

Nursery School News

A Monthly Newsletter of St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School

1066 Washington Road · Pittsburgh, PA · 15228 · (412) 531-2644



Volume XXXIV, Issue 6

April 2005

From Jane: The Importance of Play

"One way to think about play is as the process of finding new combinations for known things - combinations that may yield new forms of expression, new inventions, new discoveries and new solutions. I like thinking about play in this way because it gives play some of the importance it deserves."

Fred Rogers

Lately educational research, trends, and the media have placed lots of emphasis on young children's intellectual development, and particularly "school readiness." We also have spent a lot of time here at St. Paul's looking at these very issues as we have worked to better align our curriculum with Mt. Lebanon's new kindergarten curriculum. But at the same time, while endeavoring to stay connected to what is current in the world of early childhood education, it is still extremely important to remember that *how* (not what) young children learn and their basic developmental needs have not changed.

Play is *still* the work of childhood. It is also *still* the single most valuable source and activity that children use to learn. When we eliminate play from the early childhood curriculum we are eliminating the primary catalyst for *all domains of learning* during early childhood. Creative play naturally encompasses social, emotional, physical, kinesthetic, perceptual, intellectual, and linguistic development.

Child development research over the past five decades has firmly established that creative play is essential to, and translates into, positive academic gains. It is through play that children learn to symbolize objects and events, delay gratification, practice self-regulation, assimilate adult roles, exercise imagination, practice motor skills, develop emotional and social skills, and develop and practice verbal literacy.

Children have spontaneously played since the beginning of time, and as a result people take it for granted. Unfortunately, when many people think about school (even preschool), play is often relegated to a form of activity that is allowed only after the more important "real work" activities are completed. It is all too often not really considered to be a legitimate school activity - even in preschool!

According to Nancy Curry Ph.D., the higher on the phylogenetic scale animals are, the longer their childhood and the more that they play. Snakes and other reptiles, who are born to be independent and do not have a nurturing time with parents, do not play. Dolphins, on the other hand, seem to retain their playfulness into adulthood, much as we humans do. Humans, who have the longest period of childhood of all the species, also produce the most variety of play.

Inside this issue:

From Jane	1-3
May Fair	4
Bricks	5
Summer Program	5
Conferences	5
School Calendars	6-7

From Jane: (Continued)

Piaget classified play into four distinct areas that include sensori-motor, constructive, symbolic, and games with rules. It is interesting to look at each of these categories of play in order to understand how each type of play parallels intellectual development and the role that each type of play has in the learning process.

- (1) **Sensori-motor Play** - Sensori-motor play begins in infancy and continues through adulthood. During preschool sensori-motor play includes touching, feeling, moving things around, throwing, dropping, testing how things move and work. It also includes children's testing of body competence by hopping, pulling, running, climbing, tricycle riding, etc. Children practice skills that will build the foundation for more complicated and refined sensori-motor skills used later for complex physical tasks, games, and sports.
- (2) **Constructive Play** - Constructive play occurs when children manipulate objects to build or create something. This includes building complex models with blocks, manipulatives, and constructing art projects out of various media. This type of play takes up much of a preschooler's day. This level of play gives children practice modeling and understanding what they see and making connections in the world around them.
- (3) **Symbolic or Dramatic Play** - Symbolic play is at its height during the preschool years. It includes both socio-dramatic play, where two or more children act out play scenes together, and parallel play, or solitary dramatic play. Children first imitate simple care-giving activities done to them by loved adults in their lives such as feeding and being put to bed. This is often done in the parallel play mode of two year olds or young 3's. Later the play becomes more complicated and imaginative as they abstract salient features of another's role such as mother, father, fireman, policeman, or baby. For this type of play to occur children must engage in discussion and come to an agreement about their roles and what certain objects will represent. They must also work out an understanding about how each of the actors embodying the roles (e.g. mommy, baby) may or may not interact with one another. In order to remain welcome in the play group, they must subordinate their egocentric ideas and impulses to the shared ideas of the group. Symbolic or "make believe play" is profoundly important to the development of language and literacy. In order to participate successfully in socio-dramatic play, children must acquire a rich vocabulary, the ability to understand and follow a narrative, and the capacity to understand and empathize with the characters they encounter. All of these skills are necessary for later school tasks, especially reading comprehension. The level of understanding necessary for later problem solving during more complex academics must *first* be learned through active play.
- (4) **Games-with-Rules** - Games-with-rules generally comes into play during the early elementary school years and includes simple games such as age appropriate board games. This stage begins once a child is interested in focusing and concentrating on concrete tasks such as writing out letters, and making connections between sounds and letters and other pre-reading skills for some pre-school children.

When young children are not allowed to play and are only taught isolated facts by rote memorization, they will not have the knowledge and disposition for learning in order to build a strong foundation for the kind of comprehension that is essential to succeed in later complex academic tasks. According to Vivian Vasquez, Professor at American University, "The problem with the focus on readiness is that often it is code for focusing primarily on rote phonics instruction."

From Jane: (Continued)

" This," she explains, "is very different from building a curriculum based on the issues and questions that are important to children. Children need to do more than break the phonics code."

We still need to introduce and expose children to letters, books, and a variety of literacy experiences. A curriculum during preschool that is based on play and the child's own interests will allow for many rich and varied forms of literacy, and will be far more likely to produce learners who are able to use their literacy skills to do important life work. Those of us who are lucky enough to find careers that truly satisfy us know that much of our work has a creative or playful quality that makes it rewarding and fulfilling. So, respecting and encouraging play is not only important for children's future learning, but is also an important part of becoming a productive, balanced, and creative adult who can genuinely enjoy life!

According to William Page Ph.D. play does the following:

- **Play develops curiosity.** When children play they become inquisitive and desire to find out about things naturally. They learn to enjoy learning.
- **Play encourages children to take risks.** Children learn to take risks and think on their own. Children try many new things in a non-threatening environment.
- **During play children make their own choices.** When children can make their own choices, they develop a sense of control and self-confidence.
- **Through play children discover their own special talents.** There is no right or wrong, they "play their way."
- **Play builds social relationships.** Children need to negotiate, share, cooperate, and respect the rights of others in order to play with others.
- **Play is how children make things less scary.** They work out their fears, emotions, and concerns, putting them into "child size proportions."
- **Play rejuvenates.** Anyone who plays can find something new in each experience, each day. This gives a continued enthusiasm for life and rings renewal - the very basis for a happy life.

"Play is much more than fun and leisure time for your child. It's "work." In fact, through the play process children learn together and create their own unique experience. No textbook can create that."

William Page

Mayfair Picnic 2005

Saturday, May 21, 11:00 - 2:00

As I explained in the last newsletter, this year we are going to combine Mayfair with our yearend picnic. Because you all worked so hard and participated in our fall wine tasting fund raiser all we need to do is cover our expenses for Mayfair, we no longer need to use the event to raise funds for the school. At this point we are fortunate enough to simply enjoy our Mayfair as a fun end-of-year party for the children and their families.

In order to cover our expenses admission to Mayfair will be \$5.00. The admission fee will include all of little games with prizes and 3 free tickets, 1 each for the pony ride, train ride, and moon bounce. If children would like to participate in any of the ride activities more than once they may buy extra tickets for \$1.00 each on the day of the fair. Your purchase of an admission ticket will allow you a chance to win the door prize of a hanging basket of flowers, to be presented to the winner at the end of the day.

So participation in the activities will be as follows:

- Moonwalk - 1 ticket
- Train ride - 1 ticket
- Pony rides - 1 ticket
- All games for free
- Balloon designs for free
- Face painting for free

Another change will be that the teachers have offered to staff the games and activity booths this year so that the parents will be free to enjoy the day with their children. If anyone would like to help the teachers out and offer to be a floater to help out with the activities and games - let the Mayfair chairs know.



Mayfair Plant Sale

Becky Brinch is chairing our plant sale this year. Flyers for perennial pre-orders will be available in the near future. You may pre-order perennials or purchase annuals the day of Mayfair. Many people have found pre-ordering annuals confusing and have suggested that they would like to be able to see the annuals and make their choice at the time of purchase - so the day of Mayfair would be your opportunity to do so.

If you are interested in helping sort orders on Friday, May 20th or selling annuals the day of Mayfair you should contact Becky Brinch at 412-561-3641.

Simply St. Paul's Strawberry Jam

Once again Mindy Hudson's classes will be making our "Simply St. Paul's" strawberry jam this year. Contributions of sugar, liquid fruit pectin (Certo) and mason jars (1/2 pint and pint sizes) will be gratefully accepted in the red box in Jane's office. Jars do NOT need to be new, just clean and unbroken. New rings and lids will be purchased. Any questions, ask Mindy.



Prizes



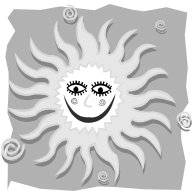
A wonderful opportunity to get rid of McDonald's or other kids meal give-aways! Drop them off in Jane's office and we'll use them for prizes at Mayfair.

If you would like to volunteer in any way contact either Rosetta Coco at 412-341-6557 or Laverne Duffy at 412-344-2204 - Mayfair 2005 co-chairs.

Bricks



Included with this newsletter is a form to fill out if you would like a personally inscribed playground brick for your child and family. Please turn your completed form in with your check to Kathi Workman by the last day of school in order to have your family's brick included on our playground walk. We will place the orders and have the bricks installed over the summer. Any questions, ask Jane.



Summer Program

The summer program registration forms are now in Kathi's office. This year summer program will again be directed by Mindy Hudson and staffed by St. Paul's teachers. The program runs from June 20th through July 29th. Children must be 3 years of age by no later than *January 1, 2005* or have completed a 2 day class at St. Paul's and must be toilet trained (for health reasons).

This year we are asking for up to 3 weeks payment at the time of registration with the remainder (if there are subsequent weeks) due by June 20, 2005. Refunds for withdrawal will be made if the request is received at least **two (2) weeks** before the first day of the program. We look forward to a fun time and thank you for your cooperation with our new policies!

Conferences

Teachers are currently doing their year-end conferences. Be sure to sign up for a conference (check classroom bulletin board for sign-up list). If you are unable to meet with your child's teacher during the designated conference time please speak with her or call her and make arrangements for a better time.



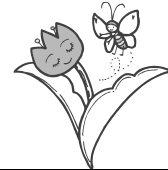
Hot Topic

Join us on Tuesday, April 12 at 7:30 p.m. in the St. Paul's Church Lounge for a presentation by Rachel K. Miller, Occupational Therapist. She will discuss the importance of fine motor skill development, including developmental milestones for children ages 2-6. Development of these skills at an early age is important for building upper body strength, as well as hand and finger dexterity needed later to hold a pencil properly and maintain that grip for the duration of an elementary writing activity. She will present simple and practical things parents can do to help children develop fine motor control and improve upper body strength. This should be both interesting and informative!

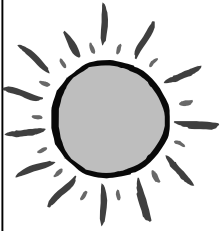
Mark Your Calendar For St. Paul's Activities and Events



April 2005



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
					1	2
3 Daylight Savings begins	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12 Hot Topic with Rachel Miller 7:30 p.m.	13	14	15	16
17 	18	19	20	21	22 Earth Day	23
24	25	26	27	28	29	30



May 2005



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8 	9	10	11	12	13	14
15 	16	17	18	19	20	21 May Fair
22	23	24	25	26	27 Last Day of School	28
29	30 Memorial Day	31				