Student Teacher Reflections, continued …

• Jennifer Young (Kindergarten with Mrs. Perovich)

This past semester has been amazing and I can’t thank the staff and my fabulous kindergartners enough for making my time at Children’s School such a great experience. This program truly exemplifies how important a high quality early childhood program is for children. I have really enjoyed working with such a knowledgeable and helpful staff this past semester. The smiles on the children’s faces when they joined me at the rotunda each morning made my day. One of my favorite parts of this experience has been the freedom to plan and implement my own lessons. There are so many wonderful resources available at the Children’s School, which helped me stretch my creativity to give the children the best experience possible. Mrs. Perovich, Mrs. Armbruster, and Mrs. Blizman have been so welcoming and open to my ideas throughout the term, and I love the way we were able to merge our different personalities in the Kindergarten classroom. Next semester, I will be teaching in a life skills classroom; and although I am sad to leave the Children’s School, I am very excited to see what this new student teaching experience has in store for me. I know that all of the tools I have gained this past semester will be extremely useful in my future teaching.

Research Spotlight

The Let’s Balance Game

One of the Research Methods groups tested the impact of encouragement on gross motor skill performance. Encouragement is particularly interesting because it is free and widely available. According to current research, it has the power to motivate and increase children’s attention. In the Let’s Balance game, researchers used verbal (“Good job!”) and physical (high-fives) forms of encouragement to investigate their effects on balancing task performance. Children did five simple balancing tasks to see how long they could sustain each task (up to 20 seconds each). The tasks included balancing on each foot, tiptoeing, and yoga tree poses on each foot. Children in one group received encouragement after performing each gross motor task, and those in the other group received the verbal encouragement and high-fives only after all the tasks were completed. Randomly assigning children to one of the two conditions allowed the students to test whether the timing of encouragement would cause a significant change in balancing task performance, which might then help parents and educators make decisions about the timing of their encouragement as children attempt challenging tasks.
Research Spotlight, continued …

The Playdough Game

Another group of Research Methods students tested if there are differences in preschool children’s willingness to share items depends on how enticing the items are. They randomly assigned children to a “bland” playdough condition and an “enticing” playdough condition, with an off-white playdough contrasted with green, sparkly, vanilla-scented playdough. Regardless of the type of playdough, they assessed willingness to share by asking a series of prompts, which progressed from just general conversation (“How are you doing today?”) to indirect hints for sharing (“That’s really fun playdough!”) to direct requests for sharing (“How much playdough are you willing to share?”). Researchers responded to children’s sharing by saying, “Thank you!” and to non-sharing with, “That’s okay!” The students also investigated whether there was a difference in sharing behavior depending on the birth order of the children. The goal of the experiment is to better understand how sharing skills develop in young children in order to be able to better facilitate healthy sharing skills among peers.

The Faces Game

Yet another Research Methods group designed a study related to recognizing emotions in others based on the age of the child and the gender of both the child and the face. The student researchers hypothesized that five year olds would perform better than three year olds on the task, and they wondered whether children would all be better at recognizing female emotions because of greater time spent with female caregivers, whether that bias would be reduced in older children, or whether the gender of the child would matter. During the study, children see a 2-by-2 grid with four faces, each expressing one emotion - either happy, surprised, sad, or scared. Children were then asked which friend was expressing a certain emotion (for example, “Can you point to the person feeling happy?”). Children answered two such questions per grid and then played the game twice, once with a set of female faces and once with a set of male faces.