Come one, come all …
to the Family Building Bonanza !!

Plan now to bring your entire family to the Children’s School Building Bonanza on Thursday evening, March 3rd from 4:30 – 6:30 pm. Come ready to experiment with balance as you work individually and collaboratively to build structures from diverse materials. Explore the building potential of our new Imagination Playground. Consider bringing a camera to capture your family’s creative constructions!

NOTE: There will not be an Extended Afternoon Program on the Building Bonanza day so that the staff can prepare the school for the event. If your child is enrolled in the Extended Afternoon Program, we will dismiss your child at 3:15 with the afternoon preschoolers. Thank you!

Enrollment Reminder

Registrations for the 2011-2012 Preschool Programs are arriving steadily and the Extended Morning Program is filling quickly, so please submit your re-enrollment materials as soon as possible. It is especially important that families let us know if you are NOT planning to re-enroll so that we can notify families on the waiting list that we have space for their children. Even if you are not re-enrolling, families need to return the corrected and signed “Child Information Form”. Thanks!

Registrations packets for the Kindergarten Program will be sent home in backpacks on Friday, February 4th. Remember that we will send more re-enrollment packets than we have spaces available, so we expect to have full classes. If you intend to re-enroll, please respond as quickly as possible to ensure that your child has a space. If you have any questions concerning admissions, please contact Maggie Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu.

February & Early March Dates

- Friday, February 4th: Deposits DUE for 2011-2012 Preschool
  Re-enrollment Packets Mailed to Current 4’s Families
- Friday, February 18th: Deposits DUE for 2011-2012 Kindergarten
- Monday, February 21st: Presidents’ Day Holiday (NO SCHOOL)
- Thursday, March 3rd, 4:30-6:30 pm, FAMILY BUILDING BONANZA
  (NOTE: There will be no Extended Afternoon Program on that day!)
- Friday, March 4th: Professional Development Day for Staff (NO SCHOOL for Children)
Family Committee News

The Library Committee continues to do a wonderful and much appreciated job of maintaining our library books! Remember – we are looking for help for our Library Cabinet Planning Committee. We are hoping to arrange a painting project for the evening of the Building Bonanza.

Thanks to Megan Cohen of the Sewing Committee for fixing the seats on our baby doll strollers!

Lost and Found

We have quite a collection of unclaimed hats, mittens, and various other items. Please check the bench in the hallway if your child is missing an item. You can also send a note to your child’s teacher with a description of a lost item so we can try to locate it. Remember to label all clothing items. Thanks!

February is Children’s Dental Health Month

The American Dental Association (ADA) sponsors National Children's Dental Health Month to raise awareness about the importance of oral health. Developing good habits at an early age and scheduling regular dental visits helps children start on a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums.

The ADA states that the most important concepts for preschool children to know are (1) our teeth are important, (2) we need to take good care of them, and (3) the dentist is a friendly doctor who helps you take good care of your teeth. Teeth are meant to last a lifetime. A balanced diet, limited snacks, brushing / flossing each day and a regular dental check-up are the keys to healthy teeth and gums.

For programs where children are older than one year and receive two or more meals, NAEYC (5.A.16) promotes good dental hygiene by requiring the staff to provide an opportunity for tooth brushing and gum cleaning to remove food and plaque. At the Children’s School, since our children are not here for two or more meals, we talk about brushing our teeth and good dental hygiene. We also encourage children to rinse their mouths with water after eating. However, just as you encourage hand washing when your child comes home from school, you should also encourage them to brush their teeth.

Please note that, in compliance with Caring for Our Children 8.015, we request contact information for your family dentist on your child’s re-enrollment information update.

Valentine’s Day

February is also the month when some families celebrate Valentine’s Day. Since the holiday falls on a school day, each class will plan a simple celebration, perhaps preparing a special snack, reading a related story, etc. Please watch the daily emails for specific information from your child’s teachers. As always, children will have access to card making materials in the writing centers for use if they are interested in sending greetings to family and friends.
Family Spotlight: Growing Up Bilingual

My name is Dave Guillou, and I am the father of Juliette, who attends Kindergarten at the Children’s School, and of Felix, who will attend the morning 3’s next year. My wife Corinne and I were born and raised in Brittany, in north-western France, and our children were both born in Pittsburgh. Our parents, our siblings, and the other members of our extended families live in France, and few of them speak English. Despite the separation, we want to make sure that Juliette and Felix learn the language of their grandparents and their cousins, so we speak French at home, and we visit our families at least once a year. We spent 2½ weeks in France over the holidays, even though it meant that Juliette would miss school. Needless to say, we all enjoyed our vacation in Brittany, the children spoke French non-stop, broadened their vocabulary, practiced ever-more complicated sentence structures, and absorbed the culture as well.

Growing up bilingual, or learning a second language at school at a young age, benefits children much beyond enabling them to speak the language (and strengthening family ties, as it may be). In that spirit, Corinne visits with the Kindergarten friends for a 20-minute “French class” every Friday. The children sing French songs and learn basic words and expressions related to the monthly theme. Corinne has been volunteering since Juliette joined the pre-school. She is grateful for the Children’s School teachers’ warm welcome, and she looks forward to starting anew next year with the morning 3’s. Our son Felix, who feels a bit anxious about joining “the big kids school” (as he puts it), is already looking forward to meeting his mommy for French class.

February Web Artists

3’s Friends: Jacey D., Travis K., Giovanni M., and Andrew Y.

4’s Friends: Nina C., Sebastian D., Mark H., and Simon M.

Kindergarten Friends: Charlotte B., Samuel R., and Etienne S.

Staff Cheer for AFC Champion STEELERS in Super Bowl XLV
Family Social Organization (FSO) Play Dates

Come and play with other Children's School families!

The FSO is planning two playdates at My Little Outback in Squirrel Hill.
- Friday February 4th at 10:30am
- Friday March 4th at 10:30am (there is no school this day)

My Little Outback is located at 1936 Murray Avenue in Squirrel Hill. Cost of admission is $8 per child, and there are often coupons in the Clipper Magazine. Socks are required for play. Siblings and friends are most welcome to attend.

Later this year, we are planning a music afternoon at the school and a trip to the International Children's Festival in Schenley Plaza. If you have any questions or suggestions please contact Aparna Brown at aparnabrown@gmail.com.

Recruiting Parent Subjects

Senior Ashley Herrick is working with professor Brooke Feeney on a study of parents' attachment style and its relationship to children behaviors. She still needs parents to complete a series of questionnaires, so if you are interested, please return the permission form or call Ms. Drash to receive another copy. Thanks!

Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration

On January 17th, the Mortar Board Honor Society read “Happy Birthday, Martin Luther King” by Jean Marzollo to our afternoon 3’s and 4’s classes and the kindergarten, and they provided activities for the children in honor of the holiday. The children made handprints and colored a mural based on the book. A “sharing” snack was also provided. Several parents joined their children and families from outside the school were also included.

NALS Conference – Auction Update

Donations are beginning to arrive for the National Association of Laboratory Schools Silent Auction that will be held in mid-April. The auction will raise money to support both NALS and the local host schools. Because we have already raised enough money for the Imagination Playground, the Children’s School’s share of the proceeds will go towards our Scholarship Fund. To date, we have received commitments for original artwork, massage, 2 dugout box tickets to Pirates game, 2 Penn State University football tickets (sideline tickets), 2 University of Pittsburgh football tickets (club seats), 2 Steelers tickets (100 level), 2 Pittsburgh Penguin tickets (100 level), a 2011-12 Season Subscription to the CMU Drama Department Productions, and a Steeler football signed by #43 Troy Polamalu. If you have an item for donation or would like to help with the Silent Auction, please contact Miss Hancock at lh37@andrew.cmu.edu or 412-268-2198.
Thanks to all the parents who participated in our Staff / Parent Discussion on Friday, January 28th. We enjoyed experimenting with varied building materials from our classrooms, as well as with everyday materials that could be re-purposed for building. We also discussed the developmental benefits of block building, along with the levels of block play, and then we watched recent video clips from our 3’s, 4’s, and kindergarten classes to see the development in action! In case you missed the discussion, here are a few of the key points, along with some photos of our experience.

**Developmental Benefits of Block Building**

- **Self-Esteem & Independence** – developing confidence in mastering diverse materials, taking responsibility for following the rules and cleaning up the space, managing emotions when structures fall, etc.
- **Interaction & Cooperation** – sharing materials, coordinating actions, negotiating cooperative designs, etc.
- **Communication** – learning new vocabulary, discussing plans, writing labels or drawing blueprints, reenacting stories, etc.
- **Discovery & Exploration** – exploring concepts of gravity as they relate to balance and stability, counting and measuring building features, strengthening geometric concepts and spatial skills, discovering multiple solutions to building problems, appreciating the value of learning from “mistakes”, etc.
- **Physical Capabilities / Health & Safety** – strengthening eye-hand coordination, building strength to handle large blocks, managing body movements to avoid bumping structures, following safety procedures with blocks, etc.
- **Artistic Expression & Appreciation** – experimenting with design & decoration while combining shapes, colors, textures, noticing varied features of buildings, replicating structure from designs, imagining new constructions, etc.

**Levels of Block Play:** Children typically progress during the early childhood years from *carrying* and otherwise exploring blocks, to **building** mostly in rows (either horizontal or vertical), to **bridging** spaces, to **enclosing** spaces, to **making decorative patterns**, to **naming** structures that they build intentionally (e.g., saying they’re making a zoo), to **symbolizing** known buildings with blocks.

**Adult Support For Block Building**

- Build **WITH the children** to gently support their developmental progression without directing or frustrating them.
- Take the **child’s lead**, follow the child’s interest, and provide only the level of support they need.
- Add people, animals, vehicles, etc. to the selection of blocks to **extend the play**.
- Allow children to combine a **variety of blocks**.
- Allow children to continue working on a structure for a **period of days**.
- Encourage children to **dissemble buildings as they assemble them** – one block at a time (i.e., rather than knocking or kicking them down).
Architecture Pointers for Families

As we begin the Whole School Building Unit, we encourage families to explore the architecture of your own homes and the buildings within our community. We will be exploring the Carnegie Mellon campus buildings during school hours.

ArchKiDecture is an independent architecture education project that encourages children to explore and participate in the built environment. The web site www.archkidecture.org offers a variety of interesting facts, stories, and related images that might be worth exploring on a snowy day.

For example, the site has a whole section for learning about materials used in architecture. In addition to introducing materials as “the substances that are selected by the architects and used by the builders to create the structure”, four key principles of materials are listed:

- Materials give the building structural soundness.
- Materials provide shelter from the elements.
- Materials should be pleasing to view.
- Materials must be within the budget for the building.

Children can then click to learn more about steel & glass, brick, straw & thatch, wood, and stone materials used in buildings. You can read to your children about these materials as they relate to stories, such as the Three Little Pigs, to new vocabulary (e.g., mason), and to famous buildings around the world (e.g., the pyramids).

There’s also a fun section called “Wild and Wacky Structures” where you can see famous buildings like the Eiffel Tower in Paris, France (1889, Gustave Eiffel). It also includes this amazing Tin Can Building in Lesotho (2002, Michael Hones). “A German man moved to Lesotho in Africa and wanted to do something positive for the people there. He realized that the tin cans were a great resource that was available and not used for anything once people had drunk up the beverage. So, he decided to start by making ‘solar cookers’ using the sun to make heat for cooking out of the cans. Then he started to design buildings out of the cans.” What a great example of RECYCLING!!
친구 고마워 (Thank You, Friends)

Ten students from Duksung Women’s University (Seoul, South Korea) smiled for a photo as they saw Pittsburgh for the first time. After orientation, they met their host families at a tea hosted by Cathy Baek and began interacting with the Balog, Brown, Cranor, Fulmer, and Sekula children. The students had a wonderful time experiencing American family life, sharing traditions (including watching the Steelers WIN), tasting new foods, and even sledding.

During their time at the Children’s School, each student was paired with a cooperating teacher and was integrated into one of the teaching teams. They helped as teacher aides and also prepared their own lessons to share with the children. We heard Korean folk tales, learned some words and songs, and played some new games together. Watch for photos in the forthcoming classroom newsletters!

We also helped the students to get a broader sense of early childhood education in our region by arranging tours of the Cyert Center for Early Education, the University Child Development Center, the Carriage House Children’s Center, the Children’s Museum, the Science Center, and the Carnegie Museum of Natural History. They learned about the high quality academic community by attending CMU’s Better Brain Panel, Dr. Carver’s Child Development Course, and a colloquium by Dr. David Uttal from Northwestern University. To broaden their experience even further, Michelle Figlar, the Executive Director of the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC) invited the students to her Applied Development Class and arranged a special seminar with Mardi Isler to discuss state and national level policies and funding for early childhood education.

To offer a little taste of home, Charles and Jehee Kim coordinated a group of parents to provide a Korean lunch for the students and staff. Several Korean masters students from the Entertainment Technology Center also provided a tour of their facility in Korean. Throughout the entire experience, Dr. Kyung Ok Lee supported the students’ learning and our mentoring by helping us to reflect on the amazing similarities between our approaches, as well as the sometimes-striking contrasts. Many thanks to everyone who helped make our first international practicum such a rich learning journey!
Research Spotlight

Do Pretests Reduce Children’s Learning?

Senior Lauren Gumbel is conducting her honors thesis in collaboration with Dr. Robert Siegler to expand our knowledge of how pretests impact children’s subsequent learning. Children learn numbers with experience. Their “comfort range” is the set of numbers a child understands, which is typically 0-10 by age 4. Numbers greater than that range are fairly indistinguishable. When asked to place numbers on a number line, children overestimate the small numbers that they know best. Below are examples of how children who are comfortable with numbers between 0 and 10, but not with numbers between 10 and 20, could incorrectly place numbers on a number line. These estimates would be quite accurate if the number line was from 0-10, but they are inaccurate for 0-20.

Studies investigating this phenomenon begin with a pretest, which could be affecting results. If the pretest problems are out of the child’s comfort range, they estimate the problems incorrectly (as in the above examples), which might make it harder for children to learn the correct strategy. They would then perform less well on the posttest because they have not been able to absorb the feedback from the learning phase of the study.

Lauren is testing the effect of pretests with Children’s School students ages 4 and 5. The computerized study consists of a pretest, feedback phase, and posttest. The study consists of one 20-minute session. Children are randomly assigned to three study variations. The pretest for the first version is a set of random numbers 0-10, numbers that should be in the children’s comfort range. Version two’s pretest is 0-20, which will most likely lead to the children overestimating, making learning during the feedback stage potentially more difficult. Version three has no pretest, which helps us determine the effects of the other variations.

The children click the place on the number line where they think the number displayed on the screen should go. A red line appears (as in the above examples) where the child clicked. During the feedback problems, a blue line appears where the correct answer is. If the answer was close, the computer says “Very Close!” and Lauren tells them so as well. If not, the computer says “Not Quite” and she explains where the line should have been.

This study is important because it could tell us whether the common practice of testing children’s knowledge before instruction might sometimes lead to less learning than if no pretest had been given. If so, a change in this classroom and research practice may be needed.
Robotics Research Featured on Plum TV

The robot Keepon was featured on Plum TV's "Masters of Innovation" in an episode entitled "Robots" about Carnegie Mellon University's Robotics Institute. Keepon is a small yellow robot designed to study the underlying mechanisms of social communication by interacting with children. Keepon has four motors, a rubber skin, two cameras in its eyes, and a microphone in its nose. Its simple appearance and behavior are intended to help children, even those with developmental disorders such as autism, to understand its attentive and emotive actions. For several years, we have collaborated with Marek Michalowski (Robotics Department) as he works to improve Keepon’s synchrony with children’s motions so that the robot behaves as naturally as possible.

View the segment filmed at The Children’s School...

http://vimeo.com/18431799

The link to the full episode is…
www.plumtv.com/videos/masters-of-innovation-robots

Undergraduate Spotlight: Getting to Know You !!

Alexandra Tapak is currently a CMU sophomore doing undergraduate work-study at The Children’s School for her second semester. She loves interacting with the children because they always have the most interesting things to say, and every day is a new adventure with them. Alex observes so many things every day because the children are constantly growing and changing. She’s seen an amazing difference since she started in September and can’t wait to see what has happened by the time May rolls around.

Alex is majoring in Psychology and Biological Sciences; she plans to go to medical school to pursue a career as a neurologist. At Carnegie Mellon, Alex is on the tennis team and cannot wait for the season to start in a few weeks. She loves spending time with her teammates, who are all so talented in many ways. Alex is also the sports editor of The Tartan, which is the campus newspaper. In that role, she gets to meet other athletes and watch Carnegie Mellon’s various sports teams compete. This fall, Alex joined Kappa Kappa Gamma, which has really been a wonderful experience of meeting so many new people and getting involved in the Carnegie Mellon Community.
Director’s Corner:
Deepening Discovery & Exploration

The Children’s School’s “developmental goals” for discovery & exploration express our commitment to substantive, inquiry-based study of developmentally appropriate themes. By highlighting our educators’ intentional preparation for these learning experiences and responsiveness to the children’s questions and interests, I seek to demonstrate ways that families can further enhance the children’s developing skills and knowledge foundations for future learning.

Discovery & Exploration - fostering a positive attitude toward learning through questioning, observing, and experimenting with varied materials related to diverse themes.

Children’s “approaches to learning” are the most important focus of our intentional teaching during the early years. We foster curiosity, initiative, attention, concentration, planning, persistence, acceptance of mistakes as part of learning, and the value of multiple strategies and solutions to problems. As with the other developmental domains, we combine modeling, explicit instruction, and coaching throughout the individualized process for each child.

The specific skills we teach generally follow the scientific method, beginning with questioning and predicting, then collecting and observing, and finally explaining and reporting. When seeking answers to our questions, we teach classifying, ordering, comparing and contrasting as basic skills that we practice with varied objects and events to highlight foundational science and math concepts (including all five domains of mathematics that I introduced in the October newsletter). We also introduce a wide range of tools for observing and representations for recording so that children have multiple options at their disposal.

When choosing themes, we aim for broad coverage of the life, earth, and physical sciences, literature and the arts, and social studies topics. For example, the preschoolers have studied recycling & community helpers, fairy tales & folk tales, and the healthy body so far this year, while the kindergartners have studied the healthy body, Native Americans, light & color, and the marketplace. We’re all about to study building, which will include focus on the physics involved, the aesthetics, as well as the community context. What amazes me most about our educators’ approach to the themes is their ability to identify the key concepts and frame them in a way that the children can understand. We also rely heavily on non-fiction books, internet sites with appropriate images and explanations, and expert guests to support our explanations of key theme content.

Naturally, mathematics is a prominent part of our inquiry process because our data collection often involves counting, measuring, describing shapes, spatial relations and patterns, and then representing the data via graphs, tables, etc. Our upcoming building unit will have many opportunities for extended projects that involve mathematics. Recently a preschool 3’s group helped Mr. Salinetro measure various spaces to determine where we can use a large Pittsburgh floor map for building our city, and the kindergarten is planning to design and build a chicken coop for use in a later project of hatching chickens.

Family support for discovery and exploration is essential because you have more time to help each child pursue individual interests for even deeper inquiry, especially via extended projects, field trips, and broader reading / internet research. We look forward to hearing about your explorations!