Month of the Young Child

PAEYC (Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children) designates the month of April as the Month of the Young Child. NAEYC encourages early childhood communities to organize projects and events that create broad visibility and support for the importance of the early years as a way of sharing the responsibility of ensuring the well-being of diverse children and families. As a laboratory school affiliated with a Psychology Department, we contribute to the success of all young children by facilitating high quality research, offering a model program that serves as an example for practitioners and as a field placement site for pre-service teachers, and offering seminars and workshops as professional development for our colleagues.

To honor young learners on campus during the Month of the Young Child, the Children’s School will be celebrating with the Cyert Center, the Reggio-Emilia inspired full day early learning center at CMU. Last year, educators and children from the Cyert Center joined us on our playground. This year, we will be walking over to their playground. The children will be collaborating on art work, playing games together, and joining in a sing-a-long and snack time on April 25th during regular school hours. Stay tuned for descriptions and photos of this event!

Enrollment Updates

2017-2018 School Year: We currently have 76 children registered for the next school year, but there are still spaces in all age groups, especially the afternoon preschool. We also have one space still available in our Morning Extended Program. We would appreciate you making referrals to your family and friends. Mrs. Rosenblum is happy to conduct tours for prospective families!

Summer Camp Enrollment: There are also spaces remaining in our June Summer Camp. This year’s camp theme is Bugs and will be taught by Children’s School educators. You can register your child for one, two, three or four weeks, and the hours are 8:45 am until 1 pm, Monday through Friday. Please contact Maggie Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu if you would like to enroll your child. We’re looking forward to exploring the most diverse creatures in the world!

April Dates:

- Friday, March 31st – NO SCHOOL for children
- Conference Preparation Day for Educators
- Friday, April 21st – NO SCHOOL for children
- Parent / Teacher Conferences in the Afternoon
- Enjoy CMU’s Spring Carnival “Timehop” April 20th to 22nd (http://www.springcarnival.org)
- Friday, April 28th – Parent / Teacher Conferences – NO SCHOOL for children
Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day

On April 27th, the Children’s School will be participating in Carnegie Mellon University’s “Take Our Daughters and Sons to Work Day”. Over 200 children are hosted at CMU annually, as they shadow their parents and take part in various campus sponsored events and activities. We will be hosting two groups of 15 children on the afternoon of April 27th. They will learn about birds and decorate birdhouses with our afternoon preschoolers.

Year End Celebration

The annual Year-End Celebration Picnic for all Children’s School families will be held after the Kindergarten Graduation Ceremony on Friday, May 19th. The Children’s School will be providing the main course, and we need volunteers to provide paper products, beverages, salads and desserts, as well as to help with the set up and clean up. Committee meetings to plan this event will be held on Tuesday, April 4th at 9 am and 12:45 pm. Please join us if you can! Even if you cannot join us on that date, there will be volunteer opportunities for this event, so watch for an email about using a Google.doc to indicate how you can help. Please contact Maggie Rosenblum if you have any questions (rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu).

Save the Date - Spring Gardening!

Saturday, April 8, 2017

The Children’s School will be participating in CMU’s Spring 1000Plus Volunteer Day on Saturday, April 8, 2017. Our tasks for the day include:

- Spring garden clean-up such as removing leaf debris
- Pruning plants on the hillside
- Fluffing mulch on the playground
- Sifting and raking sand in the sandbox to remove mulch and adding more sand
- Prepping garden boxes on the playground as well as on the wall for planting
- Washing the Imagination Playground blocks

If you have a leaf blower or tiller that you would be willing to bring or lend, please contact Miss Hancock lh37@andrew.cmu.edu.

Please plan to join us for a day of Spring garden cleanup, planting and FUN!!

Scholarship Funding Update

In March, we received additional contributions to our Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) and Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) programs. Through the EITC and OSTC, eligible Pennsylvania businesses can earn tax credits while providing financial assistance for children to attend preschool or an approved K-12 school. In addition to the donations mentioned in previous newsletters, we have also received contributions from UPMC Health Benefits, BHC Holdings/UHS of Delaware, and HM Insurance Group.

If you would like more information or can help us to build a list of prospective businesses, please contact the Main Office.
Accreditation Renewal with NAEYC

The Children’s School has been accredited through the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) since 2003. There are currently only 345 NAEYC accredited programs in Pennsylvania, with only 55 of those located within a 10-mile radius of Carnegie Mellon. Once accredited, centers provide NAEYC with an annual report documenting continuous quality improvement and participate in a self-assessment process to renew the accreditation every 5 years. In order to complete the renewal process before our 6/30/18 expiration date, Children’s School administrators and educators have already begun to document ways we are improving our program relative to the 10 program standards (with over 400 related criteria) by updating our electronic Program Portfolio and Classroom Portfolios. Feel free to review the program standards and criteria on NAEYC’s web site for families to see what we'll be documenting (http://families.naeyc.org).

In June, we will submit our “Intent to Renew” form with our annual report. By September 30th, we must submit our “Renewal Materials” to show that we are prepared for the required site visit that will occur sometime between October 2017 and March 2018. In order to complete those materials, we must conduct both staff and family surveys, using the questions NAEYC specifies. Though we gather staff and family feedback about our program each Spring as part of our continual quality improvement process, this year we must incorporate NAEYC’s standard questions AND ensure at least a 50% response rate for families (80% for staff). Our goal is 100% input for both surveys!

To help achieve this goal, during the month of April, we will send families a link to our electronic survey via Survey Monkey so families can respond at their convenience. Please watch for the email inviting your input and follow the directions closely.

• If you are unsure of a policy when asked, please check the Family Handbook (available in the “For Families” section of our web site); answers of “I don’t know” actually count against us because they are scored the same as if you respond “No.”
• Also, NAEYC is rightly concerned about centers communicating with families whose home language is not English, but their recommendations for providing written materials in alternate languages are most practical for centers with large populations of families speaking the same language rather than contexts like ours with families speaking 14 different home languages. We do seek translation services for conferences and other meetings when needed, so please feel free to ask if that would help you.
• Lastly, the survey is designed primarily for full day centers with children ranging from infants through kindergarten, so some questions are not applicable to our context. In those cases, there will be a “Not Applicable” choice available on the survey.

To encourage a high response rate, we will also have private survey stations available during April Conferences if you would prefer to complete the survey at the school. Please only submit one response per family. Thank you for your support!
April Gallery Features


4’s Friends: Jack G., Adrian L., Caleb M., Emilia M., Avi P., & Yerick V.

Kindergarten Friends: Morgan F. & Javier G.

Adopt our Garden for a Summer Week

During July and August, our garden will continue to grow but needs some friends to help with watering and weeding. If your family would be interested in adopting our garden for a week in July or August, please contact Miss Hancock at lh37@andrew.cmu.edu or 412-268-2198.

Family Social Organization Fun in March

Families of the Children’s School met at Hatch Art Studio on Saturday, March 25th to say hello to spring with a spring-themed story time and art activity guided by Shannon Merenstein. Children enjoyed decorating flower pots to grow their own paperwhites, created pinecone mobiles, collaboratively painted a giant flower, and listened to stories about spring!

We hope you’ll join the fun in April!
Family Social Organization for April

Please join us for a book club meeting on **Wednesday, April 5th** from 9-10 in the Cafe in Resnik House. We will be bringing some of our favorite **children's books that discuss feelings** to review together. Please bring one or two of your favorites to share with the group. Babies and toddlers are welcome. Please let us know if you have any questions. We hope you can join us! Becky (Atticus's mom - Kindergarten) beckymingo@me.com
Maria (Isaac's mom - AM blue room) mariamichelle1111@gmail.com

Please join the FSO at the **Gemini Children’s Theatre** on **Sunday, April 9th at 1 pm** for a classic retelling of the original version of **Snow White by the Brothers Grimm** with a modern, more pleasant theme. Children in the audience will have the opportunity to become Snow White's animal friends and help her through her journey. Tickets are $9 a person, with children under 2 free. We have reserved a block of 20 tickets. If there is enough interest, we will attempt to secure more seats. Please RSVP to Sara Torretti (Isaac, K) at storretti@hotmail.com by Monday, April 3rd. Gemini Children’s Theatre is now located at The Father Ryan Arts Center, 420 Chartiers Avenue, McKees Rocks, PA 15136 http://geminitheater.org/about.htm.

Explore **Carnegie Mellon University’s Spring Carnival!** A CMU tradition, **Spring Carnival** offers three days of amusement park rides, adventures in booths, games, fun food, and buggy races! Meet your Children’s School friends at the **Kidzone Activity Tent** on **Friday, April 21st from 8am-12pm**. This is a NO SCHOOL DAY. Kidzone offerings include a balloon artist, face painting, free t-shirts, and more. Children 12 and under can build and race their own LEGO® buggy on the track! RSVPs not required. https://www.springcarnival.org/

Join Children’s School friends for some outdoor fun at **Blue Slide Park** on **Friday, April 28th from 10am-1pm**. This is a NO SCHOOL DAY. Pack your frisbee and a picnic if you wish! Explore the playground and the trails! Blue Slide Park is located in Upper Frick Park, and its entrance is located on Beechwood Blvd, in Squirrel Hill. RSVP to Sarah Hummel (Cecilia, 3s) at shummel1010@gmail.com.

Try these city events this April!

**Earth Day in Frick Park Events:**
- **Earth Day Community Campfire** at Falls Ravine (Lower Frick Park) on April 21st, 6-9pm. Join in for an all-ages campfire to celebrate Earth Day. Campfire and sticks will be provided, just bring your own marshmallows or hotdogs to roast!
- **Walks and Hikes** at Frick Park Environmental Center on April 22nd, Noon-4pm. All ages are welcome to join a series of hikes and activities throughout Frick Park with expert naturalists. Includes nature play throughout the day. [http://www.pittsburghparks.org/earth-day](http://www.pittsburghparks.org/earth-day)


**Ultimate Play Day.** April 30th. 1-4pm. Allegheny Commons East in the Northside. Ultimate Play Day is a celebration of playfulness for people of all ages. Hosted by the Playful Pittsburgh Collaborative. Join in this opportunity to play together and learn of the benefits of play for everyone—from birth to 100. [http://www.playfulpittsburgh.org/ultimate-play-day/](http://www.playfulpittsburgh.org/ultimate-play-day/)
Family Theatre Arts Festival

On Thursday, March 9th, more than 260 Children’s School family members from 72 of our 88 families celebrated our whole school unit at our Family Theatre Arts Festival. Our stars had photos taken on the red carpet, while dressed like the characters in our version of “The Soup Opera”, and in the Tropical Photo Booth. Children had opportunities for face painting and decorating colorful hats to become the characters only they could envision. Many adorned themselves with headbands symbolizing traditional characters and made magic wands to enhance their creative dramatics.
More Theatre Arts Explorations

Families engaged in informal performances throughout the school, re-enacting traditional stories on the Preschool 4’s stage (e.g., The Three Pigs, The Three Billy Goats Gruff, Goldilocks and the Three Bears), inventing puppet shows in the preschool, singing Karaoke songs in the Kindergarten, performing shadow plays in the Make Shop, and dancing the Chinese Lion Dance with Ms. Zhu in the reflection garden. Video clips of the children’s acclaimed classroom theatrics were also available for family viewing (e.g., the Kindergarten’s comedic rendition of “Theseus and the Minotaur”).
Family Spotlight: A Bittersweet Farewell

Hello! We are the Snediker Family - Elijah (4), currently in Mrs. Opferman’s class, Caleb (8), formerly in Mrs Perovich’s class, Alexandra and Daniel, and I would be remiss if I didn’t include our dog, Kolby. Pittsburgh is such a special place for our family. It was where Daniel and I met, got engaged, bought our first home and, after being away for five years, returned to raise our two sons. We are so blessed to have been able to join the Children’s School family in 2014. Caleb had just turned five and joined Mrs. Perovich’s class for the spring semester. He quickly adjusted to the transition from Long Island in no small part because of the nurturing environment. He came to love it here and blossomed during his time. Being part of this community was the perfect transition back to Pittsburgh. Participating in FSO events allowed our family to quickly make new friends and to rediscover Pittsburgh as parents.

Before we knew it, it was Elijah’s turn to head to school. Thank goodness for sibling preference! Ha! He was more than ready, having watched Caleb. I will not forget, as we still have them, the little heart stone given to each child on the first day of Mrs. Tomer’s class. It was so special to be able to participate once again in the Children’s School community, this time at the start of the 3-year old program. It’s been amazing to watch Elijah develop in the magical space that is the Children’s School.

Unfortunately, we will not be able to finish our journey here as new adventures await us. Daniel has accepted a new position as the Director of the Emergency Department at Florida Hospital, Tampa. We are so blessed to have been here these past three years and to have had the opportunity to share it with the Children’s School educators and families. Thank you to all of you. We will miss you!
N4C Conference in Long Beach, CA

From March 23rd to 26th, Mrs. Rosenblum and I attended the annual conference of the National Coalition for Campus Children’s Centers with about 200 educators from campus-based early childhood programs. In our presentation, we shared diverse ways to support experienced educators’ professional development by mentoring less experienced educators, collaborating with peer educators, and sharing the inspiration they gain from interacting with experts in a variety of fields related to learning. We attended presentations on a range of topics, such as the benefits of nature play, strategies for developing children’s executive function skills (i.e., cognitive flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory control), approaches to listening more closely to children, software for helping teachers manage the paperwork parts of their jobs so they can spend more time with children, etc. We visited two full-day programs affiliated with the Long Beach City College and one affiliated with California State University – Long Beach. We shared meals with colleagues from the states of Maine, Washington, Florida, Nevada, Massachusetts, Indiana, etc. Dialogue with such diverse educators over the course of several days provided the opportunity to more deeply reflect on our own practice and consider possibilities for enriching our work with educators, families and children. We also took the opportunity to learn outside our areas of expertise by touring the Aquarium of the Pacific. Did you know that sea otters start turning gray at age 4?

One of the most inspiring aspects of the conference for both of us was the keynote presentation by Jason Kotecki (www.escapeadulthood.com), whose mission is to help adults “break free from the life you’ve been told to live” to “create the life you were made for”, both personally and professionally. In his book *Penguins Can’t Fly + 39 Other Rules that Don’t Exist*, he suggests that, “Following the rules is an excellent way to fit in and avoid being questioned, laughed at, or scorned. But it’s not a particularly effective way of living an amazing story.” See my Director’s Corner for some examples. In *The Escape Plan: A 40-day Plan to Annihilate the Adultitis in Your Life*, he suggests practical, perspective-shifting exercises to help adults focus more of their energy on what matters most. For example, the “Spin Cycle” task is to “take a routine you do every day and put a childlike spin on it” (e.g., writing your shopping list in crayon, having an opposite day with backwards routines, wearing mismatched socks, eating dessert first, etc.) – just to remember that all of our routines are invented and could have been constructed a different way. The “Memory Maker” task is to “create a memory with someone you care about that will mean a lot ten years from now” – as a way of breaking stride and more intentionally choosing how to spend our time. The goal, he says, is to build a portfolio of an awesome life. The question of what to include in the portfolio resonates with me this spring as I help my parents sort generations of documents, photos, and mementos from relatives back to 1870. What most interests my generation are items that help us understand who each ancestor was as a person, because both the distinctive traits and the similarities across generations help us better understand how we each became who we are. For example, I learned that my grandfather, who I never knew, had the same work ethic and sense of humor as my father, which was passed to me, and that my grandfather’s mother was a revered and somewhat rebellious educator. Learning my history inspires me to share my unique narrative with my granddaughter.
Undergraduate Spotlight

Perhaps you wonder *What's Next?* for the undergraduates who have taken all the courses connected with the Children’s School and want to delve even deeper into the field of early childhood development and education. They’ve conducted observations here as part of the *Principles of Child Development* course, worked as interns in our classrooms via the *Practicum in Child Development* course, and learned to conduct formal research with young children as part of their *Developmental Research Methods* course. Here are some of the unique academic experiences these students have chosen for the final year of their undergraduate degree programs.

- **Lisa Murphy**, who plans to be an early childhood special educator, is interning one full day per week at the Environmental Charter School. She supported the 1st grade educators by designing a Peace Corner to promote mindfulness, relaxation, and conflict resolution, while herself learning how to work in an inclusive classroom and plan lessons for students with widely varying skill levels.

- **Lilah Buchanan**, who is heading for a career in social work, is doing an independent study to investigate strengths-based models for supporting parenting, particularly for those parents most at risk for struggle based on their levels of education, economics, etc. As part of her project, Lilah has observed parent education events at the Children’s School and Angels’ Place.

- **Aubry Brown**, who wants to become a Veterinarian, is interning on weekends at the Animal Rescue League’s Wildlife Center and, in addition to gaining valuable animal care experience, plans to develop educational materials for the public on treatment of wild animals.

- **Caroline Santilli** is conducting a capstone project for her Bachelor of Humanities and Arts degree to show how her psychology and art interests can be integrated. She has been doing literature research, interviews with art educators, and site visits to art programs designed for typically and atypically developing children and plans to synthesize what she’s learned by creating a web site that will be useful to art educators interested in better meeting the needs of children with special needs.

Alumni Profile

- **Stanton Man:** In 2016, I graduated from Carnegie Mellon with a B.S. in Decision Science, with a focus on quantitative decision making and market research. I worked at the Children’s School as a work study and loved every moment of it. I’m currently working in Philadelphia for Accenture’s Digital practice, where I specialize in Marketing and Customer Analytics. I also occasionally volunteer at the local Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) School, where I help high school students with their resumes and interview skills to better prepare them for their future endeavors. I am extremely thankful to the Children’s School educators for always providing a place of comfort, positivity, and goldfish during my time at CMU.
Research Spotlight

The iPad Game

Literacy skills are closely linked to a child’s earliest experiences with books and stories and, with the increasing use of electronic books accessible through computers, apps, and tablets, researchers investigating whether the addition of interactive features in an e-book can support children’s understanding of the story. In collaboration with Dr. Erik Thiessen, Psychology 1st year graduate student Cassie Eng is studying the impact of animations triggered by children’s story relevant vocalizations during digital story reading.

In The iPad Game, a researcher reads each child two stories on an iPad, Cat’s Pajamas (Hurd, 2000) and Zoom City (Hurd, 1998). One iPad story is static like traditional electronic books (e-books), and the other iPad story is interactive, i.e., the pictures animate whenever the child vocalizes a word that is in the story. The researchers hypothesize that children will be better able to answer comprehension questions for the animated story than the traditional one. Their results have the potential to inform the design of digital books designed for novice readers.

The Matching Game

As a follow up study to The iPad Game, the same research team is testing children’s development of sight word vocabulary in The Matching Game. The researcher shows each child four pictures, like the ones to the right, and asks the child to point to the picture that best matches a spoken word. This assessment is the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test and will enable the researchers to correlate the children’s performance on The iPad Game with their vocabulary level to determine whether the animations are especially useful for children with particular levels of vocabulary skill. So far, Cassie is not finding enough variance in the Children’s School data to test her hypothesis, however, because most of the children are scoring in the 99th percentile for vocabulary knowledge, which is well above their age level! With a group that has a broader vocabulary range, the researchers theorize that having animations in the interactive iPad book that are congruent with the text (e.g., if a child says “cars” only the cars animate; if a child says “moon” only the moon in the sky animates) will foster children’s ability to connect words to relevant representations.
Director’s Corner: Parents-as-Playwrights

This spring, I have compared parenting to theatre directing and set design, claiming that parents define the vision for their children’s developmental outcomes and design the atmosphere of their home to set the overall mood for the family and tone for their interactions. This month, I consider the role of “Playwright”. How is being a parent like being a playwright? According to the American Association of Community Theatre (https://www.aact.org/playwright), “Playwrights create scripts … [they] tell stories through the words and actions of characters”. Similarly, based on the stories of their own childhoods, parents craft the narrative of the family’s life together, which will then become the initial chapters for each child’s life story.

The AACT describes a playwright’s “toolkit” as including “a vivid imagination, a gripping story to tell, insight into what makes people tick, etc. These same tools are essential for parents because we rarely get to choose all of the characters, plot elements, and settings that may be central to the final production. Extroverted parents who have chosen a lifestyle with highly public elements may bear an introverted child and have to creatively construct a revised narrative so that the child can blossom. The planned family vacation to visit the great grandparents may have a twist in the plot when one of them lands in the hospital, which may then require amending the planned setting, activities, etc.

Such imagination and insight are essential to Parents-as-Playwrights, because the family’s story is the heart of the matter, the core messages of who we are in this world, as a unique and cohesive family composed of exceptional individuals. Just as a play cannot become a blockbuster by repeating what others have done or blindly following convention, families willing to write their own original narratives are most likely to construct family scripts with language, routines, expectations, and rules that best fit parents and children alike.

As mentioned in my article on the recent N4C Conference, Jason Kotecki, artist, motivational speaker, and father of three children ranging in age from 3 to 8, cautioned us to beware of following rules that don’t actually exist. Maybe some of these will resonate with you.

“Thou shalt act thine age.”
“Thou shalt color inside the lines.”
“Thou shalt not jump in puddles.”
“Thou shalt always be careful.”
“Thou shalt not make a mess.”
“Thine offspring shalt be in a million extracurricular activities.”

Recently, I heard myself asking my granddaughter whether she wanted one ponytail on top or two pigtails. “I want seven pigtails,” she said with joy. After just a moment’s panicked hesitation, I said, “Why not? Let’s see how many we can do before it’s time to leave for the zoo.” We can all enrich our family scripts when we share in what playwrights call “collective creation” with the actors.

Just like directors striving to craft a sensational production and set designers seeking “creative possibilities for movement”, playwrights can most effectively tell a compelling story by imaginatively and artistically weaving elements to bring their stories to life in the theatre. Each day on the family stage, there is a story in the making, with a plot that twists and turns through life’s ups and downs. We look forward to hearing your story and supporting your playwriting along the way.