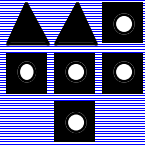




Children's School

April 2004



Family Newsletter/ 412-268-2199

Week of the Young Child

April 18-24, 2004

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The Week of the Young Child has been celebrated since 1971. The primary goal of The Week of the Young Child is to focus public attention on the needs of young children and their families and recognize the early childhood programs that meet those needs.

The theme for the Week of the Young Child 2004 is Children's Opportunities - Our Responsibilities. Today, we know more than ever before about the importance of children's earliest years in shaping their learning and development.

The Week of the Young Child is a time to recognize that *children's opportunities are our responsibilities* and to recommit ourselves to ensuring that each and every child

experiences the type of early environment (at home, at school, and in the community) that will promote their early learning.

Exhibition of Learning

In celebration of the Week of the Young Child, we are collaborating with the Cyert Center on an exhibition in the CMU University Center Gallery (close to the information desk in the University Center). The exhibit will open on Tuesday, April 20th and continue through Thursday, April 29th. The Gallery hours are Monday – Friday from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. Please make time to attend the exhibit with your child.

CMU Spring Carnival

Carnegie Mellon's Spring Carnival begins the evening of Thursday, April 15th. The Theme this year is "To Be a Kid Again". Spring Carnival is held in the Morewood Gardens Parking Lot (on Forbes Avenue between Morewood and S. Craig Street). It's a fun event for the whole family.

There will not be school on Friday, April 16th because of the congestion caused by traffic and the closing of roads surrounding the Children's School during the buggy races in the early morning hours.

After 10:00 AM, preschool parents attending parent/teacher conferences will be able to park in our lot.



Safety Corner



A tip on fastening the chin strap: To avoid pinches, place a finger in between your child's skin and the strap and then fasten the strap.

Please remember to send a bike helmet to school if you would like your child to ride a tricycle on the playground.

Here are a few keys to helmet safety:

- Make sure the straps are tight.
- Pull the helmet down and to the front of your child's head.
- The helmet should meet or exceed the ANSI or ASTM requirements for certification.
- The industry recommends that you replace your child's helmet every 3 years or if your child is in an accident while wearing the helmet.
- Helmets that are too small, straps that are too loose, and helmets that are worn so far back that the forehead is exposed are not effective protection.

We still have several spaces available for our Nature Camp in June. The dates for camp are June 1 to June 25, 2004. Please call the Children's School's office for a registration form.



Nutrition Corner

The Best Drinks for Children

(taken from the Better Kid Care Program)

Studies have shown that what children drink plays an important part in keeping children healthy. Take a closer look at what you are giving your children. Be sure to read the labels on containers carefully. A lot of fruit drinks and juices contain as much as 36 grams of sugar! Even 100 percent juice has a lot of sugar. This is because of the natural sugars that are in most fruits. Research is linking the drinking of soda, juice, and juice drinks to the rise in children's obesity.

If you want your children to be healthy, they should be drinking:

- 2 cups of low-fat milk a day
- 1 cup of 100% juice a day
- as much water as your child wants

Water is a great drink for everyone. It has no fat or sugar. Let's set a good example for our children by drinking water!



National TV-Turnoff Week

April 19-25, 2004

April 19th to 25th marks National TV-Turnoff Week, whose aim is to demonstrate how rewarding life can be without the tube. Turning off the television gives us a chance to think, read, create, and do. It gives us the chance to connect with our families and engage in our communities. Join thousands of parents, teachers, pediatricians and other families by celebrating TV-Turnoff Week 2004.

- First, talk with your family about the week.
- Think about what times you watch TV.
- Plan activities you can do in place of watching television.
(e.g., going to the *Exhibition of Learning at the University Center*)

If your family participates in this event, please let us know. We would love to hear about your experience!

To learn more about TV Turnoff Week, check their website (www.turnoff.org).



Stop by the office to buy your school spirit items!

Positive Discipline Pointer

No. A short but powerful word. Saying “no” can be an important strategy for avoiding over-commitment and the stress it causes. Children need to learn to say “no” if someone is hurting them. At the same time, “no” is often the root of unnecessary power struggles between adults and children. In “Positive Discipline for Preschoolers: Raising Children Who Are Responsible, Respectful, and Resourceful”, Jane Nelsen, Cheryl Erwin, and Roslyn Duffy offer numerous strategies for how adults can avoid constantly saying “no” and hearing their children say “no” (see Chapter 9). For example, they emphasize the importance of telling children what they should do rather than what they shouldn’t, which is why all of the Children’s School behavior expectations are phrased in the positive (e.g., use your walking feet, be a kind friend, etc.). They also suggest being more open to saying “yes”, particularly when there is no real harm in granting a child’s request (e.g., their example is saying “yes” when the child asks for mustard on pancakes). Sometimes finding a way to say “yes” requires a little creativity. Instead of saying “no” to a desired activity that you don’t want to allow at the moment, say “yes” to the activity happening later (e.g., after the bath is taken or the chore done, etc.). Children say “no” less often when given limited choices. For example, ask whether the child would rather help with job x or y, rather than asking whether the child wants to do x and hearing “no”. Learning to avoid the “no” in these cases makes it easier to say “no” and mean it when doing so is crucial to the child’s safety or healthy development. I highly recommend this book as the most practical and straightforward parenting guide available!



April Web Artists

Paige M.
Sebastian O.
Yon L.
Joshua P.
Thomas C.
Aidan L.
Shaw Y.
Emma H.
Izabella S.
Evan Z.
Benjamin W.
Claudia S.



Undergraduate Researchers

Throughout the month, twenty undergraduates will be conducting their group research projects under the supervision of Miss Bowers and Dr. Carver. Children who participate in each study will bring a full study description home in their backpacks, so please take the opportunity to read about their research.

Project Topics, Titles, and Participants:

The Effects of Varying Sound Effects and Voice Intonation on Episodic Memory (The Music Game) 3's & K

Memory for Faces (The Family Face Game) 3's, 4's & K

Peer Status Networks (The Party Game) 4's & K

Racial Stereotypes (The Fun with Faces Game) 3's & K

Understanding Animals' Theory of Mind (The Animal Game) 3's, 4's & K

Gender Stereotypes (The Monkey Game) 3's & K

The Shapes Game

Early in development, children explore objects to learn about their nature. Eventually, they try to represent these objects, initially using images that highlight the most prevalent characteristics. In school the children have begun to learn written language as well as to play with other novel representations like tangrams and pattern blocks. In this study, Ashley Anderson, a Research Training student working with Dr. Carver, is focusing on that time when the children are developing alphabetic representations and presumably starting to make the leap from purely iconic representations to inclusion of these more symbolic ones. The goal is to see if there is a correlation between a child's ability to represent objects abstractly using shapes and his or her ability to learn the alphabetic symbols.

The experimental task had two parts. First your child took a standard writing assessment to measure current ability to use written symbols for representing spoken words. For the second part of the game, we used a stack of cards with pictures of common objects on them. The child and the experimenter took turns using pattern blocks to make representations of the objects in the pictures. The cards had cartoon-like pictures of things such as a house, dog, or car. The point of turn taking was to allow the experimenter to model special "tricks" or skills with the pattern blocks.

These skills were:

- using two pieces together to make a shape
- overlapping pieces
- leaving gaps to represent things such as eyes or windows

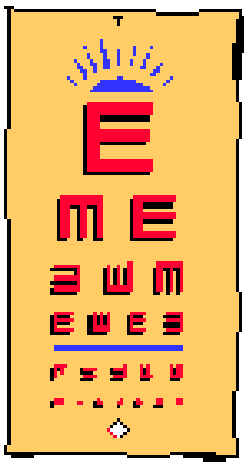
We hypothesize that children who are more facile with combining shapes to form representations of objects will also have progressed further in their use of alphabetic symbols. Findings from studies such as these can be used to help educators design a wide range of activities to support developing literacy skills.

The Animal Sorting Game

Erin Hahn, a graduate student working with Dr. David Rakison, is investigating how children determine category membership. In particular, they are interested in whether children rely on perceptual features (e.g., ears, tail) or other, less obvious properties (e.g., eats grass, has a round heart) when deciding what an animal is. In this study, children are presented with two kinds of animals. For each kind, the perceptual and non-obvious features vary. For example, all examples of one kind of animal might have a beak, while only one of the other kind has a beak. Children are then presented with several pictures and are asked to decide which kind of animal they think it is.

For example, children are presented with four examples of one kind of bird. Three of these birds have large ears, the other one does not possess salient ears and is said to eat grass. Then, four examples of another type of bird are presented. Two of these birds possess large ears and two eat grass. The child is then presented with a new bird that both has large ears and is said to eat grass. Children's task is to decide which of the two types of birds this new creature is most like.

By studying the basis for children's category inductions, the researchers hope to better understand the nature of children's early concepts. These insights may eventually contribute to the development of interventions to assist children with cognitive deficits.



Vision Screening

Margie Dubner, from the Easter Seal Society, will be here once again in April. On April 7th and 8th she will be conducting free Vision Screening in cooperation with Pittsburgh Vision Services. She will be screening our children for visual acuity, muscle imbalance, lazy eye (amblyopia), and color deficiency. If you want your child to participate, please complete the enclosed permission form and return to Mrs. Simpson by Monday, April 5th, 2004! Screening is important because children's eyes are fully developed by eight years of age, yet few children have eye examinations before entering grade school.



Director's Corner

At the recent conference of the National Coalition of Campus Children's Centers (NCCCC), keynote speaker Tom Hunter spoke about the importance of **belonging**, particularly for young children who are experiencing their first educational experience outside the family. Such belonging starts, he suggested, with "someone waiting for you", both an educator at the beginning of the school day and then a caregiver at the end. Mr. Hunter defined good teaching as "**an act of hospitality to the young**" and then described such hospitality as having several components. Hospitality values participation more than performance and process more than product. Hospitable adults also acknowledge children's feelings and offer their presence rather than answers or advice. One of Mr. Hunter's primary vehicles for touching the lives of children and the adults who care for them is through his songs; check for his "Song Growing Company" at www.tomhunter.com on the web.

At the Children's School, we have many strategies for extending hospitality to encourage belonging. We purposely address each other as "friends", and every adult greets all the children by name. We use the children's photographs as labels throughout the school on attendance charts, lockers, etc., and we display the children's work as a way of sharing it with each other. Like Mr. Hunter, we emphasize the use of songs to promote inclusiveness; each group has a standard set of greeting songs, as well as songs for many other parts of their school routine. All types of learning are affirmed here, with particular emphasis on noting progress relative to the goals the children have set for themselves (e.g., getting the ball in the basket, learning to cross the monkey bars, making a new friend, etc.).

Keynoter John Medina, from the Talaris Institute on Early Brain Development (www.talaris.org) expanded on Mr. Hunter's theme by advocating **emotion coaching**, which includes adults clearly indicating their awareness of children's emotions, their recognition of emotion situations as appropriate contexts for teaching, and their empathy and validation of the emotions. After setting the stage for effective coaching in these ways, adults need to help children verbally label their emotions, to set consistent behavioral limits for responding to emotions, and to offer assistance in solving problems related to the emotions. Since we have been focusing our professional development time on the issue of fostering social competence, emotion coaching is a current topic for our reflection. Naturally, such coaching happens here on a more individualized basis as the need arises. Occasionally, when issues such as teasing or tattling seem pervasive in a particular group, teachers will read related stories and discuss them during circle time so that all the friends can work on developing new strategies together. Conference time is a wonderful opportunity to talk with your child's teacher to learn more about the issues arising at school, as well as to share ideas about how to partner to facilitate your child's development.

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We're on the Web! See us at: www.psy.cmu.edu/childrenschool