Undergraduate Spotlight

Rachel McKinney has always enjoyed working with children, which is why she is so excited to be a part of the undergraduate support staff at the Children’s School! As a classroom assistant in the PM 3’s class, she has enjoyed getting to know the children through various playground activities. She says, “Interacting with the children through play is an incredible experience because you get to see them learn while also having a ton of fun. At this age, they learn so much through exploring their environment, and they also intuitively apply the concepts and skills taught in the classroom in a way that is unparalleled outside of childhood.”

Rachel is a freshman psychology major following the pre-med track, and she aspires to someday work in developmental pediatrics or child psychiatry. Before coming to the Children’s School, she discovered her passion for working with children in a similar role as a Big Helper in her high school’s Early Childhood Development class. She writes, “Working with preschool-age children on a daily basis was an incredibly rewarding experience, and I learned so much about not only the children, but also about myself through that class. I am thrilled to have this opportunity once more as a classroom assistant in the Children’s School!”

Student Teacher Reflections

Kayla Kirschenmann and Jennifer Young 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.

• Kayla Kirschenmann (AM Older 4’s with Mrs. Bird)

It is hard to believe that my time here at the Children’s School is coming to a close. The staff and children have been so welcoming. I have enjoyed seeing the students’ smiling faces everyday. The best part of my day was talking with the children and hearing their stories. I have learned so much from the students while working with them. They welcomed me into their classroom and let me try different activities with them. My time here has been one of the best experiences I have had. I have learned so many valuable things that I will take with me in my other teaching experiences. The team of teachers I worked with taught me so much about collaborating and sharing ideas. Learning from Mrs. Bird was a joy. She has taught me so much about how to be the best teacher possible. Watching her interact with the children inspired me everyday to do better. I am truly grateful for being able to work at the Children’s School.
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.