

## **On Equal Exchange Packing as Community Builder**

**By Emily Schnee, Brooklyn New School, Brooklyn NY**

As the kids have gotten older, many of us have begun to work more, our kids have gotten more independent, and we don't get to school as often as we did when they were little. Taking one morning to work with other parents to pack up the order has been a nice way to reconnect with our children's school community, to find out what's going on in old friends' lives, and to feel like we are contributing in a very concrete and productive way both to the school and fair trade. Though it can sound onerous to pack up thousands of dollars worth of coffee beans and chocolate bars, the spirit of the day has always been upbeat and positive.

Over the years, we've realized that it is important to have a big enough space so that we can lay out the boxes in the order that the items appear on the form. Rather than criss-crossing over one another and tripping over boxes in a too small space, as we did in the beginning, we now set up a circle of boxes that follows the order of the items on form. Each person doing the packing, grabs a bag (that another parent has already labeled with a child's name and teacher) and the corresponding order form and follows the circuit placing the items that the child has sold in the bag. The order form is then stapled to the bag and all the bags that go to the same classroom are placed together.

After all the packing is done, the bags are brought up to the classrooms for distribution to the individual children who have participated in the fundraiser. At this point, the classroom teachers are responsible for making sure the bags get sent home.

Coming together with other parents one Friday morning before the holidays to pack the Equal Exchange order has actually been a fun, community building event at our large, public, elementary school in NYC.