Transitions Abound!!

The Children’s School family welcomes Jackson Robert, son of Educational Administrator Annie Smith and her husband Danny. Jackson was born on Saturday, April 24th at 10:34 am, weighing 7 pounds 2 ounces and measuring 19.75 inches. Congratulations to the Smith family! Mrs. Smith will be on maternity leave for the remainder of this school year but will return half time beginning in August to focus on administration. Mrs. Caitlin Armbruster is now working full time as the Kindergarten Assistant Teacher, and she plans to continue that schedule for the next school year as well.

We are sad to announce that Ms. Pharlan Rock will be leaving the Children’s School at the end of May so that she can pursue her Master’s Degree at Duquesne University at a more aggressive pace that will enable her to finish by the end of the fall semester 2010. Ms. Rock will also be marrying Faran Ives on June 19th in Miami, Florida. The couple will honeymoon there and then return to their home on Pittsburgh’s North Side.

We are fortunate that Ms. Jillian Mangan will fill Ms. Rock’s teaching role for the upcoming school year, and we will hire a new assistant teacher.

Year-End Celebrations

The 2010 Kindergarten Class will graduate on Friday, May 21, 2010 at 10:00AM. Kindergarten families will receive an invitation soon, so keep your eyes open!

Following the Kindergarten Graduation, ALL Children’s School Families are invited to celebrate our wonderful school year by joining us for a picnic celebration from 11:00AM to 1:00PM on our playground. Please join us for a lunch of pizza and salad and fun outdoor activities. We’ll move the fun indoors if the weather does not cooperate. More information to follow!

May Dates

Friday, May 14th - NO SCHOOL - Whole Staff attends the PAEYC Conference
Thursday, May 20th – Last Regular Day for ALL Programs
        Friday, May 21st - Kindergarten Graduation at 10:00 AM
                           Whole School Picnic at 11:00 AM on the Playground
Family Committee News

• The Library Committee has continued to keep our books well organized. We appreciate your time and effort!
• Thanks to Aparna Brown for planning Children’s Festival outings!
• The Whole School Picnic Committee needs adults to help with either set-up or clean-up. If you are available to help on Friday, May 21st, please contact Maggie Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu.

Please Return Your Gate Cards

If your child is not returning to the Children’s School next year, please return your two gate cards to Ms. Drash in the main office on your child's last day of school or camp. Thank you!

Lost & Found

Please visit the office to check the lost and found for any items you may be missing. Any items not claimed will be donated to the Women’s Shelter this summer.

Camp News

Limited space is still available for all 4 weeks of Camp: Plants & Dirt. Please inquire in the Main Office for more information or send an email to ed-admin@andrew.cmu.edu. Any balance due on your child’s camp tuition is due by May 17, 2010.

Week of the Young Child:
Picnic with the Cyert Center

This year, to celebrate the Week of the Young Child (April 11 -17), the Children’s School joined Carnegie Mellon University’s Cyert Center for Early Education on April 12th for a collaborative picnic on “The Cut”. The morning and afternoon preschools and the kindergarten all joined the Cyert Center friends for snacks of teddy grahams, homemade muffins, juice boxes, and water. We danced and sang to CDs, blew bubbles, tossed beanbags, played jump rope and parachute games with Ms. McMichael, and listened to a Cyert Center dad play his didgeridoo. We had so much fun that we are planning to make this picnic an annual event!
Research, Practice & Policy

Milena Nigam, mother of Simon, joined the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development (OCD) almost a year ago. She works both in the Division of Applied Research and Evaluation, as a Research Projects Manager, and in the Division of Policy Initiatives. She is thrilled to apply her Masters degree from the Carnegie Mellon Psychology Department toward OCD’s vision of helping all children, youth, and families to develop in safe and supportive environments and achieve their life potential.

OCD works to improve the lives of children and families by conducting a variety of multidisciplinary, community-driven, responsive, collaborative projects that turn knowledge into action. Many of OCD’s projects involve four basic functions:

- **Analyzing** information from research and professional practice
- **Innovating** with service demonstrations and applied research
- **Learning** and improving through monitoring and evaluation
- **Changing** practice and policy based on knowledge

These functions are demonstrated through OCD’s projects and services, which span the periods of infancy, early childhood, school-age and youth, and parenting. OCD operates the local Early Head Start program and several Allegheny County Family Support Centers. In May, OCD, through Allegheny County Family Support, is partnering with the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC) and the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts to host a conference entitled, *Creativity: Where the Future Begins*. The Children’s School will be closed on Friday, May 14th so that all of the staff can attend the conference. Seven Children’s School teachers and administrators will be presenting at this conference, along with other early childhood experts.

Other OCD projects include strengthening kindergarten readiness and transition to school, working with juvenile justice providers to improve the quality of their interventions for court-involved youth, and improving complementary learning opportunities for Pittsburgh’s children through partnering with Pittsburgh Public Schools and local afterschool providers. In addition, OCD is participating in a national and statewide effort to recruit local business leaders to become advocates for public investments in quality early childhood programs, primarily those programs that serve children from under-resourced areas.

On the international front, OCD has conducted interventions in Russian orphanages (and recently begun the process in China) to improve care through (1) promoting more warm, sensitive, and responsive care giving, and (2) making structural changes to promote positive relationships between children and caregivers, predominantly to increase the consistency of caregivers in children’s lives.

Finally, in a project that should be of particular interest to Children’s School families, OCD is working with Family Communications, Inc. and a small group of Children’s School parents to explore ways to promote effort and resiliency in young children at home. We hope to be able to share some of our findings in a subsequent newsletter, most likely next fall.
What’s New at the Theatre?

Pittsburgh Musical Theater presents Annie
~ Thursday, May 6 - Sunday, May 16 ~ Byham Theater ~
For tickets visit www.pgharts.org.
Children’s School alumna Emma Perelman stars as Annie, and several other alums are in the cast!!

2010 Pittsburgh International Children’s Festival
~ May 12-16, 2010 ~ Various Times and Locations ~
For tickets visit www.pgharts.org or call 412-456-6666.

Bathtime ~ Pitt University Studio Theater
Join Mrs. Firebell and her precious piglet for bathtime. After a day fighting forest fires, extinguishing a dragon, and saving piglets, Mrs. Fireball and her piglet discuss the day’s excitement and challenges - both big and small.

Droplets ~ Pitt University Theater
This adventurous tale transports audiences from the Western world to Africa in search of water. Sometimes, water will flow in abundance. In other places, water will need to be gathered drop by drop. In all corners of the world, water is an essential resource to be valued and loved.

Mapapa Acrobats ~ Bellefield Hall
The Mapapa Acrobats, from the heart of Africa, will limbo beneath rods of fire, tumble, contort, dance, juggle, chair-balance, and more, all to native African music.

The Man Who Planted Trees ~ Bellefield Hall
This unique blend of comedy and puppetry tells the inspiring tale of a French shepherd who recognized the destruction of our environment, decided not to ignore it, and set out on a mission “to put things right” by planting a forest to transform a barren wasteland.

Zany Umbrella Circus ~ The Charity Randall Theater
An Italian circus artist dreams of the big, the impossible, and the ridiculous, believing that he can be the first to train none other than an elephant to walk on a tight wire.

Aga – Boom ~ The Charity Randall Theater (Starts Thursday May 13)
This lovable trio extracts endless delight from everyday items, a towering punch-away paper wall and even some brave audience members. Aga-Boom breaks down barriers with the best traditions of circus arts, physical comedy and European avant-garde.

Orchard Hill Performing Arts Company Presents a Summer Series of Musicals
~ Apple Hill Playhouse (Delmont) ~ All shows start at 11AM ~
For more information or for tickets call 724-486-5050 or email boxoffice@applehillplayhouse.org

• Remus Tales ~ June 15, 17, 18, 22, 24, 25
• OH, JACK! ~ July 6, 8, 9, 13, 15, 16
  A version of Jack and the Beanstalk written by Pittsburgh native Richard Kinter!
• Charlotte’s Web ~ July 20, 22, 23, 27, 29, 30
• The Tale of the Frog Prince ~ August 3, 5, 6, 10, 12, 13
  The Kindergarten Children performed this story during our theatre unit!
Research Spotlight

Strategies for Learning English as a Second Language

HJ Helen Kim, a senior who studies psychology and music, is working with Dr. Carver’s guidance on an independent study about young children who are learning English as a second language. The study is personally meaningful to Helen because she learned English as an ESL student in Kenya, Wisconsin and then Northern Michigan. Knowing that each unique educational context, instructional methods, teachers, expectations, and opportunities shaped her as the learner that she is today, Helen thought it would be interesting to observe and track the learning paths of children at the Children’s School as they learn English as their second language. She began observing in the beginning of September, but more serious observations started in January. Below, Helen summarizes her observations.

Many children started with the “one word strategy.” This strategy is useful in learning the labels of the objects. It is also effective when a child wants to communicate intent. Some example words are “No”, “Yes”, and “Here.” When reading a book together, children would often point with their fingers to various pictures, ask for the names, and immediately practice the new words by repeating the language model. In educational psychology, this strategy is called “labeling” and “rehearsal.” As the year progressed, children started using key phrases such as “I like …”, “I don’t like …”, “<object>, please”, and “It’s mine.” Last month, one child told me, “I like cupcake. I like cake. I like blueberries. I like chocolate. I don’t like pig.” Through this strategy, children get ample and consistent practice in speaking English, and they also effectively communicate across various situations. Catch phrases are also used a lot during snack time. Without much difficulty, children simply use the phrase, “(food), please” to request more snack. When children engage in simple interactive play, they sometimes comment to the play partner, “It’s mine!” or “Look, (name of the other child)”.

Children had diverse learning trajectories. I noticed that most children selected their “safe haven” (e.g. arts center, playdoh table or lego area) and observed without any direct contact with others. They learned about the class routines and the environment during this “safe haven” phase. Once they felt comfortable with the environment, routines, teachers, and just the fact of being with others, children branched out to take part in various parallel or simple interactive play. At this point, the ESL children were both emotionally and cognitively more able to closely observe other children’s actions, as well as language usage in the classroom. Once they started exploring more, the frequency of interaction, verbalization, and active participation increased dramatically. All ESL children eventually arrived at a similar proficiency level, regardless of strategies and learning trajectories. At this point, all of them have friends with whom they closely interact. They are also expanding their vocabulary and refining communicative language.

Most of the observations were conducted in the three-year-old classes, but I was able to observe four-year-old ESL children on a regular basis as well. I noticed that some four-year-old children comprehended the content material in their first language (although it was taught in English!), and then translated back to English to complete activities. I also had an opportunity to have short individual conversations with ESL Kindergarteners. The most common response to my question,
Strategies for Learning continued …

“What was most helpful to you when you were first learning English?” was their parents reading books to them in both English, as well as in their first languages. They all said that learning English was “pretty hard” but that it wasn’t hard to make new friends.

One strategy that the teachers use most often to help children’s English learning is combining physical cues and visuals along with verbal language to aid comprehension. This approach seemed to be very effective in directing children’s attention to the relevant subject, helping children to encode new words, and thus communicating important information. Teachers acknowledged and appreciated the individual differences in children’s learning. I noticed many adjustments that the teachers made to appropriately support each child’s unique needs. In my survey of the teachers, many commented that teaching is the most meaningful when children are empowered by what they have learned at school, when they are having fun learning, and when they are finally “getting it.” Thanks to the maximal support and love from the teachers, as well as carefully-constructed learning environments and activities, children learn not only the new language, but also establish important foundations for life such as friendship, trust, responsibility, cooperation, confidence, and the joy of learning.

NOTE: Helen will be graduating from Carnegie Mellon in May and begin an Early Childhood Education masters program at Columbia University in the fall.

The Number Game

Yan Mu, a graduate student working with Dr. Robert Siegler, is exploring how children develop their understanding of numbers in the preschool years. Each child participates in a brief session to complete simple tasks involving:
1) verbal counting: children count from 1 and go up freely in one minute;
2) single digit number computation: children answer addition questions presented as short stories;
3) number line estimation: children estimate the position of several numbers on a number line;
4) evaluation of counting: children see a puppet count objects and evaluate the puppet’s behavior;
5) number conservation: children make judgments about the quantity of objects in an array before and after spatial transformation of that array.

Yan’s project also involves collecting information about children’s daily experience with numbers both at school and at home. Hence, there will be audio recording and observation of children’s classroom activities and a questionnaire for parents. Watch for the questionnaire in your child’s backpack soon!

Web Artists

Kindergarten Friends: Ryan H., Oscar L., Neely N.,
                      Julia K., Ari D.

4’s Friends: Everyone has had turns already!

3’s Friends: Peter M., Jonas C., Andrew G., Anna H.,
             Ian Z., Sydney S., Jake B.
Research Spotlight continued …

The Writing Game

Sara Pelikan, Alyssa Miller, Caitlin Hughes and Samantha Schreiber are working with Dr. Cynthia Puranik, from the University of Pittsburgh, to investigate how preschool children develop writing skills. The first half of the task includes showing children pictures and asking them questions about their knowledge of print. For example, they will be shown the pictures to the left and asked, “Which one says “Oreo”?

Or they will be shown letters and asked, “Which one is D?”

The second half of the task includes asking children to do some writing, such as writing their names, writing their friends’ names or describing a picture. Additionally, children are asked to communicate through spontaneous writing. Children are given a blank piece of paper and pencil and asked to write a letter to a loved one or to invite a friend to their birthday party. The researchers understand that the younger children might not be able to write conventionally. Just as children do not begin to talk by speaking in complex utterances, or decode by reading a novel, children do not begin writing in complete sentences. Similar to how children learn to speak or read, writing skill progresses in stages. Before writing conventionally, children scribble to convey meaning through print; however, these scribbles or early writings are not random. These scribbles contain certain features that reflect children’s understanding of written language. The researchers are interested in studying these features in young children’s writing. This study will help identify the importance of these early writing skills and may lead to the development of strategies that parents and teachers could use both to identify children who may be exhibiting signs of risk for later educational problems and to identify areas and strategies to promote the development of important early literacy skills.

Children’s Responses To Research

Many prospective parents ask how our children feel about their participation in developmental psychology research projects. Most of the children eagerly volunteer to play the games and speak favorably about them upon return to the classroom. Recently, we learned that three-year-old Simon Moak enjoys the researchers’ “special games” so much that he collects his participation stickers on his bed. What a great idea, Simon!
Undergraduate Spotlight: Thank You !!

Thank you to ALL of the undergraduate helpers who have been working in our classrooms this year! We appreciate all your help and support, and we hope you have benefited from positive learning experiences! It has been a pleasure working with you this year, and we wish you the best of luck in your future endeavors.

We are happy to welcome Katie Held back to our team this summer as a Summer Intern for our May classes and June camp. Katie will also be with us in July and August, as we get ready for the new school year. Katie was a Student Teacher in the Green Room at the beginning of this semester. Katie is a recent graduate of Carlow University with her undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Education.

Director’s Corner: Summer Learning

Though the school year is ending, opportunities for children to learn and parents to facilitate development are plentiful, particularly in the summer months. Here are a few ideas to help you think about simple ways to promote children’s growth in each of the key domains of development.

Self-Esteem and Independence

• Since the pace of summer is typically slower, allow time for children to do as much as possible for themselves (e.g., eating and cleaning up, washing, dressing, and packing a backpack). The resulting increase in independence will promote self-esteem AND help prepare the child for new responsibilities at school next year.
• Sharing ideas provides an opportunity for children to discover the value of their contributions. Allow time for leisurely conversation while sipping lemonade or taking a walk. Invite the child to suggest activities for the day, ways to celebrate a special event, or items to pack for a picnic lunch.

Interaction and Cooperation

• Summer often brings more time with extended family and friends, which encourages important social interactions. The longer days and special activities, on the other hand, often change sleep schedules and other important routines. While it is important to learn flexibility, you’ll find that children are best able to cope with the necessary changes when they get enough rest and enjoy the comfort of consistency. Your efforts in this area will make all of the suggestions below more successful.
• Interacting with siblings, cousins, playground partners, etc. all provide opportunities to practice taking other perspectives and negotiating. These valuable skills can be learned best when adults help children to think in advance about situations that might arise. Anticipating another child’s interests, planning to choose one activity the child likes and one the peer likes, and considering ways to handle a sibling’s refusal all help the child respond more appropriately when the time comes.
Director’s Corner continued …

Communication

• Extra car time during summer travel is wonderful for word games and songs. Remember that oral communication is the foundation for written communication.
• Read a book. Read it again. Consider alternate endings. Write and illustrate your own version.
• Print photos from family outings and travel so that the children can make a summer photo journal with the child choosing the photos and dictating or writing the captions themselves.
• Preparing postcards for family and friends is another great way to promote meaningful writing skills.

Discovery and Exploration

• Ask questions that promote thinking about how and why things happen the way they do. Use “I wonder …” and respond to questions with “What do you think?” The local library is a wonderful source of children’s non-fiction books for help in discovering answers.
• Choose a sunny space at home for observations and collections. Grow a plant, collect pebbles, or keep a pet bug for a while. It’s helpful to have a magnifying glass, trays for sorting, and a clipboard with paper and markers for recording observations.

Physical Capabilities

• Many of the ideas listed above include fine and gross motor practice.
• Helping with family chores both indoors and outdoors can also strengthen physical skills (as well as independence, which fosters self-esteem). Invite children to help with the gardening, laundry, table setting, dishes, etc.
• Remember that children need to practice every skill repeatedly to develop effective coordination and build strength. Creating an obstacle course and developing “carnival” games are fun ways to encourage repetition.

Artistic Expression and Appreciation

• Notice and draw attention to art EVERYWHERE! The shapes and patterns in nature offer intricate examples. Designs on posters, buildings, bridges, etc. can inspire children’s own creations. Notice sounds and movements as well, since they are part of music, dance, and drama.
• Provide a variety of open-ended materials for art, dramatic play, creative movement, and exploration of sound. Collage materials in an “invention box” with lots of glue can yield hours of fun. Simple scarves or pieces of interesting cloth can become a hundred costumes or parts of interesting forts.

Best wishes for a safe and relaxing summer! We encourage you to share your experiences with us via postcards, journals, photos, etc. and look forward to welcoming many of you back in the fall. For those of you making transitions to other schools, good luck and please keep in touch.

You’ll always be part of the Children’s School family!
Teacher Appreciation Week ~ May 3rd to 7th

Forever In Your Heart

Although you're not their parent,
You care for them each day.
You cuddle, sing and read to them,
And watch them as they play.
You see each new accomplishment.
You help them grow and learn.
You understand their language,
You listen with concern.
They come to you for comfort,
And you kiss away their tears.
They proudly show their work to you.
You give the loudest cheers!
No, you are not their parents,
But your role is just as strong.
You nurture them and keep them safe.
Though maybe not for long-
You know someday the time may come,
When you will have to part.
But you know each child you cared for,
Is forever in your heart!
~ Author Unknown

Please join us in thanking teachers everywhere for devoting their time, talents, and energy to cultivating our most precious resource – our children!

As we celebrate Teacher Appreciation Week and reflect on the impact of teachers in our lives, let's also reflect on our Children’s School experience during the past year. Enclosed with this newsletter is an open-ended evaluation form asking you to share your perspective on our program, including our current progress and possibilities for the future. Please take the opportunity to provide your honest input so that we can best plan our improvement efforts for the coming year. We appreciate the many parents who have already taken the time this year to share their feedback with us personally. Together, we create an exceptional environment in which we all can grow and learn!!