



Carnegie Mellon University Children's School November 2014 Family Newsletter



Growing Our Outdoor Classroom

During the 2014-15 school year, we will begin to create a community garden on the hillside adjacent to the playground and parking lot. Our first family committee meetings were held in October. Over the next few months, we will be working with the University to develop a plan for the area so that we can begin to terrace the space for planting in the spring. If you are interested in helping with this effort in any way – pondering, planning, planting, or procuring – please contact Miss Hancock or Mrs. Rosenblum. No experience is necessary - just a willingness to help beautify the space!!!



Spaces for Spring Extended Day Programs

There are limited spaces still available for the spring semester in our Extended Morning Program and our Extended Afternoon Program. The AM Program runs from 11:30am–1:00pm and the PM Program runs from 3:15pm until 5:30pm. These programs extend the preschool themes through literature-based activities. If you are interested in enrolling your child, please contact Maggie Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu. IF YOUR CHILD IS CURRENTLY ENROLLED IN THE EXTENDED PROGRAM, THERE IS NO NEED TO RE-ENROLL for the spring semester.

November / December Dates (Remember to Check the Interactive Web Calendar TOO)

Sunday, November 2nd – Daylight Saving Time Ends – Turn Clocks **BACK** One Hour

Food Bank Donations – November 3rd through 14th

Staff / Parent Discussion re: School Choice (child care provided)

Friday, Nov 7th from 9:30-11:00am or Wednesday, Nov 12th from 4:30-6:00pm

Friday Afternoon, November 14th - Parent Teacher Conferences for 4's and K
Regular School Schedule in the Morning

Thursday, November 20th from 6-8pm - Shopping Night at Ten Thousand Villages
Raising 10% of sales for library acquisitions

NO SCHOOL – Friday, November 21st – Parent Teacher Conferences for All Ages

No School for Children – November 26th through November 30th – **Happy Thanksgiving!!**

Tuesday, December 2nd – Extended Morning 4's Open House 12-1pm

Thursday, December 4th – Extended Morning 3's Open House 12-1pm

Fall Open House Events

On October 22nd and 29th, our children shared favorite learning experiences 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 web message that their teachers send electronically each day. Talking about the highlights of each day helps the children reflect on their learning and affords families the chance to enhance and extend it.



Family Social Organization

Hello and Happy fall! The Family Social Organization had a great month of October and it's not over yet! We hope to see you all at the special Halloween class and zoo trip this Friday at the Pittsburgh Zoo! We kicked off October with our first book club at the Reznik Café. We hope families can join us for our next discussion on November 12th! We will be watching and discussing "School's Out", a documentary about an all-outdoor kindergarten in Switzerland. If you are interested in watching the documentary but are unable to attend on November 12th, please email us and we can make arrangements to get a loaner copy of the DVD in your child's backpack. The big event for October was our 2nd annual trip to the Reilly's Summerseat Farm. We had beautiful weather and over 100 people attended! Everyone had a great time going on a hayride, picking pumpkins, navigating the corn maze, playing on the giant slide, feeding animals, and having lunch together. Special thanks to Alexis Tuckfelt, Janica Smith, and Aimee Bednar for their help in making



the event a huge success. We hope you join us for an "eventful" November! Please watch for emails about the free martial arts class at Ryer Academy, bowling at Forward Lanes, and a visit to the Model Railroad Museum. As always, please email us with any questions or suggestions of events that you would like to host! Ameer (ameechaudry@gmail.com) and Julie (julieparis6@gmail.com)

National Family Volunteer Day

Saturday, November 22nd is Family Volunteer Day, "a day of service that demonstrates and celebrates the power of families who volunteer together; supporting their neighborhoods, communities and the world. Points of Light created the day 23 years ago to showcase the benefits of family volunteering and to provide opportunities for families to help create supportive environments in their communities (<http://www.generationon.org/teens/news-events/the-latest/family-volunteer-day-2014>)." Volunteering is one way to help our children learn to be givers. As Fred Rogers said, "As different as we are from one another, as unique as each one of us is, we are much more the same than we are different. That may be the most essential message of all, as we help our children grow toward being caring, compassionate, and charitable adults."

International 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. A total of 12 Early Childhood Education students will be in Pittsburgh for practicum experiences at our school, Falk, Carlow, or Pitt's University Child Development Center. To help the students experience family life in Pittsburgh, we are recruiting two families who live close to the university to provide **housing and some meals** for two practicum students, with tentative dates from Sunday, January 18th through Sunday, February 1st. Proximity to CMU is essential so that the students can use public transportation or rides from teachers to travel to and from school. Please contact Dr. Carver at sc0e@andrew.cmu.edu if you are interested in this hosting opportunity.



Family Spotlight: Kuhn Family in Pittsburgh

We are very happy to share a little Kuhn history with the staff, children, and families at the CMU Children's School! Mattias, now four and a half, was born in Brookline - a town next door to Boston. He has an older brother (Markus, almost 7) and sister (Beatrice, 9). Pittsburgh is the children's first move, and so far they are having a great time! Carolina, the mom, is a third-generation Japanese American. She is originally from Los Angeles, but has lived in many cities across the country as well as in Saudi Arabia for a few years and Brazil for almost 13 years. Very few people know that the largest group of Japanese outside of Japan is in Brazil, specifically Sao Paulo. In Sao Paulo, Carolina received her medical degree and shortly thereafter returned to the United States.

In the Bronx, she completed a residency in Pediatrics, then moved on to Boston (to join her husband) for additional training. Since having children, she has decided to stay at home until... well that is still up in the air! Her hobbies are roller-skating, knitting, sewing and running. Mattias' father, Bernhard (with an "H"!), is from the former East Germany. He went to medical school in Berlin and decided that research was his main interest. He pursued a residency in Pediatrics in New Haven, then a fellowship in Pediatric Cardiology in Boston. He started his research laboratory there in cardiac regeneration, and this summer has moved his lab to Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh. His hobbies are sailing and playing with the kids, and most recently fixing our new home here in Pittsburgh. Luckily he has many helpers (including Mattias and Markus, of course!).



Mattias has always been the "fofo" (sweet loving one, in Portuguese) in our family. He was born with a very common pigmented birthmark – a "nevus" - only that its locality and size make it extremely rare. Medically there is no need for treatment (except for sun protection, which everyone needs anyways!), and over the years he has reacted very well with the attention he gets. He has taught us, with the limited vocabulary a toddler can offer, a lot about ourselves and the world around us. We are very thankful that his family and friends have given him a nurturing and loving environment - including the Children's School. He is so, so happy here!! His hobbies are using the power drill (a real Black and Decker!!), biking, and impressing his older siblings in any way possible. This year we look forward to new friends and experiences in Pittsburgh. We feel very welcome and fortunate to be part of this forward-moving city!

Pittsburgh Perspectives

This representation of Pittsburgh by Custom Made Ventures shows the unique character of our city, with a wide range of colors and patterns as diverse as the individuals who make their homes here. As we prepare for our whole school study of Pittsburgh in February, please broaden your exploration to see what new adventures are available for you and your family.



November's Pittsburgh Tip: Pittsburgh is a family-friendly city with lots of opportunities, many of which are free. *Honey Hill Publishing* (<http://www.pittsburghparent.com>) offers an "online parent resource center for busy families in Pittsburgh. The site has been designed so parents can quickly access advice on family and parenting issues, fun and entertaining activities and local resources." The Kidsburgh collaborative (<http://www.kidsburgh.org>) aims to make "the Pittsburgh region ... the best place on earth to raise a kid." They provide an online resource for family-friendly events.

Cans Across the Cut

Carnegie Mellon University's Staff Council is running its annual food drive benefitting the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank from November 3rd until November 14th. If you wish to donate non-perishable food items during this time period, please send them with your child or bring them to our office. On Monday, November 17th, the Children's School students will be participating in **Cans Across the Cut**, a yearly event in which University teams compete to see which groups can place the most donated food items in a line across the area on campus known as "The Cut". Cash or check donations (made payable to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank) are also accepted.

Giant Eagle Apples for Students

Each time you shop at Giant Eagle[®] using your Giant Eagle Advantage Card[®], you can earn points for the Children's School – points we can redeem for great educational tools. The points are automatically credited to the school through the Giant Eagle Advantage Card[®].

Here's how:

1. Sign up at www.gianteagle.com/about/apples-for-students
2. Provide our School ID #0151
3. Each time your Giant Eagle Advantage Card is scanned through March 17, 2015, your purchases automatically earn our school FREE educational awards.

In the past, we have been able to receive an overhead projector, computer software, books, and physical education materials. If you registered in prior years, there is no need to register again. Please visit www.gianteagle.com to review your school choices.

November Gallery Features

3's Friends: Malena F., Zahra J., and Max T.

4's Friends: Avery K., Daniel K., Max L., and Emma T.

Kindergarten Friends: Ruby A. and Andres F.



Committee News

- The **Library** Committee met on September 30th and our members have already reviewed some of our library books that a student work-study had labeled as having “questionable material” so that we can weed out and update our books. We are also looking for suggestions for new books to add to our library so if you have any family favorites to suggest – especially any that would align with our yearly themes – please send suggestions to Maggie Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu and our committee members will review them for recommendations to add to our collection.
- The **Sewing** Committee met on October 2nd and members Carolina Kuhn and Melissa McFadden are already hard at work making aprons and Native American clothing for our friends.
- Our annual Barnes & Noble book fair is scheduled for December 6th at the Waterfront and our **Book Fair** Committee will be meeting on November 3rd at 9 am and 12:30 pm. Please feel free to join us. Also, if you know any Pittsburgh folks who would be interested in sharing a book with us between 10 am and 2 pm on the 6th, please let Mrs. Rosenblum know!
- Thanks to everyone who volunteered for these committees and for the **Repair, Teacher Luncheon** and **End of Year Celebration** Committees. If you are interested in joining any of these committees (or if you have an idea for a new committee) please feel free to let us know!

Ten Thousand Villages

Shop at Ten Thousand Villages on November 20th from 6-8 pm and a percentage of your purchase will be donated towards our Library Acquisition Fund. Your Holiday gifts can give three times, to the recipient, the artisan, and CMU Children's School! To learn more about this wonderful store located on Forbes Avenue in Squirrel Hill, visit the Ten Thousand Villages web site at <http://www.tenthousandvillages.com/home.php>.



Box Tops for Education Update

Thank you to everyone who submitted Box Tops for Education. In this collection period (March - October), we received 880 Box Tops plus 91 Bonus Box Tops for a total of \$97.10. Our next Box Top Submission Deadline is February 13, 2015.

So Many School Choices

How do families make the best choice of an elementary school for each of their children and decide when to make the transition? Please join us for a review of school choice principles and a discussion of strategies for exploring school options.



Friday, November 7, 2014 from 9:30–11:00am in the Danforth Lounge of the University Center

- Preschool 4's and Kindergarten children will be in school.
- Child Care will be provided for children 3 and under in the Red Room.

Wednesday, November 12, 2014 from 4:30-6:00pm in the Children's School Kindergarten

- Child Care will be provided for children of all ages in the Red Room.

NOTE: The Pittsburgh Public School birthday cutoff is September 30th 2014. In other words, a child who turns 5 by September 30th is eligible for kindergarten (or 6 by September 30th for 1st grade).

Fall Parent / Teacher Conferences

The fall conferences are great opportunities for the parents and teacher to discuss their views of each child's development. This year, parent conferences are being conducted primarily on Friday afternoon, November 14th (4's and K), Friday, November 21st (all ages), and Friday afternoon, December 5th (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 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. Earlier this year, we invited you to 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. For your convenience, we have posted Open House information for other schools on a bulletin board to the left of the school office. In addition to the conference opportunity, Dr. Carver is available to discuss any questions or concerns you may 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 our 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.

Outreach for Practicing Educators

Professional development is a high priority at the Children's School because it supports our continuous quality improvement. For our experienced educators, much of our professional growth comes from preparing professional development experiences for other educators, as well as from mentoring practicing and pre-service educators on their career paths in early childhood. On October 17th and 18th, our staff attended the bi-annual conference of the Pittsburgh Association for the Education of Young Children (PAEYC), which was co-sponsored by the Allegheny County Family Support Centers and held at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center downtown. All of our educators, two of our substitute teachers, and both of our student teachers attended part or all of the conference, and 10 of our educators collaborated on four presentations.

- [Strategies for Helping Parents Meaningfully Engage in Their Children's Early Education](#) (Holly Blizman, Violet McGillen, and Maggie Rosenblum)
- [Innovative Explorations to Enrich Thematic Units and Inspire Deep Learning](#) (Linda Hancock, Krissy Opferman, and Tim Salinetto)
- [Too Much Too Soon, Too Little Too Late](#) (Sharon Carver and Charline Tomer)
- [Adventures in Outdoor Education: Rethinking Summer Camp for Young Children](#) (Jean Bird and Jillian Wendolowski)



This year, our staff is also partnering with PAEYC's Homewood HUB and the Homewood Child Care Alliance to provide professional development opportunities for home-based educators in the Homewood neighborhood. Once a month, two of our teaching staff, together with a home-based educator, are demonstrating and discussing different types of activities that are designed to be engaging while addressing the six domains of development. In September, Ms. McMichael and Mrs. McGillen cooked pancakes with 20 children and their educators and, in October, Ms. Stevens and Mrs. Blizman demonstrated how to do art with shaving cream. Mrs. Solomon and Mrs. Loomis will be sharing sensory experiences in November. Next spring, Miss Hancock and Mrs. Opferman will be exploring the science behind building, Mrs. Bird and Mrs. Armbruster will be doing music and movement activities, and Mrs. Wendolowski and Mrs. Tomer will demonstrate science experiments for young children. In addition, four of our educators, Mrs. Bird, Mrs. McGillen, Ms. Stevens and Mrs. Rosenblum, will be staffing an art activity booth on November 15th for the "Coats 4 Kids" kickoff event run by the Homewood Children's Village.



Right after the PAEYC conference, Dr. Carver and Mrs. Perovich spent a morning with the preschool and preK educators at the First Presbyterian Church of Bakerstown, PA to discuss strategies for aligning goals and assessment in early childhood education. In all of these ways, we support the professional development of fellow educators while stretching ourselves to grow as well.

Undergraduate Spotlight

From Stanton Man: When going to Carnegie Mellon, most students will be stressed, pull all-nighters, or even be unhappy about their grades. Students here look at extra-curriculars to get their minds off the inevitable stress. For me, there are two stress relievers - music and the Children's School.

I am currently a junior in the Dietrich College of Humanities & Social Sciences studying Decision Science, with minors in Music Performance & Business Administration. When looking into my music minor, it is something that I love doing and will be with me for the rest of my life. The Children's School is one form of stress relief that comes once in a lifetime. There's something extremely special about this school that I can't seem to put my finger on. I'm not sure if it's the passion from the teachers, or the happiness of the friends, but the atmosphere puts me at ease.

I originally heard about this job from a bagpipe performance I did for the children. After I performed, the feedback from the school was incredible. I felt a sense of ease and friendship from the friends and teachers, so I knew that I wanted to work here. I still remember my first day well. I was nervous, but also really excited. Once I started working, everyone was so accepting and friendly. It really was a breath of fresh air from my daily work schedule at the university. When I leave at 2 pm on Monday / Wednesday or 5:30 pm on Tuesday / Thursday, I always feel the same no matter how I entered the school feeling. There's a sense of accomplishment, as well as joy and tranquility, after every day. Although this is my first semester, I'm eager to be working here for the rest of my CMU career.



Undergraduate Research

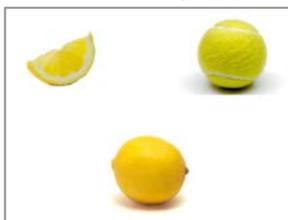
Dr. Anna Fisher and Graduate Student Lucy Erickson's **Developmental Research Methods** students are preparing their final projects for the semester. They are beginning to pilot test their projects on the topics listed below. Families whose children participate will receive fuller parent descriptions via the child's backpack, and there are some samples on the next few pages. Everyone can read the study descriptions on the Research Bulletin Board across from the new library cabinets. Notice the interesting range of important topics in early childhood development!

- **The impact of fine or gross motor exercise on creativity** (The Copy Cat Game, K)
- **The impact of encouragement on balancing ability** (The Balancing Game, PM 4's and K)
- **Gender effects in the ability to recognize emotions** (The Faces Game, AM 3's and K)
- **The impact of reward distance on delay of gratification capability** (The Puzzle Game, AM 3's)
- **Familiarity effects on memory game performance** (The Matching Game, AM 4's)
- **The impact of feature appeal & sibling status on sharing** (The Playdough Game, PM 3's & 4's)

Research Spotlight

The Reasoning Game

In this study, Dr. Anna Fisher and graduate student Karrie Godwin are investigating young children's understanding of categories and the development of category-based reasoning. In particular, they are interested in examining the role of conceptual and perceptual information on category-based reasoning and induction in early childhood. Specifically, they are interested in the degree to which children utilize their knowledge of categories and perceptual similarity in a reasoning task where these sources of information are in conflict. They are also interested in whether labels help children make inferences. In the Reasoning



Game, children are shown sets of three pictures similar to the ones presented here. For example, we might show children a lemon, a tennis ball, and a lemon slice. For half of the trials, children may be told the object labels. For the other half of the trials, no labels will be used. Children will learn that one of the objects has a particular property, and then the children must decide whether this property can be generalized to the other two objects.

The Naming Game

In a related study, Dr. Anna Fisher and graduate student Karrie Godwin are investigating young children's understanding of categories and the development of category-based reasoning. In particular, they are interested in examining the role of conceptual and perceptual information on category-based reasoning and induction in early childhood. Specifically, they are interested in the degree to which children utilize their knowledge of categories and perceptual similarity in a reasoning task and whether familiarity with labels helps children make inductive inferences during a reasoning task. In the Naming Game, children are shown a series of pictures similar to the one presented below. Then, children are asked to identify the animal or object pictured. For example, "We are going to play a game with pictures. I am going to show you a picture and I want you to tell me what the picture is called. Okay, let's play the game. What is this called?"



The Balancing Game

One Research Methods team is studying the impact of encouragement on gross motor skills, which are actions that require movements of large muscles, such as running, jumping, walking, and balancing. Encouragement is particularly interesting because it is simple, free, and may have the power to motivate and increase children's attention, according to current research. Encouragement, specifically high-fives, was shown in previous research to improve performance in children. In the Balancing Game, the students tested the effects of verbal ("Good job!") and physical (high-fives) forms of encouragement on balancing task performance. Half of the children received encouragement immediately after performing each balancing task, and the other half received the encouragement after all of the tasks had been completed. The students plan to compare the length of time children balance on each task and compare the times for children receiving encouragement between tasks vs. those receiving encouragement at the end of the experiment (i.e., when it could no longer affect performance). Ideally, results from this experiment can be applied to other activities as well, such as reading or problem solving.

Research Spotlight, continued ...

The Matching Game

One of the Research Methods groups is testing the effect of familiarity on working memory. The purpose was to explore the differences in the memory performance with high familiarity objects as opposed to low familiarity objects. Some examples of highly familiar objects shown below are apples and cats; low familiarity objects would be gooseberries (a fruit) and binturongs (an animal). Based on previous studies of familiarity effects with faces and objects, the students expected that children would have better memory and make fewer errors when matching high familiarity objects than matching the low familiarity objects because they could devote their cognitive resources to the object location instead of focusing on the object identity. Each child played this game three times in one session, once with high familiarity objects, once with low familiarity objects, and once with a mixed set. The students included a mixed board to determine whether the children matched familiar objects before unfamiliar objects. If this result is obtained, it will provide further evidence suggesting that how well children remember something depends on its familiarity. This is important because teachers could use familiar objects and concepts as a teaching method for conveying new ideas to encourage better memory. Additionally, the results could be used to show how repeated exposure to objects can help a child remember the objects better. As a result, teachers and parents could use this information to further reinforce various ideas/objects/lessons through repeated exposure.



The Copy Cat Game



Another Research Methods team is studying the effect of physical activity on creativity. Multiple studies have suggested that physical activity prior to a creative challenge increases creativity scores in adults. In the Copy Cat Game, students in the Developmental Research Methods class are investigating the connection between exercise and creativity. In this task, children are first asked to repeat actions of the tester. Children in the experimental (exercise) group mimicked behaviors like jumping jacks and running in place. Children in the control (stationary) group mimicked behaviors like smiling and touching their head. All children were then given a modified "alternative uses" task, which is a type of creativity measure, where they were asked to think of as many uses for a block as possible. A coder recorded all of the ideas generated, with the goal of comparing the number and originality of ideas from both groups. Based on the existing evidence that there is a connection between physical activity and creativity, they expect the children who did an exercise-oriented copy cat game to perform better than the children who did a more stationary version of the game. If this result is obtained, it will provide further evidence suggesting that physical activity is beneficial to children and adults alike in enhancing creativity, and perhaps other types of cognition.



Director's Corner: Exploring Nature



Our theme for this year's Director's Corner articles is **Why Explore?** Open-ended exploration of materials in diverse spaces promotes inquiry that starts with noticing interesting features, wondering about cause / effect relationships, thinking of possible explanations and testing them, and then learning from the outcomes. Nature provides engaging opportunities for children's self-initiated discovery that blossoms into interests that children are motivated to pursue, both on their own and with the guidance of educators who are prepared to involve them in more systematic inquiry and deeper learning from books, experts, and other sources. We scaffold with the prompts, "I notice ____, I wonder ____, I think ____, and I learned ____" to support children's use of the inquiry process and then introduce the formal scientific vocabulary.

During the 2008-09 school year, our educators discussed Richard Louv's 2005 book, "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder." Louv's aim is to encourage discussion of "the increasing divide between the young and the natural world, and the environmental, social, psychological, and spiritual implications of that change" (p. 2). Since that time, we have worked more purposefully to include nature in the classroom, focus more on "nearby nature", make our school more "green", and improve our "outdoor classroom". For example, our classrooms now include more plants and a wider variety of pets, we take more walks on campus and in Schenley Park, we have broadened our recycling and composting programs, and we have added more natural elements and gardens in our outdoor space. Both CMU and the city of Pittsburgh have supplemented our efforts with their own steps toward "green urbanism". One result of these efforts is that this fall our children have had opportunities to observe diverse songbirds on our playground, as well as squirrels eating the seeds from our giant sunflowers, mother rabbits and cats caring for their young, and a groundhog emerging from the hole he dug in our bike path. Nature at its best!

With nature explorations, our educators utilize the full continuum of teaching strategies, from encouraging open-ended discovery, to modeling and coaching inquiry, to direct instruction. For example, we created a "mud kitchen" on the playground for free exploration, and we take a variety of "scavenger hunts" on campus and in Schenley Park (e.g., the 3's recent scavenger hunt for trees and the Kindergarten's search for living and non-living things). Those explorations led to guided comparison and contrast to distinguish types of trees, experiments with trying to root plants brought back from the park, etc. The teachers respond to children's questions and supplement the group experiences by sharing non-fiction nature books, showing time lapse video sequences of plant growth or web cams of natural habitats, inviting experts to talk with the children, etc.

Why do these efforts matter? During nature investigations, children have opportunities to progress in all developmental domains. For example, nature explorations help children gain confidence in their skills and foster initiative (Self-esteem & Independence), encourage peers to support each other's ideas and negotiate plans (Interaction & Cooperation), provide rich topics of conversation and contexts for recording observations (Communication), provoke inquiry with diverse opportunities to compare, sort, and quantify (Discovery & Exploration), build skills for controlled movement and use of tools while managing risks (Physical Capabilities / Health & Safety), and inspire children to both perceive and create beauty (Artistic Expression & Appreciation). Remember, exploration is more about noticing, wondering, and predicting than about knowing all the answers. So, relax and venture outdoors with your family. You'll be amazed at what you can discover together!