses, a general drowned-cat appearance, but I'll cluck to any nearby parents, "Oh it's just such a bad allergy season isn't it?" And, as their respective bedraggled, wet-cats stand in miserable little huddles, they'll chirp back. "Oh yes! I saw on the news that hay fever is just awful this fall." "Mmm, hmm. Such high pollen counts!" Cluck, cluck. Chirp, chirp. When no one is looking during these group think chats, I sneak a few cough drops that I keep in my diaper bag. You know the kind — they promise to cut my cold, should I have one — which I don't, in half or to prevent it from occurring at all. It's a nice pitch. Nice enough that I buy them and suck them down like they are delicious treats instead of tasting like citrus flavored cardboard.

But the cold hard truth is: They don't cure a thing. They simply sell us a tangible action. They give us something to do to make us feel like we're fighting off the cold. Plus, they are so full of zinc and vitamin C that the ensuing twitchiness is easily mistaken for increased energy.

But at least all these colds, er, allergies, can impart some good life lessons. My daughter's preschool is learning about the five senses and she excitedly told me in the car, "Mommy, you know the *sounds* that truck and cars and planes make?" "Yes." I answered. "Well, well, well," she ramped up, "We hear those sounds with our . . . ears!" "You're right!" I affirmed. "And what do we do with our noses?" I asked,

thinking of flowers and newly washed sheets or perhaps a recently mopped kitchen floor. She smiled and replied matter-of-factly. "We blow boogers out of them."
So true. So true.

As for me (and not my mat), I dutifully took the call and left yoga early to go administer some medicine and soothe my youngest daughter back to sleep. Back to dream of the day we can all just breathe in and breathe out clearly and without interruptions.

Note: Esther Baird is a Beverly writer. Her column appears regularly in the Citizen. Please contact Esther with suggestions or comments about The Baird Facts at: esther@estherbaird.com, or visit her Web site at: www.estherbaird.com.