Music & Movement Classes

Welcome back, Lauren Hraber! Mrs. Hraber conducts Music and Movement classes with all of the children at the Children’s School every other week. Our first classes for the fall were held on September 28th and will continue approximately every other week for the rest of the school year.

Lauren Hraber is an experienced preschool and elementary music teacher with a MED in Special Education from the University of Pittsburgh and a BFA in Piano Performance from Carnegie Mellon University. She spent 10 years teaching General Elementary Music in Baldwin–Whitehall, Woodland Hills, and Canton City Schools. Lauren founded Piano Tots for preschoolers and has spent the last 10 years teaching Piano Tots classes. Presently, Lauren serves as the music teacher at several preschools in the Pittsburgh area. Lauren’s family includes husband Zach and 2 children - Maddy & Jax, a Children’s School alum.

Keeping Parents Informed about Research

The Research Spotlight section of the monthly newsletter is one way Children’s School parents can learn about research in progress. Also, each time your child participates in a study that involves playing a “game” with a researcher (i.e., as opposed to merely being observed), he or she will get a participation sticker suggesting that you, “Ask me about the … game” and a study description detailing the task. We also have recent articles resulting from Children’s School research posted on the school web site (www.psy.cmu.edu/childrensschool) and a notebook of articles in the office. Feel free to contact Dr. Carver to discuss any questions you have about research.

Observations for Psychology Assignments: Students from Dr. David Rakison’s Child Development class conduct periodic observations throughout the fall. For each assignment, they observe specific differences between preschoolers and kindergartners in motor skills, social interactions, language, etc.

Research Methods Class Studies: Students in Professor Anna Fisher’s Developmental Research Methods class will start with a lab entitled The I Spy Game to investigate children’s attention and distractibility while finding all instances of a certain object (e.g., strawberries) on a sheet with about 100 diverse objects. Children play the game twice, once with the secondary researcher sitting and observing quietly (as is typical in studies with multiple researchers) and once with the secondary researcher playing “Fruit Splash” on a smart phone with the volume set to low. The distracting effects of background television on children’s play are well established, but there is little research on the impact of other electronic devices in children’s environment. Later in the semester, the students will work in small groups to conduct a study of their own design, which will be approved both by their instructor and by Dr. Carver. Watch for their research questions in the November newsletter!
Research Spotlight

The iPad Game

Cassandra Eng, a second year graduate student working with Dr. Erik Thiessen, is studying the vocalizations young children make in response to stories presented in typical book format and via iPad with animations embedded within the story. In collaboration with children’s author and illustrator Thacher Hurd, the research team aims to determine if the animations encourage children to vocalize more frequently than would a normal storybook. During each session, a researcher reads the child two stories on an iPad, *Cat’s Pajamas* (Hurd, 2000) and *Zoom City* (Hurd, 1998). One of the iPad stories was interactive: the pictures animated whenever the child vocalized. For example, if the child repeated the researcher after she read “boom, bang, boom!”, the experimenter in another room with a one-way observation window would activate an animation of the illustration of a drum beating. In other words, the child’s vocalizations caused the animations. The other iPad story was not interactive: the pictures animated before the researcher read the page regardless of whether or not the child vocalized. The order of the two story types varies, and children’s responses are videotaped so the researchers can compare their vocalizations across the two conditions. Because literacy skills are closely linked to a child’s earliest experiences with books and stories—and there is increasing use of electronic books accessible through computers, apps, and tablets—the researchers are investigating whether the addition of interactive features in an e-book could support children’s understanding of the story.

In between stories, a researcher played an I Spy game with the child. The researcher asked the child to find all of the bowling pins in the picture below. Through this game, the research team is investigating how children develop the ability to ignore distractions while working on a task. They want to determine whether the interactive iPad story is especially useful for young children who are still developing the ability to ignore distractions. They hypothesize that the animations in the interactive iPad book will draw the child’s attention to the important elements of the story, thus increasing comprehension. The study results may inform the development of future electronic books for children.

The Matching Line Game

Dr. Erez Freud, a postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Psychology, is working with Dr. Marlene Behrmann, on a research study that aims to characterize the development of visual object perception. The ability to accurately perceive objects is crucial for every aspect of our lives from childhood through adulthood. To shed light on the emergence of this ability, researchers play the “matching-line game” with the children. In this game, the children are asked to match the length of a line presented on a computer screen to the size of a real object using a mouse to adjust the line length. Researchers then measure the accuracy and variability of the estimates. This study will help determine the extent to which precise shape sensitivity exists in children aged 5-6 years old.