Sharing with Our Community

At all times of year, we seek to help all of the learners at the Children’s School to become generous givers and gracious receivers. As Fred Rogers explained, “Everyone has needs and everyone has something to give. 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” (The Giving Box: Create a Tradition of Giving with Your Children, 2000, p. 13).

• Thanks to the 8 families who collected donations for UNICEF on Halloween. The United Nations Children’s Fund is designed to “build a world where the rights of every child are realized.” Their sponsored projects focus on child survival, protection, education, etc.

• The Carnegie Mellon Community collected 7,896 pounds of non-perishable food and other supplies, plus $1,702.10 for the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank during the November Drive. Our children contributed 181 cans to the Cans Across the Cut project on November 11th.

• SOCKS, HATS AND GLOVES. OH MY! During the winter months, Operation Safety Net offers winter shelters for the homeless when the temperature drops below 25 degrees. The shelters are in need of new socks, gloves and hats for their clients. These items can be purchased at a very economical price. If you can support this project, please bring your donations to the Children’s School by December 15th. The shelters are also requesting paperback books.

Holiday Sharing at School

During December, our classes will focus their thematic studies on Nursery Rhymes and Fairy Tales in the preschool and the Grocery Store in the kindergarten. We encourage families with interest in sharing talents or experiences related to our themes to contact the child’s teacher to make arrangements. Similarly, families may share their holiday traditions in order to help our children understand and appreciate the diversity within their groups.

If you would like to show your appreciation for any of the Children’s School staff members at the holiday time, we suggest a simple gift, a donation to the school’s scholarship fund, or a gift for the classroom (books, puzzles, etc.). Involving your child in the decision and/or creation of a card or gift focuses the activity on the joy of giving rather than on the gift.

December Dates

Tuesday, December 1st from 12:00 to 1:00pm Extended AM Open House for 4’s Families
Thursday, December 3rd from 12:00 to 1:00pm Extended AM Open House for 3’s Families
Thursday, December 17th Last Day of the Semester for 3’s and Extended Day Programs
Friday, December 18th Last Day of the Semester for 4’s and Kindergarten Programs
Parent Spotlight: New Arrivals

Many of our families have recently moved here from other countries. We asked some to relate their first impressions of Pittsburgh and to include a photo. The Linds are from Finland. Their son, Anton, is a Purple Room 3’s friend. The Cerits moved here from Turkey. They have a three-year-old daughter who joined the Blue Room friends in the middle of October.

Anton, age 3, his brother Aarno, age 7, his sister Alina, age 10, and parents Minna and Sakari Lind moved to Pittsburgh on August 12th from Finland (Scandinavia). At that time only Alina spoke a little bit of English, because she had studied it in school for one year, but both boys spoke only Finnish. The reason for moving was that Anton’s mom, Minna started her post-doctoral research work at CMU in the Center for Iron and Steelmaking Research. Our apartment location in Squirrel Hill is fantastic. It is only 20 minutes walk to CMU preschool. In the other direction, Alina and Aarno get to Colfax by school bus. Everything is within the walking distance and we do not have to use a car for school or work trips. The bus to downtown takes only 10 minutes, and we have a bus stop in front of our apartment. All elementary, middle and high schools are free of charge in Finland. School books are also free except in the high schools. We do not have bus transportation to schools, but, on the other hand, everyone has a free lunch at school. Cities and communities are required to provide preschool services for all children. We love the living peace in Squirrel Hill. Schenley Park is next to us, and we do lots of outdoor activities. At this time of year, the weather is already rainy and dark in Finland, but here we have enjoyed the wonderful climate. Fall has been sunny and warm. We like living in Pittsburgh a lot. The city is not too big, and it provides many cultural and sports activities. There are many museums worth visiting. People are friendly, and it is easy to get contact with local citizens. Probably the best thing for us is that we are now spending much more time together as a family.

We, Burcu, Faith, and Elif Cerit, have not been in the U.S.A. before. So, this is our first time for being in this country. We have observed so far that the system outside was designed for the human being, for better living conditions, especially for the children. We don’t know the other destinations in the U.S.A., but we think that Pittsburgh is a really comfortable, cute and beautiful city to live in. It is green green and greeeeeen! In this season, when we saw so many colors together, we quickly decided to buy a professional digital camera to capture this beauty. Now, we are waiting for the winter and the snow impatiently. Beyond this natural beauty, we think that even if Pittsburgh is a big city, it is easy to live in. In our home country, it is hard to find these two characteristics together in a city. The last thing to say about the city is that it was not designed as a tourist destination most probably due to its heavy industry past. To summarize, we are happy to be here because we have time to enjoy it!

P.S. Our family photo was taken in our home in the Ankara, Turkey. It was a traditional festival day. The painting behind us was drawn by a family friend.
Family Committee News

Sewing Committee – Thanks to Megan Cohen for making replacement burlap covers for our hammering blocks.

Library Committee – Our volunteers have been doing a great job re-filing and re-labeling our books.

Repair and Construction – Thanks to Jason and Beth Myers for the tool logs. We have been enjoying them! Thanks to Khalid Javid for volunteering to re-hang our 40th Anniversary Quilt.

Scholarship Fundraising Efforts

Thank you to everyone who came to Ten Thousand Villages to support our fundraiser. The event was well attended by Children’s School families and staff as well as community members who just happened to be out shopping in Squirrel Hill. Our net sales were $1151.60 and our event raised $172.74.

Planning to do some online holiday shopping? Be sure to use GoodShop.com and shop on behalf of the Children’s School. A percentage of your purchase will be donated back to our school. Since beginning our GoodSearch/GoodShop relationship in late October, we have raised $28.09 which is about $1.00 a day for simply searching the Internet and doing your family’s regular online shopping!

Scholastic Book Fair

The Book Fair was a resounding success this year! We enjoyed Smiley Cookies (donated by Eat ‘n Park), milk, and pretzels on kick-off day, Wednesday, and we also had a chance to browse at breakfast time on Thursday. On Friday, a noon Story Time allowed parents to shop without their children. We sold $2,287 worth of books, which yields 25% for our scholarship fund. Also, our families contributed 22 books to our school library by donating books that our teaching staff had put on their wish lists. We want to thank Grace Tan for being a terrifically organized Chairperson! Many thanks to our other volunteers: Sonia Mino (delicious muffins!), Leah Broudy, Katie Salvi, Susie Wilojanapa, Jim and Toshie Olsen, Marta Kolthoff, Karris Jackson, Jennifer Moak, Lisa Friday, Huma Husein, Lauren Hraber, Julia Laurin, Jennifer Honig, Milena Nigam, Cathy Baek, Erika Freiberger, Bridgett Javid, and Megan Cohen (babysitting). Happy Reading!
What’s New at the Theatre?

**Cultural District Illumination Project** ~ Saturday, December 5, 2009 ~ 5:30 p.m. at Watercolors Gallery (901A Penn Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15222)  
Tickets: Free and Open to the Public

The Pittsburgh Cultural Trust and Carnegie Mellon University invite you to participate in an illuminating project—a study to brand the Cultural District with light. Please help shape this exciting project that will culminate into a public exhibition for First Night Pittsburgh on December 31.

**The Nutcracker** ~ Friday, December 11, 2009 ~ Sunday, December 27, 2009, presented by Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre at the Benedum Center

The adventures of Marie and her Nutcracker Prince bring the wonder of the season to children of all ages. Set in turn-of-the-century Pittsburgh, Terrence S. Orr's grand-scale production features scenes of old-time Pittsburgh, including Kaufmann’s clock, a Heinz delivery truck and a beautiful view of Mt. Washington during the famous first act snow scene.

**Peanut Butter & Jam Session presents The Adventures of Vi and Lin**  
Saturday, December 12, 2009 ~ 10:00am and 11:30am at McClintic Hall of the Calvary Episcopal Church, 315 Shady Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA 15206. Tickets are $5 per child and $8 per adult. (For tickets, call 412-394-3353 or visit the website at [www.chathambaroque.org](http://www.chathambaroque.org).)

Chatham Baroque's popular Peanut Butter & Jam Sessions are designed especially for preschool children and their accompanying adults. These interactive and informal programs present musical experiences in a fun and family friendly way.

**Highmark Family Holiday Pop** ~ Saturday, December 12, 2009 ~ 11:15 a.m. at Heinz Hall (For tickets, call 412.392.4900 or visit [www.pittsburghsymphony.org](http://www.pittsburghsymphony.org).)

Escape the hustle and the bustle of the holiday rush and start a family tradition. Join the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra for a sing along concert with everyone’s favorite winter carols!

**A Children’s Festival of Carols** ~ Sunday, December 13, 2009 ~ 4 p.m. at East Liberty Presbyterian Church (For tickets, call 412-394-3353.)

The mission of the Children’s Festival Chorus of Pittsburgh is to provide superior choral education and performance opportunities for children, a professional-level children’s chorus to audiences, and training to current and future music educators.

**First Night Pittsburgh 2010** ~ Thursday, December 31, 2009 ~ 6 p.m. to midnight at various locations around Pittsburgh

Enjoy the First Night Parade, live music and dancing at Pittsburgh’s biggest New Year’s Eve Bash! People of all ages will enjoy the spectacular fireworks display that concludes the First Night Festivities. Tickets for adults and children over 5 are $8, and children under 5 are free. First Night buttons are available starting in December at the Box Office at Theater Square and at participating Giant Eagles. Your First Night button is your ticket to this New Year’s Eve celebration.
Web Artists

Kindergarten Friends: Parisha W., Julia K., Oscar L., Rose I., Jordana J.
4’s Friends: Ella R., Ryan B., Josh B., Chase H., Kaelin I.
3’s Friends: Nicholas R., Trey S., Elias J., Nikou N., Sophia H.

Health Pointers:
Winter Wear

As the chilly winter weather approaches, please replenish your child’s extra clothes bag with apparel appropriate for the season, as well as clothes to accommodate their physical growth.

Layering your child’s clothing for school days is helpful. While the temperature in our building is fairly constant and comfortable, some children may feel too warm or too cold on any given day. Wearing a t-shirt under a sweater allows the child to adjust to a personal level of comfort.

Even in the winter, we go outside daily except in very extreme weather conditions. Please send labeled hats and mittens to school every day. On snowy days, please also send labeled snow pants and boots. Feel free to provide a set of outdoor clothes to be kept in your child’s locker.

Participation in the School Day

Our school day is filled with active and interesting projects that are planned in advance to ensure appropriate adult supervision. To that end, we ask that children come to school only if they can fully participate in the day’s activities, including outdoor play and gym. If your child is not well enough to fully take part in the day, please keep the child at home because we do not have staff members available to supervise children indoors while the rest of the class is outdoors or at gym.

Fruit Juice Update

You may have seen the recent Post Gazette article entitled, “Sugar in juice could be bad medicine” (11/9/09). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics, 100% fruit juice “can be part of a well-balanced diet.” The AAP recommends “fruit juice be limited to 4-6 ounces per day for children 1 to 6 years old.” In response to parent queries, we began a dialogue with our NAEYC health consultant and with early childhood program administrators on campuses across the country. All agree that water and milk should be the most frequent drinks for young children, and that whole fruit has more nutritional value than 100% juice. As you can see from the enclosed snack menu, water is available daily, and milk 3 days per week, while fruit or vegetables are served frequently. We plan to continue offering 100% juice twice per week, following our current practice of diluting it, using small servings (~ 3 oz), and serving it with whole grains or proteins to slow the absorption of the natural sugars. We encourage parents to monitor their children’s total juice intake and to reduce the juice they offer, particularly on the days we serve juice. Though most children choose water at school, we aim to provide healthy variety and choice.
Research Spotlight

Eye Tracking Research

The Tobii T60 eye tracker is a computer that encodes eye movement. The Tobii T60 pictured below is in one of the labs near the end of the Children’s School hallway. The black part is where the sensors are. The machine is controlled by another computer that is on the other side of the room. Basically, what you see on the Tobii screen is the clone (or the mirror image) of the real one sitting behind. This picture was taken during the calibration phase of an eye tracking study conducted by senior Helen Kim, who is a research assistant for Dr. Anna Fisher, as well as one of the interns working with the preschool 3’s. Before starting the eye-tracking task, researchers want to make sure that two dots are on the center of the screen; those two dots are where the child’s eyes are focusing. Usually the child is told to sit back and "make sure that the computer can see your eyes". By conducting tasks on a computer that can also track children’s eye movements, researchers can better understand where on the screen children are focusing while they complete a task. The two studies below are examples of eye tracking studies being conducted currently.

The Moving Eyes Game

The world around us is complex, and maintaining focused attention can sometimes be challenging even for adults. The goal of this project is to investigate the developmental course of deliberate selective attention and to examine factors that play a role in attentional selectivity at different points in development. In this project, Dr. Anna Fisher’s research assistants asked children to play a game in which they see several objects moving on a Tobii T60 eye tracker and landing on one of the nine screen locations, each associated with a different cartoon character. Children were asked to watch a particular object (i.e., the target) while ignoring the rest of the objects (i.e., the distracters). When the objects stopped moving and disappeared from the screen, children were asked which cartoon character was last visited by the object they were watching. Every participant plays the Moving Object Game several times, tracking either many objects or just a few objects at a time. Tracking children’s eye movements will help researchers determine (1) how likely children are to glance at distracters and (2) how fast children can locate the target object after glancing away at distracters under different testing conditions.
The Faces Game

Sarah Shade, an undergraduate working with Dr. Anna Fisher, is conducting an honors thesis study that involves children looking at pictures of faces and objects on an eye-tracking computer. Each object array contains a small face, whereas the solitary faces are life-sized. The faces are either neutral or displayed emotions of fear, anger, or sadness. Children see the pictures on the screen for a few seconds and are instructed to “just look at the things you see on the screen the way you would normally look at them”. By using the eye-tracking computer, Sarah can tell where the child focuses attention within each photograph (e.g., particular objects, just the eyes on the face, etc.). In addition, the data from photographs displaying the same emotion can be combined to examine viewing patterns among several children, within each emotion. For this study, parents are also asked to complete a survey on the child’s personality. These data will be used to determine the patterns that emerge when a child’s personality is analyzed with the information on the way he or she views faces. Earlier research showed that the way an adult views faces is related to his or her personality. This study aims to determine whether the same pattern holds for children as well, and if so, how this phenomenon develops over time.

Example pictures:

To examine the developmental pattern over a broader age than Children’s School’s children, Sarah is recruiting children ages 6-11 to participate. If you have a child in this age range and are willing to bring him or her to the lab, please contact Sarah at sshade@andrew.cmu.edu to arrange a time.

Undergraduate Spotlight: Getting to Know You

New Student Employees:

Wendy Shung is new to the Children’s School and will be spending two mornings a week with the 3 year olds. Wendy is a junior this year and is majoring in Mechanical Engineering and Biomedical Engineering. Wendy integrated smoothly into our threes group, and we are happy to have her. Minju Kim has started with our Extended Morning and Afternoon classes. Minju goes by the nickname Min and is currently a sophomore majoring in Biological Science. Min transitioned quickly into the extended day classes and is enjoying spending time with our friends.

Senior Spotlight: Sarah Shade has been with the Children’s School for 2 semesters. She is currently working in the 3’s classroom and has committed to working with us in the 4’s classroom next semester. Sarah is keeping busy by working on her Senior Honors Thesis project (see above), for which she will be conducting sessions with students at the Children’s School, as well as older children. Sarah is looking forward to pursuing a Ph.D. in Clinical Child Psychology after graduating. She is well on her way to her goal of earning a spot on the Carnegie Mellon University Dean’s List. Good luck to Sarah as she works toward the end of her undergraduate career.
School Recommendations

Many families are in the process of making school choices for next year. If you are considering a school that requires a Letter of 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 complete this form and send it with the application to Miss Hancock. She will then send an updated version of your child’s fall conference report to the school(s) of your choice.

Director’s Corner: Work Worth Doing

Last week’s NAEYC Conference in Washington, D.C. inspired both Miss Furman and me to continue what featured speaker Bev Bos dubbed, “working hard at work worth doing.” President Obama’s written welcome to conference attendees encouraged investment in quality education by saying, “We must give our sons and daughters the knowledge and skills they need to compete in this new and changing world by providing a complete and competitive education beginning in early childhood and continuing through adulthood. By fulfilling this commitment, we uphold the founding promise that in America, we can make of our lives what we will, and all things are possible for all people.”

As a laboratory school community, we are already engaged in building firm foundations for lifelong learning in our children, staff, families, undergraduates, researchers, and pre-service / practicing educators. We can strive to improve daily, however, as the “engines of innovation” that keynote speaker Secretary of State Arne Duncan proposed are necessary for developing a more coordinated system for early childhood education that is both developmentally appropriate and focused on essential outcomes, particularly in the domains of literacy, math, and science. The Children’s School staff had already planned to devote some of our spring professional development time to strengthening our learning experiences related to mathematics, and I secured additional resources for that endeavor by attending the National Research Council’s early childhood mathematics session.

Throughout the conference, while listening to educators sharing ideas for engaging preschool and kindergarten learning activities, Bos’ refrain of “working hard at work worth doing” kept ringing in my head. To make both our work and the children’s work worth doing, we must intentionally focus on providing meaningful opportunities for children to develop valuable knowledge, skills, and, I would add, dispositions. Through our thematic studies, we introduce children to new ideas about topics such as “How Things Work” and “Native Americans” (the November preschool and kindergarten units respectively). Through teacher-directed projects and independent play, children then extend and apply their knowledge while building essential skills. For example, preschool teachers introduced and demonstrated concepts like gravity at circle time, lead explorations of simple machines like inclined planes and pulleys during activity time, and provided free play opportunities for solidifying concepts while building ramps in the block area, using scooters on the playground, etc. As Russian psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) aptly noted, “In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior. In play it is as though he were a head taller than himself.” By fostering age-appropriate explorations and play, we endeavor to strengthen each child’s learning dispositions, including curiosity, creativity, critical thinking, and discovery, all of which will inspire them to engage in hard work that yields growth. We hope you’ll join us on the learning journey!