

Carnegie Mellon University Children's School

November 2012 Family Newsletter



Fall Open House Events

Blocks & books, drilling and dabbing, markers & mirrors, playdough & puzzles, sand & more sand, wonders & worms. On October 10th and 17th, our children shared these learning experiences and many more with their families. Siblings, parents, cousins, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and friends shared the children's excitement as they confidently demonstrated our favorite routines and activities.



Thanks for taking the time to engage in the experience with us! Remember that you can learn about the children's daily activities by reading the email or web message that their teachers send electronically each day. Talking about the day's highlights helps the children reflect on their learning and affords families the chance to enhance and extend it.

November / December Dates:

Sunday, November 4th – Daylight Savings Time Ends – Turn Clocks BACK One Hour

Friday Afternoon, November 9th - Parent Teacher Conferences for 4's and K
Regular School Schedule in the Morning

Shopping Night at Ten Thousand Villages – 6-8pm Thursday, November 15th
Raising 10% of Sales for our Scholarship Fund

NO SCHOOL – Friday, November 16th – Parent Teacher Conferences for All Ages

No School for Children – November 21st through 25th – **Happy Thanksgiving!!**

Friday Afternoon, November 30th - Parent Teacher Conferences for 3's
Regular School Schedule in the Morning

Tuesday, December 4th – Extended Morning 4's Open House 12-1pm

Thursday, December 6th – Extended Morning 3's Open House 12-1pm

Children Sharing their School with Families



Family Social Organization

The FSO organized a visit to **Reilly's Summer Seat Farms** on October 19th. Over 70 people attended the event from our school! The families got to take a hayride, pick pumpkins, feed corn to animals (a favorite!), and many other fun activities on a gorgeous fall day. The FSO is so grateful for the amazing participation. It's wonderful to make new friendships in our great Children's School community.



The FSO has a full slate of events being planned. Please consistently check your email for event announcements, as well as reading the newsletter each month.

Here are some dates to save:

- Saturday, December 1st at 3:30pm - "Beauty and the Beast" at the Gemini Theater (tickets \$11/ each; contact Jessica at jessicachristiemorowitz@gmail.com). Note that we'll be offered a private tour of the theater following the show. Please send your exact change or a check made out to Gemini Theater to school with your child by Tuesday, November 27 so we can give the theater an accurate count. Please indicate the number of adults and children on the envelope and address it to Jessica Morowitz. Tickets will be handed out starting at 3 p.m. on the day of the show at Gemini. We have an entire section of the theater so we can sit together.
- Sunday, January 27th - Party at Gymkhana (admission will be about \$10 / child; we have rented the gym for our group only! This event was a big hit last year!)

Plans that are still in the works:

- Winter - a night out for grown ups!
- February - maybe a cooking class for the children or a visit to **Be A Paint Monkey** in Lawrenceville or **Assemble** in Garfield
- March – "Bubble Time" at the Pittsburgh International Children's Theater
- May - Pittsburgh International Children's Festival

If you have any questions or want to help with the Family Social Organization, please contact Beth Lott at elisabeth.lott@gmail.com or 412-243-2626.

Food Drive & Cans Around the Playground

From now to November 9th, we are participating in the University's collection of non-perishable food items to benefit the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. Since the timing of the university's "Cans Across the Cut" does not fit our schedule this year, the Children's School will hold its own "**Cans Around the Playground**" on Thursday, November 8th. Please consider contributing non-perishable food items so we can see if we can gather enough items to circle the playground on our bike path. The Food Drive will also accept cash or checks made payable to the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank.



Ten Thousand Villages Shopping Night



TEN THOUSAND
VILLAGES®

Shop at Ten Thousand Villages on Thursday, November 15th from 6-8 pm, and a percentage of your purchase will be donated towards our Scholarship Fund.

Your Holiday gifts can give three times, to the recipient, the artisan, and families who need financial support so their children can attend the CMU Children's School! Visit <http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/home.php> to learn more about this multicultural, fair trade store located on Forbes Avenue in Squirrel Hill.

Barnes & Noble Book Fair

On December 1st, the Children's School will be hosting a book fair at the Barnes and Noble Bookstore at the Waterfront from 12 noon until 3 pm. Mrs. Bird and her brother, Ken Thompson, will be providing musical entertainment and there will be craft activities available. Families, grandparents and other friends of the Children's School will have the opportunity to support the school by shopping that day or for a week on-line. We will receive Barnes & Noble gift cards totaling 15% of purchases up to \$2,000 and 20% of purchases from \$2,000 through \$10,000.

There will be a Book Fair Committee Meeting on November 2nd at 9 am in the school office, and we would welcome any volunteers! Even if you cannot attend the meeting, there will be opportunities to help at the event. Further information will be sent shortly by e-mail!

International Student Hosting Opportunity

In late January, the Children's School will be hosting 4 undergraduate students from Duksung Women's University in Seoul, South Korea for an International Practicum Program. All of the women are studying Early Childhood Education, and they will be in Pittsburgh with 12 other students and one professor. All of the students will observe and assist in early childhood classrooms at either our school, Falk, Carlow, or Pitt's University Child Development Center, as well as participate in workshops specially planned for them, visit some Pittsburgh cultural attractions geared for young children, etc.



We are recruiting two families who live close to the university to provide **housing and some meals** for the practicum students from Sunday, January 20th through Sunday, February 3rd, both to reduce the cost of their practicum experience and to provide an opportunity for them to experience family life in Pittsburgh. Proximity to CMU is essential so that the students can use public transport or rides from teachers to get to and from school. Please contact Dr. Carver at sc0e@andrew.cmu.edu if you are interested in this hosting opportunity. We invite all families to be involved in this international practicum and to share ideas for strengthening the experience for families and children.

Fall Parent / Teacher Conferences

The fall conferences are great opportunities for the teacher and parents to discuss their views of each child's development. This year, parent conferences are being conducted primarily on Friday afternoon, November 9th (4's and K), Friday, November 16th (all ages), and Friday afternoon, November 30th (3's). Specific schedules are included with this newsletter. Please remember to call Ms. Drash to reserve your particular conference time.

At the Children's School, our conferences are structured by the developmental objectives that are the focus of our program design. For the fall conference, teachers of three year olds will emphasize the first three domains of development and teachers of four year olds will emphasize four, while kindergarten teachers will cover all six domains. The primary reason for this difference in emphasis is that the preschoolers are in school for less than half as much time as the kindergartners and typically require a longer period of adjustment to the school environment and routine.

- **Self-Esteem and Independence**
- **Interaction and Cooperation**
- **Communication**
- **Physical Capabilities / Health & Safety**
- **Discovery and Exploration**
- **Artistic Expression and Appreciation**

We encourage parents to prepare for their child(ren)'s conference(s) by considering the progress they have noted, particularly in the context of family discussions of the daily classroom emails or web page updates. One strategy is to identify one adjective to describe your child in each of the areas that will be discussed. Another is to recall one prototypical anecdote for each category. A third is to consider the school activities and events related to each area that your child has discussed with you. Finally, you might specify one goal related to each domain that you would like to see your child achieve during the next six months. For the first time this year, we have invited you to also share your view of your child's development by completing two Ages & Stages Questionnaires, so this input may also guide your conference discussion. Sharing your views with your child(ren)'s teacher(s) facilitates productive dialogue about the ways that your child is progressing in both home and school environments. It's always interesting to see the parallels that exist between the two contexts, as well as the distinct differences that are often evident.

The conference dialogue will help parents to choose the next school for their child so that its program will best match the child and family. We have brochures and flyers for many local schools in the office. We have also posted Open House information for other schools on a bulletin board outside the office. In addition to the conference opportunity, Dr. Carver is available to discuss any questions or concerns you have about your child's development or about our program. We are privileged that you have entrusted your children to us and look forward to continued partnership in their education.

Recommendations for Elementary Schools

Many families are working on school applications for next year. If any require a recommendation from the Children's School, please obtain a Request for Release of Student Records form from Miss Hancock (lh37@andrew.cmu.edu or 412-268-2198). Please send the completed form along with your request to Miss Hancock. Depending on the timing, we will either send your child's Fall conference report to the school(s) of your choice or prepare an updated version in January.

School Choices Discussion

If you missed the October 12th **Staff / Parent Discussion on Making School Choices**, you can find the handouts on the Children's School web site in the "For Parents" section. Remember to **Focus on the MATCH** between your child, your family, and the school rather than seeking an absolute best choice (i.e., one school that's best for all children in all families). **Take a BROAD, LONG-TERM VIEW** including your priorities for future years' programs as well as other children in the family so that you can avoid multiple school changes and placements of siblings in too many different schools.

Perhaps you wondered ...

... whether all children write letters or read numbers backwards or whether it's a sign of dyslexia, etc.

The simple answer is that it's typical. Basically, until children encounter letters and numerals, the orientation of an object is not a factor in its name. A dog is a dog no matter which way it's facing or whether you view it from the right or left or above or below. So, children are not used to encoding the orientation and using that information to decide what to call something.

All of a sudden, with letters and numerals, orientation matters, sequence matters, and position on the page matters, etc. Partly, children have to be told that these things matter, and they have to have the short-term memory capacity to store all the information at one time. Usually, adults are good at telling them what matters, but we have to be patient until they mature enough to hold that much information in memory at once. With lower case letters, p, d, q, and b are the worst because they're all basically a circle and a line but in all the possible orientations relative to each other. Sigh.



It's not unusual for us to see some of these issues in kindergarten and 1st grade. By age 7, there should be enough memory capacity to handle them, which is why challenges such as dyslexia aren't typically diagnosed until that time. Because we know the errors are common and that maturity is the main factor in remedying them, we do not make a big deal about correcting them. Instead, we want to encourage the children to do as much beginning writing and reading as they can, and we don't want our corrections to discourage their efforts. That being said, there are a few strategies that adults can use to help children work from left to right, top to bottom. For example, you may see teachers use a green dot on the left and a red dot on the right, so they tell the children to start at the green dot. With reading, we'll often use a finger to cue where to start since we don't want to write in the book.

14 vs. 41

Number errors like saying fourteen when you see 41 are an artifact of English and rarely happen in languages that label their numbers in ways that make more sense (like ten one for 11 and ten two for 12).

Whoever invented the English number system did children a disservice by putting the four first in fourteen, just like forty-one, so the number names are actually backwards in the teens. For that reason, the research shows that essentially all English speaking children make teen errors into elementary school and few whose languages use a consistent numbering system ever make them.

Family Spotlight:

The Simcox family has been involved with The Children's School since 2002, when Jessica was an Assistant Teacher in the Preschool 3's Program. She was attending Chatham University to earn her Master's in Early Childhood and Elementary Education, and she found her full-time work at The Children's School a valuable addition to her graduate classes. It was the foundation for every teaching experience she has had since then, laying



framework for so many classrooms full of positive interactions with children, and even now at The Open Door Youth Center where she coordinates an Afterschool Program for city school children. It's hard to believe that now the time has come for our own children to be in a school setting, and we couldn't be happier that Henry is in the Green Room with the same teachers who were such an important part of Jessica's early teaching career. It feels like we never left!

Adam, a nurse at Magee Women's Hospital, and Jessica Simcox reside in the West End of Pittsburgh, where they are raising Henry (4) and Campbell (2).



Collecting Used Books & Magazines

Please help us collect used books and magazines for Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh's "adopt a book" program. The program allows all patients and their family members to keep any magazine or book that has been donated to the library. Please pull your name and address information off of the donated magazines. The program encourages magazines that are not more than one year old. Any books - for adults or children of any age - are welcome.



Bring your magazines and books beginning on December 1st to the Children's School office. Donations will be accepted until Thursday, December 20th, the last day of the fall semester. If you have any questions, please contact Jessica Morowitz at jessicachristiemorowitz@gmail.com or (312) 351-3617. Many thanks in advance for your assistance!

November Web Artists

3's Friends: Simone B., Lola F., Tripp F., Basil K., and Sally T.

4's Friends: Mae B., Woojin C., Hugo M., Lizzy N., and Chase W.

Kindergarten Friends: Noah H., Giovanni Mc-C., and Liam S.



Undergraduate Spotlight: Chris Conte

This is my first semester working at the Children's School, and I am very grateful to work with so many kind people and great children. On my second day, I was standing on the playground when Mrs. Rosenblum suggested, "Go play with the children". That statement summarizes the work I do. At first, I was a little too shy to approach the friends, but, little by little, I have really enjoyed getting to know them. Despite what one might think, the friends all have very developed and distinct personalities.



One of my favorite moments at the Children's School was when one child left her spot at circle time to walk up to and kiss another. At the expense of some macho-ness, I will admit that it was one of the cutest things I've ever seen. Playing with the friends is just as enjoyable for me as it is for them. I like showing them new things like how to draw letters and build more complex structures. Sometimes, difficult situations arise where friends get angry or upset. There are no clear answers in these situations, and so it is important to be alert and use my judgment to handle them effectively.



On the playground with the kindergarten, I saw Mrs. Perovich take full advantage of a difficult situation by turning it into a learning opportunity for the friends. One friend was crying because she wasn't picked to be a puppy in their game. Mrs. Perovich responded by asking, "Why can't everyone who wants to be a puppy, be a puppy?" One friend became noticeably thoughtful about the question, and I expect that she will search for similar everybody-wins solutions the next time difficult situations arise in the future. This incident is one of many where we are lucky enough to make a positive impact by taking the time to teach the friends good habits.

High School Interns

- Hello, my name is Kenya Brown, and I am a senior at City Charter High School. I am interning at the Children's School as part of my graduation requirements. After high school, I plan to attend college for elementary education or biology, but I don't yet have a particular school in mind. I really love interning here at the Children's School and interacting with all of the children. The thing I like to do the most here is watch the children play and interact with each other because I get to observe their social skills and their communication skills. My favorite part of the day is when I



come in and all of the children are playing and all of the kids say hi to me. Really, just hearing the children laugh, giggle, and play really brightens my day.



- My name is Makenzie Romonovich. I am an 18-year-old senior at Brashear High School in the Pittsburgh Public School's **Start On Success** program. My internship here at Carnegie Mellon Children's School has been fantastic so far. I work with 11 preschool 4's friends, and they are truly the reason why I want to continue my dream career of becoming an elementary school teacher. The children are always willing to learn new things. They see me come into the Green Room, greet me with "hello", and some even give me hugs. They are precious young children who have a great future ahead of them.

Undergraduate Research

Yevdokiya (Dussy) Yermolyeva's and Bryan Matlen's **Developmental Research Methods** students are preparing their final projects for the semester. Though the research procedures are still being finalized, the topics are listed below. Families whose children participate will receive fuller parent descriptions via the child's backpack. Everyone can read the study descriptions on the Research Bulletin Board outside the Children's School Office. Notice the interesting range of important topics in early childhood development!

Children's memory for 2-dimensional vs. 3-dimensional representations of home and school rooms (The Room Arranging Game, K only)

The impact of supportive vs. unsupportive visual cues on story memory (The "Going to Grandma's" Game, 3's and 4's)

The effects color scheme and music tempo on the speed of simple shape identification and motor tasks (The Stars and Beads Game, K only)

Children's short-term memory for color sequences presented and recalled verbally vs. visually (The Color Game, 4's only)

Children's ability to recreate toy actions they see a videotaped adult perform, after a preliminary play session with the identical toy or a similar toy (The Copy Cat Game, 3's and K)

The role of demonstration vs. physical participation in children's ability to remember color sorting patterns immediately vs. after a few minute delay (The Sort the Beads Game, Afternoon Children)

The effects of neutral acknowledgement vs. effort reinforcement on sorting accuracy (The Sorting Game, 3's and K)

The speed and accuracy of gender identification for faces of children, adults, and elderly adults (The Faces Game, 4's and K)

Children's accuracy of tracing familiar upper & lower case letters compared to unfamiliar figures with the same component lines (The Tracing Game, 4's and K)

The impact of verbal fluency and visual vs. auditory cues on children's emotion labeling (The Emotions Game, 3's and K)

Scholarship Fundraising Efforts

As you know, the Children's School participates in the Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program. Through the EITC, eligible Pennsylvania businesses can earn tax credits while providing financial assistance for children to attend the Children's School. Thus far in 2012-13, we have received \$33,000 from Duquesne Light and subsidiaries of ThermoFisher Scientific. If you would like more info or can help us to build a list of prospective businesses, please contact the Main Office.

Benefit Dinner at Eleven: Our Benefit Dinner at Eleven was well attended by current Children's School families, as well as a few alumni. The event added \$3,288 for our Scholarship Fund!

Pittsburgh's Day Of Giving: For the first time, The Children's School participated in the Pittsburgh Gives Day of Giving. Children's School families and alumni donated just over \$4,000 and we are waiting to learn what our match from The Pittsburgh Foundation will be.

Research Spotlight

Another Listening Game

In this study, Dr. Erik Thiessen and graduate student Lucy Erickson are investigating how young children discover words in fluent speech, which lacks reliable pauses between words. One cue that may help children segment speech is its statistical structure. For instance, syllables within words tend to have a higher probability of co-occurrence than syllables that span word boundaries (e.g., the syllables in 'pre-tty' and 'ba-by' occur together more frequently than the syllables between those two words, 'ty-ba'). Prior research with artificial languages stripped of all other cues to word-identity has demonstrated that both infants and adults are sensitive to this cue. Furthermore, this learning often happens after brief, passive exposure periods and without any conscious awareness of learning on the part of the participants. However, in studies where participants are asked to do a secondary task while listening to the speech, performance is disrupted. This finding suggests that attention is necessary for learning, but the specific role attention plays in the process is not yet known. In this research, researchers are exploring how performance on a task of sustained attention (The Moving Eyes Game, see October 2012 newsletter) is related to performance on this word segmentation task. In this Listening Game, children listen to an audio recording of a speech stream while drawing a picture and are told that we are interested in how listening to different sounds while coloring can affect creativity. After the exposure phase, they are presented with pairs of words and asked which one sounds more like the sounds they heard before. All of the words they hear are syllable combinations that were present in the stream, but within each pair one of the words is characterized by higher statistical coherence than the other (i.e., the syllables predicted each other 100% of the time compared to 33% of the time).



The Picture Finding Game

Early childhood is a time when children discover many new words. Word recognition tasks are often used to determine the average age of acquisition for these words. These data can then be applied to the study of other cognitive topics, including generalization or inductive inference, when using words and pictures. The purpose of the current study by Layla Unger, a new graduate student working with Dr. Anna Fisher, is to test whether four-year-old children can recognize and accurately identify a new set of stimuli that include pictures of birds, bats and butterflies on the basis of their category labels in order to determine whether they can be used in subsequent studies.

Specifically, in the *Picture Finding Game*, children are shown slides that display pictures of birds, bats and butterflies. Then, children are asked to find the picture representing one of the animals on each slide. For example, we might ask children to find the picture of a bird. The data collected in this study will be used as the basis for selecting a subset of pictures that four-year-old children can reliably identify. These pictures will be used in subsequent studies to investigate the ways in which children use category membership and perceptual attributes to make novel inferences about unobservable properties of objects.



Research Spotlight, continued

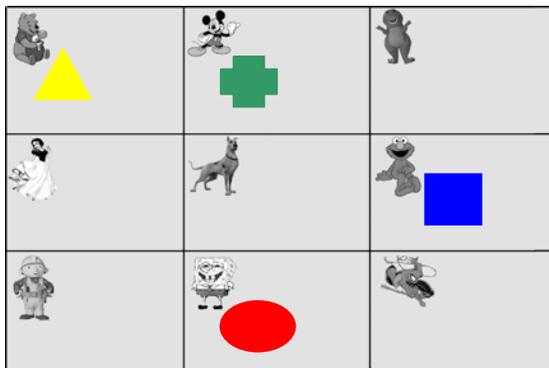
The Concentration Game

The world around us is complex and maintaining focused attention can sometimes be challenging - even for adults. The goal of graduate students Karrie Godwin and Derek Lomas' research project is to investigate the developmental course of deliberate selective attention. They are particularly interested in examining whether attentional selectivity can be improved through training with an instructional computer game. In the present study, they are examining how the design elements of a computer game affect children's engagement and motivation to continue playing.

In the Concentration Game, children play two short computer games that differ in their design elements - the *Moving Objects Game* and the *Hide-n-Seek Game*. In the *Moving Objects Game* (Below Left), children see several objects moving on a computer screen landing on one of the nine screen locations, each location is associated with a different cartoon character. Children are asked to watch a particular object while ignoring the rest of the objects. When the objects stop moving and disappear from the screen, children are asked which cartoon character was last visited by the object they had been watching.

In the *Hide-n-Seek Game*, children watch as friendly characters run around a room and hide behind everyday objects. Children's task is to ignore the distracter characters in order to identify the hiding location of a target character. For example, the target character may run around a playroom (similar to the room shown below on the right) and then hide behind a rocking horse. The child's task is to click on the object that the target character is hiding behind (i.e., the rocking horse).

After children play each game for 5 minutes, they will be presented with a choice of playing either *The Moving Objects Game* or *The Hide-n-Seek Game* for another five minutes. The game children select and the duration of play will be recorded as a behavioral measure of children's motivation and engagement in the game.



*Karrie and Derek are both students in Carnegie Mellon's **Program in Interdisciplinary Education Research (PIER)**, for which Dr. Carver is the Co-Director. Karrie is working on a PhD in Psychology under the direction of Dr. Anna Fisher, while Derek is completing a PhD in Human Computer Interaction with advisor Dr. Ken Koedinger. Drs. Fisher and Koedinger are parents of Sasha (K).*

Director's Corner: Relationships Matter



Several of NAEYC's ten accreditation standards highlight the importance of *relationships as a foundation for quality early care and education*. Standard #1 is actually called "**Relationships**" and includes criteria regarding promoting positive relationships between educators and families, between educators and children, and between children and peers. Standard #7 is called "**Families**", but the emphasis of all the related criteria is on establishing and maintaining collaborative relationships with the diverse families we serve so that together we can support each individual child's development. Because our laboratory school is thoroughly integrated into the university community, we cultivate an even broader view of relationships that includes all of the learners involved in our educational system. As with Leadership and Management (see October 2012), our affiliation with Carnegie Mellon affords innovative approaches to building strong relationships as a foundation of excellence.

- We begin with the belief that all of our interactions and communication should focus on building a consistently warm, respectful, and positive emotional climate for our entire school community, so we aim to set that tone in all of our routines and conversations from greeting through dismissal, with children, families, undergraduates and facilities workers, within the school and elsewhere on campus.
- From our web site design and our initial application forms to our newsletters and emails with enrolled families, we attempt to communicate clearly a broad welcome to diverse families and children and a deep interest in getting to know and understand the family structure, cultural background, child-rearing practices, etc. so that we can foster strong reciprocal relationships.
- With families, we emphasize close home – school connections through a variety of communication mechanisms so that we can support each child's growth in the self-regulation and social skills that will help with functioning comfortably and building friendships in a classroom community that feels secure and is responsive to everyone's needs. CMU's *Message from Me* project is helping involve our children in the communication directly, as well as sharing that technology with neighboring centers.
- Our "open door" policy invites families to connect in ways that fit their styles, interests, and schedules, whether that means simply attending the whole school events, or joining committees to help plan ways for families to connect with each other and enhance the school program. We also solicit input about our programs in multiple ways so that we can continually improve our work.
- For all families, we discuss their children's development in detail and provide resources for community involvement and school transitions. When needed, we can arrange for language translation and help families connect with services to help with unique challenges regarding physical and mental health, individual learning support or counseling, etc.
- When conflicts arise, we seek to utilize direct, honest, and sensitive communication to help us develop an effective solution. We listen carefully and reflect frequently so that we can discern assumptions that may be biasing our perspectives and work toward solutions that counter discrimination and collaboratively address persistent challenges.



In all of these ways, we seek to develop close partnerships with children and families, as well as with the university and Pittsburgh communities to create the best learning opportunities for everyone in our busy laboratory school. We invite your input and involvement as together we strive for excellence.