Cans Across the Cut

Thank you for your contributions to the annual CMU Food Drive benefitting the Greater Pittsburgh Food Bank. This year the Children's School collected $200 and 179 food and hygiene items! Throughout this newsletter are many opportunities for you to continue modeling generosity and engaging your whole family in creative acts of kindness. That's a great way to express thankfulness and celebrate holidays.

December Dates:

**NO SCHOOL** – Friday, December 2nd – Parent Teacher Conferences for All Ages

Saturday, December 3rd – Waterfront Barnes & Noble Book Fair (10am-2pm)

Tuesday, December 6th – Extended Morning 4’s Open House 12-1pm

Thursday, December 8th – Extended Morning 3’s Open House 12-1pm

Friday Afternoon, December 9th - Parent Teacher Conferences

Regular School Schedule in the Morning

Thursday, December 15th – Last Day of the Semester for 3’s

Friday, December 16th – Last Day of the Semester for 4’s and Kindergarten

No School for Children – December 19th through January 2nd

Monday & Tuesday, December 19th & 20th - Professional Development Days for Educators

*Have a Wonderful Winter Break!!*

Tuesday, January 3rd – Educators and Children return to school
Help Celebrate Our 50th Anniversary in 2018

In the year 2018, the Children’s School will be 50 years old! We are hoping to celebrate with alumni families as well as those who are currently enrolled. We are looking for volunteers to help plan celebrations, including a reunion party. If you are interested in helping with the preparation and/or if you have some specific ideas, please contact Maggie Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu.

Monthly Teacher Appreciation Events

A big Thank You to the Monthly Teacher Appreciation Events Committee and all of the families who contributed treats for the Children’s School staff. In October, the Kindergarten families contributed fall-themed snacks and in November the 4’s families provided a Thanksgiving feast. The 3’s classes will be contributing celebratory treats on December 13th. If you weren’t able to contribute this semester, we will be asking each class group to provide snacks or lunch once during the spring semester. Please contact Maggie Rosenblum (rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu) if you have any questions.

In Memoriam: Beverly Steinberg

It is with great sadness that we share the news of the passing of retired Children’s School educator, Beverly Steinberg, on November 1, 2016. Bev was hired as an aide in the three-year-old classroom in 1979 and later became the teacher of the Young 3’s classroom in what is now the Red Room. Bev retired from the Children’s School in 2000. She was the wife of the late Erwin Steinberg, a legendary CMU English professor, and is survived by sons, Marc and Alan, grandson, Jared, and sister, Marcia Handelman. Per her family’s request, contributions may be made to the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank. In memory of Bev, all contributions from the Children’s School’s November Food Drive will be given in her memory.
Children’s School
December 2016

Barnes & Noble Book Fair

We hope you can join us on December 3rd from 10 am until 2 pm for our annual Barnes & Noble Book Fair at the Waterfront store. There will be a scavenger hunt, a crafts table where children can decorate a mask and crowns, and Mrs. Bird & Friends will host a lively sing-a-long at 12 noon. 15% of the in-store sales (including the café!) and weeklong on-line sales will benefit the Children’s School library collection.

Ten Thousand Villages Fundraiser

Thank you to everyone who came to Ten Thousand Villages to support our fundraiser. The event was attended by Children’s School families and staff as well as community members who just happened to be out shopping in Squirrel Hill on November 17th. Our net sales were $496.41 and our event raised 7% of that total or $34.75 toward our whole school exploration of Theatre.

Please Avoid Credit/Debit Card Payments

In a few weeks, families will be receiving the spring tuition invoices. Carnegie Mellon University allows 30 days from the date of the invoice for the tuition and fees to be paid. Please note that a link is provided at the bottom of the invoice form for credit card payments. The Children's School is requesting that families NOT pay by credit or debit card because the school is charged a significant fee for these transactions. For your convenience, monthly payment plans can be arranged through Maggie Rosenblum with no penalties or interest charged.

Lost and Found

We have accumulated quite a collection of jackets, barrettes and other items of unlabeled children’s clothing. If your child is missing anything, please look in our lost and found area in the hallway or send a note to your child’s teacher with a description and we will see if we have it!
Winter Health Pointers

WINTER WEAR: As the chilly winter weather approaches, please replenish your child’s extra clothes container 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.

Generous Givers & Gracious Receivers

During the year, we seek to help the learners at the Children’s School become generous givers and gracious receivers. Whether giving and receiving affirmation, help, or actual items, we aim to emphasize respect and gratitude. For example, when collecting food in November, we explained to the children that some of our neighbors in Pittsburgh do not have enough food or enough money to buy food. We can help them stay healthy by sharing nutritious food with them. At other times, people may share food with us, perhaps when we are traveling or when someone in our family is sick. We also emphasize the importance of expressing gratitude verbally or by drawing or writing.

Involving your whole family in helping provides opportunities that go well beyond donation drives in ways that build relationships. A child’s smile, hug, or drawing can brighten a neighbor’s day. Once children have learned skills by helping in their own homes and yards, they can share those skills with their elderly relatives and friends. Families can also share from their abundance when they cook or bake together, when flowers bloom or vegetables ripen, or when they have time to sit and listen. See “14 Little Ways to Encourage Kindness” by Kristine Breese from Parents Magazine for more ideas (http://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/advice/14-little-ways-to-encourage-kindness/?page=1).
Upcoming Screenings re: Ears and Eyes

This year, the Easter Seals Speech, Language, Hearing and Middle Ear Screenings will be held at school during the week of January 17th. Lynn Hofstetter, who has conducted these screenings for many years, will be returning. This speech pathologist plays a series of Talking & Listening games with each child that take about 15 minutes total and give a snapshot of the child’s development in the areas of hearing and listening, direction following, understanding and use of language, speech sound production, voice quality, and fluent communications. If you are interested in having your child screened, please complete the enclosed permission slip and return it with cash or a check for $20 made payable to Easter Seals. Beginning January 31st, the Blind & Vision Rehabilitation Services of Pittsburgh will be conducting screenings for vision issues. There is no cost for this service, but please complete the enclosed permission slip if you want your child screened. Please contact Mrs. Rosenblum at rosenblu@andrew.cmu.edu if you have any questions.

December Gallery Features

3’s Friends: Cheryl H., Holden P., Maggie P., and Zoe S.

4’s Friends: Henry A., Ava B., and Isaiah B-S.

Kindergarten Friends: Owen H., Annika P., and Katharina R.

Beautiful Hands in the Make Shop

Our educators recently beautified the Make Shop as a way of engaging in our own creative design based on the book, “Beautiful Hands” by Bret Baumgarten and Kathryn Otoshi. The Make Shop has been a busy place this fall. September was dedicated to dissembling old electronics, and October focused on sculpture made from wood scraps and then clay with natural elements like twigs, stones, etc. In November, children experimented with light and color, starting with exploring old overhead projectors and then switching to working with black light. Watch for new investigations starting soon!
Family Spotlight: Back in the ‘Burgh

Our family is not originally from Pittsburgh, but we’ve chosen to make it our home for the second time. The first time Nathan and Kara moved to Pittsburgh, we moved for Nathan to attend CMU for graduate school. We were lucky enough to spend 5 years here and send our oldest child, James (now 7), to the Children’s School. He had Mrs. Tomer in the 3’s and Mrs. Cherin in the 4’s. He loved the Children’s School and learned every song they ever taught him. We are so thankful for caring staff and wonderful community. James was not, however, able to attend Kindergarten here because we moved again – this time to Chicago for Nathan to do a post-doc at Northwestern University.

Kara was a teacher and then got a Master’s in Social Work before the first move to Pittsburgh. Since James was born, she has been keeping busy staying at home. Our youngest, Madelyn (1), is a delightful handful. We have, of course, registered her for the Children’s School, too.

This second time we moved to Pittsburgh this past summer, we again moved for Nathan’s work. He now works for CMU as a member of the research staff. It is a good gig: he gets to solve interesting problems for the Software Engineering Institute and work on fundamental social science methodology at the Heinz College of Public Policy.

More importantly, however, now that we are back in Pittsburgh, we get to send our middle child, Lillian (4), to the Children’s School. She is in the 4’s with Mrs. Opferman and amazes us with how different she is from her brother James. She does every art project and tells us everything that ever happens during her day. She loves it here. We couldn’t be happier to rejoin this community that makes us feel like being back in the ‘Burgh is like returning home.

Kara, Nathan, James, Lillian, and Madelyn Van Houdnos
Family Social Organization Fun

On Friday, November 11th, families participated in a Children’s School November tradition: Family Bowling! The children not only had a blast rolling their balls down the lanes, but they displayed incredible sportsmanship: taking turns, sharing techniques, and cheering for each other! A great time was had by all!

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

On Saturday, December 10th, there will be a special screening of Walt Disney's Moana (http://movies.disney.com/moana) for the Children's School friends at the Waterworks Cinema on Freeport Road in Fox Chapel! Tickets are $7.50 for children and $8.00 for adults. Please RSVP with the number of adults and children by Friday, December 2nd. Send ticket money in an envelope marked FSO Movie / Liz Harper. Plan to arrive at 9:30am and the movie will begin at 10:00am. Contact lizstoryharper@yahoo.com with any questions.

“On a mystic island in Polynesia, the young daughter of the chief of the tribe, Moana from Motunui Island, is a girl chosen by the ocean to reunite the heart of Tehiti. She sets sail in search of Maui, a legendary demigod and hopes to save her people.”

Explore these city events during the month of December!

- **Every Saturday and Sunday 12-5pm, November 19th - December 17th: Holiday KidsPlay!**
  Holiday KidsPlay offers activities for all ages. Located in Downtown Pittsburgh on the Cultural District’s 800 block. Activities include comedy workshops, penny arcade crafts, short family-friendly holiday films, story time, and hands-on holiday arts and crafts. www.downtownpittsburghholidays.com/kidsplay/

- **December 1-4th: The Joy of Cookies, Cookie Tour**
  A holiday tradition in Lawrenceville. The tour has become Lawrenceville’s biggest yearly event. Come to support local businesses this holiday season while sampling glorious holiday cookies! For more information, and a printable map of the tour, go to www.lvpgh.com/cookietour2016/

- **Saturday, December 17th: Chatham Baroque’s Holiday Peanut Butter and Jam Session: Sing we Noel!**
  Bring your preschooler to enjoy live music, dancing, and games. McClintic Hall in Calvary Episcopal Church, 315 Shady Ave. 15206. Register for the 10:00am or 11:30am session at https://www.showclix.com/event/peanut-butter-and-jam-sessions

- **Saturday, December 31st, 6-9pm: New Year’s Eve Family Celebration at Phipps!**
  Enjoy an early countdown to the New Year at 8:45pm with your family, while enjoying a variety of activities for children. A New Year’s Eve celebration the whole family can enjoy! Free with membership or paid admission. https://phipps.conservatory.org/calendar/detail/new-years-eve-family-celebration

Peace and Love to all of our families this coming new year! As always, please contact Sara Torretti at storretti@hotmail.com and Jay Miller at jaymiller1@gmail.com (Isaac’s parents, Kindergarten) if you would like to help plan events!
Mrs. Wendolowski’s 2016 NAEYC Experience

Each year, the National Association for the Education of Young Children holds a conference to bring together professionals interested in learning, connecting and growing in their understanding of developmentally appropriate practices. In her address to the attendees, CEO of NAEYC, Rhian Evans Allvin, described the conference as, “the largest and most important gathering of early childhood educators.” This year, the conference was in Los Angeles, California. and I was lucky enough to attend as a 2nd year member of the YPAC (Young Professional Advisory Council). Being a member of YPAC has opened so many doors for me and I am so proud and grateful to learn from the experiences of other young members of the early childhood community from all over the country. This year, the group gathered to reflect on projects we’ve been working on throughout the year, and how we continue to build engagement within NAEYC for other young professionals. YPAC organized a “Bowl and Brew” event at Lucky Strike at LA Live. Here, we met with other young members of NAEYC to learn about what great contributions they are making to their schools and early childhood communities. Also, we bowled and brewed.

One of the highlights of my experiences at NAEYC was listening to keynote speaker, Sonia Manzano. You may know Sonia for her 40 years of playing “Maria” on Sesame Street. Latina Magazine named Manzano, a Carnegie Mellon alum, as one of the “25 Greatest Latino Role Models Ever” for her contributions to enriching diversity on television. She is also a prolific writer and has written children’s and adult books. In her message, she shared a story of being the face of Latino culture on television and about how her real life shared so many similarities to that of Maria, the character she played. She didn’t want to be a Latino character that only shared the kind of food and music that Latino Americans enjoy but to give accurate depictions of how her family loves and lives together. The importance of media representation cannot be ignored. When watching a television program or reading a book, children need to see themselves. They need to feel that, whatever race or nationality, they are a part of the community. Positive role models representing different cultures in the media is one way to send that message. Sonia titled her keynote speech, “E is for Equity,” and her story and message were clear that all children deserve the highest level of education regardless of where they live or how much money their families make.

I attended many sessions during my time at NAEYC. I selected sessions that I knew could be helpful in enriching our themes this year. I specifically enjoyed a session entitled, “Play Attention: A sensory exploration of mindfulness in the early childhood classroom.” Right now, the preschool is doing the Healthy Mind and Body Theme, so attending this session gave me several new breathing and relaxation exercises that I’ve already incorporated into my gym classes this week! I’ve benefitted so much from hearing the ideas of other educators, from how to teach kindness to engaging students with inquiry-based science and social studies experiences. I appreciate this NAEYC experience because I returned to Pittsburgh with new ideas to use in the classroom, cards and email addresses of colleagues I’ve met, and the memory of some really good sushi.
Introduction to Mindfulness

You may have heard the buzz word “mindfulness”, but what is mindfulness and why is it so important? Mindfulness is the idea of purposefully paying attention; an awareness of our thoughts, feelings, environment, and body sensations. Building upon this consciousness, mindfulness also involves acceptance; being aware of your thoughts and feelings without judging them, or believing that they may be “right” or “wrong”. Many studies have shown that practicing mindfulness, even just for a few weeks can bring a wide range of physical, psychological and social benefits. Here at Carnegie Mellon, Dr. J. David Creswell and his Health and Human Performance Lab are leaders in mindfulness research. As an undergraduate, I have had the privilege of learning about mindfulness as a research assistant in this laboratory.

Working at the Children's School for some time now, I recently began to wonder about the benefits of “early intervention” mindfulness, and how it could impact the lives of young children, both inside and outside of the classroom. Interestingly, the research in early childhood mindfulness is pretty slim. This month, I have had the opportunity to work with the Extended Morning friends during the Healthy Mind and Body unit. We started by learning about the “special bell”, where friends listen to the bell and raise their hands when they cannot hear it anymore. This routine helps friends to focus their attention and develops self-regulation. Each week, I’ve been sharing stories during circle time and lunch about being more mindful of our surroundings and our feelings. For example, in “The Lemonade Hurricane” Emma teaches her brother Henry the importance of taking time to breathe. I have helped the friends learn and practice taking time to breathe and calm their bodies through flower breaths, elevator breaths, and balloon breaths. Additionally, Mrs. Bird sang songs with the friends to develop executive control, and we encouraged them to be mindful through extended periods of time on the playground.

Practicing mindfulness helps us and our young friends in many ways. It helps to strengthen our “mental muscle” and bring our focus back to where we want it, when we want it. It helps us become aware of our patterns of behavior, and adaptable when we want to change them. It helps us to be calm through breathing and other mindfulness practices, giving us access to peace regardless of our surrounding environment. It helps us regulate our emotions, through being able to observe and recognize our emotions, as well as to change how we respond to them. Mindfulness helps us become aware of our own thoughts, emotions and senses, which in turn grows our understanding of what other people are experiencing. Finally, mindfulness teaches us resilience; by seeing things objectively, we can develop balance in response to the ups and downs of life. The benefits of mindfulness are enormous, and the idea is that starting mindful practice at a young age can both help children as they grow and likely have ineffable long term benefits as well. I encourage you to explore mindfulness practice and incorporate it into your lives at home. I’m sure the Extended AM friends would love to show you all that they have learned.

Jaclyn Zois, Carnegie Mellon Class of 2017
B.S. Biological Sciences & Psychology
Bringing Theatre Home

Dramatic play in the classroom is a great source of learning for children. We are happy to have our Whole School Theater Arts Unit planned for February so we can bring a little theater into each of our themes. We look forward to sharing our school theater activities with you during our Family Festival on March 9th, but we encourage families to incorporate theater into the home setting as well.

Enacting Books
Have your child choose his or her favorite short and simple book. Help her to list the characters in the book and props or outfits needed to enact the book choice. Making adult clothes and shoes available is a fun twist for the child. Help your child assign characters to parents, siblings, aunts, uncles, or pets. Allow your child to arrange the play how she would like it, and she will become the director of her own play! This same concept can be used for enacting favorite songs.

Fairy Tale Play
In this theatre activity, your children will put a funny spin on a classic fairy tale. A fairy tale play is easy to perform because the audience recognizes the story. This indoor activity can be played for laughs or taken simply as a chance to enact a favorite tale.

Animal Doctor
The word veterinarian is a hard one for some preschoolers. But animal doctor works just fine. Make sure there are available bandages and other first aid items around the house. Grab a stuffed animal and suggest there is something wrong with it, “I think I just heard Brown Bear cry, I hope he’s okay. Will you check?” Let your child play with the bandages, gauze and cold compresses to care for Brown Bear and other stuffed animals.

Paper Bag Puppets
Using paper lunch bags (an inexpensive necessity!), draw faces on the bottom of the bag of a dog, a cat, a bear, a lion, etc. and invite your child to do the same. You can glue items like yarn and feathers to make imaginative puppets. Then you and your child can create a puppet show for the rest of the family!

Playing Restaurant
Set up a playroom or family room as a restaurant or pizza parlor. Menus, a notebook, some pretend food and tables with chairs are great additions to a pretend restaurant. Have your children consider characters or roles that would be in a pizza parlor or restaurant and assign them to other members of the family. Take turns acting as a customer, waiter, cook or hostess.

Costume Fashion Shows
Find some old clothes around the house and make costumes out of them. You can then host a fashion show or help your children create a play of their own. Scarves and capes make fun costumes for children, and they are easy to use.

Gingerbread Man Book and Baking
Incorporating some baking with theater can be fun, too. Baking and then decorating gingerbread cookies is a good cold day activity. Children can decorate the gingerbread with different edible cookie decorations. Once the baking is done, take the time to read the story with your family and help them enact it. See if they can catch the gingerbread man!
Undergraduate Spotlight:  
Student Teacher Reflections

Lindsay Wilson and Madeline Bondi are seniors in U. Pitt’s Combined Accelerated Studies in Education (CASE) Program, a five-year undergrad and Masters program that includes a BS in Applied Developmental Psychology and a M.Ed. in early childhood and special education.

• **Lindsay Wilson** (AM Younger 4’s with Mrs. Bird)  
  *Spending this semester at the Children’s School has provided me with such a rewarding early childhood education experience. Mrs. Bird and all the other Green Room educators have helped me see the classroom through the eyes of the students, and, in return, that viewpoint has made me more aware of what interests, engages, and excites these young learners. I have also learned many classroom management strategies that I can implement in future placements, and someday in a classroom of my own. The children at this school are so bright and curious, and working with them has reminded me of what being a teacher is all about. I would like to thank all of the educators at the Children’s School, as well as the families, for allowing me to apply my studies in education to supporting the preschool program here, and I would love to return in the future.*

• **Madeline Bondi** (Kindergarten with Mrs. Blizman)  
  *I really enjoyed the time I spent this past semester at The Children’s School. I have learned a great deal of information that will benefit me in the future. I am so fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn in such a great environment. All of the kindergarten teachers welcomed me with open arms, and have been great mentors throughout the semester. They have taught me so much. The children have been a joy to work with, I enjoyed watching their creativity and eagerness to learn and try new activities. I hope that my classroom one day can look like the classrooms at The Children’s School. I have enjoyed working with the wonderful students and staff at The Children’s School, and I will miss working with everyone.*
International Studies in Education Interns

For the second year, we are hosting masters level early childhood interns from the University of Pittsburgh’s International Studies in Education program. All of these interns are supporting our afternoon 4’s preschool class and learning with cooperating teachers, Mrs. Cherin and Mrs. Wendolowski.

• Shengnan Li is from Wuhu, China, a city that sits on the southeast bank of the Yangtze River. Her undergraduate major was English education, and she has four years of teaching experience in a public high school in China. She worked at Pitt’s UCDC as a student assistant this summer. In her spare time, she likes playing badminton and basketball.

• Bamboo Xinzhu Liu comes from the Weifang City in China, which is famous for kites. She used to be a TV & Broadcast Journalism student in the Zhejiang University of Media and Communications. She enjoys free hand drawing to capture the scenery while traveling.

• Mengying Qiao comes from Beijing, China. She went to Capital Normal University for her undergraduate years and is currently studying early childhood education. In her free time, she enjoys ice skating and swimming.

• Jingjing Zhang is also from Beijing, China. She majored in electrical engineering at the Beijing University of Posts and Telecommunications. For two years, she taught at the Riverdeep International Education Center, Beijing, China. She also worked as a volunteer in the Higher Achievement Program, plus as a YMCA day camp counselor last summer. She enjoys playing traditional Chinese chess in her free time.

Miss Lin Zhu, our new Educational Intern during the 2016-2017 school year, graduated with a masters in early childhood education from the same program last April, then taught at our June camp, and is now spending her “optional practical training” year with us. Miss Zhu earned her undergraduate degree at Shanghai University in soprano vocal performance and is also trained in Guzheng, a traditional Chinese instrument. Miss Zhu serves as a floating educator, covering for educators who are working on professional development or are taking paid time off. She has also been working on preparing materials from the Heartwood Ethics Curriculum for sharing broadly via the Children’s School web site.
Pittsburgh Alliance of University Schools

From 6:30 until 8:30 pm on November 10th, the Children’s School educators were proud to host an open house and dinner for The Pittsburgh Alliance of University Schools (PAUS). The Alliance was formed this summer to foster collaborative professional development experiences for the educators of Pittsburgh’s five university affiliated schools – The Children’s School, The Cyert Center, The University Child Development Center, The Falk School and The Carlow Campus School. Approximately 70 educators and administrators toured our school and engaged in lively discussions considering how inquiry-based approaches and loose parts explorations can support active learning. After enjoying our taco bar and conversation, our colleagues had opportunities to experiment and create individually and collaboratively before enjoying a dessert of lemon sorbet.
Research Spotlight

The I-Spy Game and The Matching Game

Children learn from the world around them, despite the world being really cluttered. At any given moment children are surrounded by more information than what they can possibly process. Dr. Catarina Vales, a new postdoctoral researcher working with Dr. Anna Fisher, is exploring the knowledge children use to decide where to focus their attention. In her project, the research team is interested in one source of knowledge – semantic knowledge – that might help children orient their attention. Semantic knowledge refers to word meanings (e.g., knowing that the word “cat” refers to the animal cat) and how words are related to one another (e.g., knowing that “cat” and “bear” are both animals, or knowing that “cat” and “mouse” share a thematic relation). Over the preschool years, children’s knowledge of the meaning of words and how they are interconnected deepens, potentially allowing children to attend to their environment in “smarter” ways.

Dr. Vales is investigating the idea that the relationships among words influence how children direct their attention. To do so, preschoolers and kindergartners complete two games across three sessions. In the I-Spy Game, which they play twice, children are asked whether a given target is in an array of pictures (e.g., “Is there a cat on this screen?”). Across screens, sometimes a related item (e.g., “bear” or “mouse”) is also present and sometimes it is not (see screen shot below, left). If children have the knowledge that “cat” are “bear” are related, they should be more likely to notice the “bear” in the array, taking longer to locate the “cat.”

Because children’s knowledge is changing so quickly, researchers also want to make sure that the relations they are testing in the I-Spy Game are known by the children. They assess that knowledge in the Matching Game. In the Matching Game, researchers show children a picture at the top of the screen, and ask them which of two options goes with that picture (see screen shot below, right). For example, children might see a cat at the top and a bear and a cat collar at the bottom. If children have the knowledge that “cat” and “bear” go together because they are animals, they will choose the picture of the bear.

Screen shot of the I-Spy Game

Screen shot of the Matching Game
Director’s Corner: Dramatic Play

“Almost all creativity involves purposeful play.” – Abraham Maslow
“Play gives children a chance to practice what they are learning.” – Fred Rogers

In *Nurturing Creativity: An Essential Mindset for Young Children’s Learning* (Isbell & Yoshizawa, 2016), the authors highlight the 4C’s of 21st Century Learning as Creativity, Communication, Collaboration, and Critical Thinking. These are exactly the skills developed by the rich play experiences I’ve been discussing in this fall’s Director’s Corner series.

Children’s pretend play engages their imaginations as they assume roles of other people and diverse creatures. They invent make-believe actions with imaginary props as they spin scenarios while playing house, school, zoo, restaurant, etc. Such dramatic play involves communication on two levels, both speaking in character while pretending and temporarily stepping out of character to negotiate the setting and plot. For example, this morning’s 3-year-olds were playing with rubber animals and foam blocks. In that context, I heard Mrs. Tomer suggest, “Let’s make houses for the animals” (in her normal tone of voice) and then later when the play developed into a zoo’s animal hospital, “Show me which paw is hurting” (in her most sympathetic veterinarian voice). As children progress to deeper collaboration in their play, they learn to build on each other’s ideas to create intricate story lines but also have to negotiate and compromise when peers have differing ideas. Together, they learn to creatively utilize open-ended materials like blocks, playdough, fabric, and boxes to become whatever their fantasy requires, and they practice solving problems that arise within the scenarios they invent. When trusted adults provide both time and space for dramatic play, as well as both scaffolding to foster richer pretend play (as Mrs. Tomer did in the situation above), children begin to demonstrate increasing persistence such that the play episodes can last for extended periods. According to Isbell and Yoshizawa, these “play experiences develop skills they need now and help prepare them to be creative thinkers, team leaders, and innovators in the future” (p. 97).

During December, the preschoolers will be exploring Building, which naturally leads to dramatic play related to both the construction process and the use of the final structures. For example, after reading about architects and constructions workers, educators will provide opportunities for children to engage in pretend play within the “dramatic play center”, as well as in the block areas, at the playdough tables, etc. At the same time, our kindergartners will be studying the author A.A. Milne, who is most famous for the Winnie-the-Pooh stories. This unit will likely lead children to re-enact the stories with themselves as characters or using stuffed animals, and educators will encourage them to dramatize their own ideas for adventures in the “hundred acre wood” (i.e., the Children’s School playground and Schenley Park).

For families interested in promoting dramatic play, I have included practical tips in the “Bringing Theatre Home” article in this newsletter. I also highly recommend the enclosed piece on *Choosing Playthings* from the Fred Rogers Company. This insightful article explains that common preschool play themes emerge from the developmental tasks challenging children at the moment, answers common parenting questions about weapon play and electronic games, and encourages parents to take a proactive role in providing open-ended toys and time for imaginative and creative play. Perhaps reading it will help us all consider the gifts we offer our young children during the upcoming holiday and vacation season, particularly the gifts of our own time and attention. Enjoy!