



SUMMER 2009

Nursery School News

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL NURSERY SCHOOL

Director's Dialogue

Why Children Need to Play

"The importance of play to young children's healthy development and learning has been documented beyond question by research. Yet play is rapidly disappearing from kindergarten and early education as a whole. The stifling of play has dire consequences – not only for children but for the future of our nation."

The Alliance for Childhood – Crises in the Kindergarten, 2009

It's summer, a time to kick back and relax – or at least it used to be. When my own children were growing up summer was a time when kids mostly just hung out. In fact, if there was any kind of structured activity beyond school in children's lives, those activities typically came to a stop during the summer months. Admittedly, when my own children were young I did not work, which simplified my life in terms of needing some sort of child care/activities during the summer. But still, the overall sense of summer time was that it was really OK for kids to just enjoy unstructured free time. Oh, there was sleep over camp by the time a child was nine or ten – not sports camp or some other "specialized" camp complete with incredibly intrusive video cameras that enable parents to totally micro-manage their children in order to be reassured 24/7 that their child is having a perfect and completely safe time of it. But today, we tend to feel guilty and anxious, as though we are being bad and neglectful parents, if we do not have our children's (even preschoolers) summer weeks fully planned out with every type of "enrichment" activity available on the face of the earth. Is this necessarily a bad thing? Truthfully I am not really sure.

I do know that we may have tipped the balance too far in the direction of structure for children. Lately there have been a number of excellent studies that show the harmful effects of too much adult supervised and non child-directed free form activity in young children's lives. That free form, non adult directed activity would of course be play, particularly solitary dramatic and socio-dramatic play – the kind of play that children love to participate in when they have been given the time and freedom to develop the social, emotional, and intellectual skills necessary to be good players.

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CALENDAR

September

Tuesday, September 8
School Begins

Monday, September 14
Parent Orientation
7:00 pm

October

Monday, October 12
Open House
7:00 – 8:00 pm

Monday, October 19
Open House
7:00 – 8:00 pm

Tuesday, October 27 &
Wednesday, October 28
No School
Parent Teacher Conferences

Saturday, October 31
Halloween

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Don't forget to download all necessary forms from the web site and fill them out prior to your child's first day of school.

VISITING DAY SCHEDULE

Tuesday, September 8th
4 day classes
T/TH classes

Wednesday, September 9th
MWF classes

Staff Changes and Additions

As most of you probably already know, Rita Neher retired this spring and she and her husband, Ken, have moved to Winston Salem, NC. As a result a couple of our current staff members have moved around.

Next year, **Marianne DeVito** will co-teach with **Erin Rutter** in the Tuesday – Friday am and pm classes. **Pat Hurd** will now be the assistant with **Pam Countouris** in her morning 4 day class and her afternoon 3 day class.

Leanne Simmons, who last year taught art with Heather Herbay, will now move into Joan's 2 day morning class as the third assistant.

I am also pleased to add 2 highly qualified volunteers who will be working with the oldest children. **Nancy VonderPorton**, who years ago taught at St. Paul's and recently retired as the lead kindergarten teacher at St. Edmunds Academy and **Jan Rankin**, who just retired from teaching kindergarten in Upper St. Clair are both going to join us in a volunteer capacity. Both Jan, whose child graduated from St. Paul's many years ago, and Nancy were ready to retire from full time teaching, but not ready to entirely leave the field of early childhood education. So I am the recipient of two fabulous teachers and as a result, very excited about adding their expertise and experience to our staff.

Fall Opening Reminders

I can now turn my thoughts to September and the changes that will occur as new groups of children are formed and new friendships are made.

The staff and I look forward to welcoming the new children and their families who will be coming in September, and of course we look forward to seeing the children and parents who will be returning.

You will be getting a call from your child's teacher to arrange for a home visit in late August. The purpose of the home visit is for the teacher to begin to make her first connection with you and your child in order to help them make a more comfortable transition to a new situation. It is also a time for the teacher to speak with you on a one to one basis to hear what your expectations are for the year, to begin to educate you about what we do here with the children during their day, to answer questions and to hear any concerns that you may have about your child in school.

Don't forget to [download all necessary information forms](#) from the web site and fill them out prior to your child's first day of school. **No child may be left at school without a completed emergency card.** If you would prefer a hard copy of the forms you may either stop by the school and pick them up, or we would be glad to mail you copies if you call the school at 412-531-2644 or e-mail Kathi Workman at kworkman@stpaulspgh.org. Thanks in advance for your cooperation in getting all of the paper work done that we are required by our NAEYC accreditation to have on file.

The first day of school will be Tuesday, September 8th and will be a visiting day for everyone who attends school on Tuesdays. For children in a MWF class their first day will be Wednesday, September 9th.

A visiting day permits parents to stay with their child and makes the separation easier. Parent Toddler classes will begin on their regularly scheduled day, either Friday, September 11th or Monday September 14th.

Director's Dialogue cont.

So, what are the benefits of free play versus structured activities? Free play is critical for becoming socially adept, coping with stress and building the cognitive skills necessary for a productive life. According to a paper published in 2005 in the *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, children's free play time dropped by a quarter (that's huge!) between 1981 and 1997. Concerned about getting their kids into the right colleges and all kinds of safety fear issues, parents are sacrificing unstructured playtime for adult supervised activities. As early as preschool, youngsters' after-school hours are now being filled with music lessons, tutoring, and sports – reducing time for the type of imaginative and rambunctious cavorting that fosters creativity, cooperation, and a strong sense of self.

Parents often comment to me that children “play” soccer or violin, so why are experts worried about these activities eating into free play time? Certainly games with rules can be fun and sources of learning experiences, and they may even foster some social skills and group cohesion. But according to Anthony Pellegrini, an educational psychologist from the University of Minnesota, “games have a priori rules – set up in advance by adults and followed. Play, on the other hand, does not have a priori rules, so it affords more creative and ultimately complex responses.”

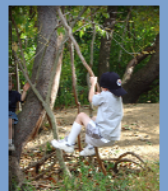
This creative aspect is key because it challenges the developing brain more than following predetermined rules does. In free play, children use their imagination and try out new activities and create roles. The child is the one who initiates and creates free play which ensures that they are totally focused and truly engaged in the activity. It might involve fantasies – such as pretending to be doctors or princesses or playing house – or it might include mock fighting, as when kids (primarily boys) wrestle and tumble with one another so that neither of them always wins. And free play is most similar to play seen in the animal kingdom which, according to many anthropologists, is indicative of its importance in terms of our evolutionary roots and human development.

Relieving stress and building social skills may seem to be obvious benefits of play. But research hints at a third, more counterintuitive area of influence: *play actually appears to make kids smarter.* Adult directed, structured activities typically require only “mid-level” thinking skills. In adult directed activities there are no real problems to be solved, only pre-determined rules, directions, and perhaps some memorization are required. From a developmental perspective, young children's minds need to be more complexly challenged through the realm of creative play. When we fill their time with too much adult directed structure, the cost of the absence of play is truly harmful to a child's intellectual development.

Neuroscientists believe that play serves as a kind of training for the unexpected. “Play is like a kaleidoscope,” says evolutionary biologist Marc Bekoff, in that it is random and creative. The bottom line, he posits, is that play encourages flexibility and creativity that may, in the future be advantageous in unexpected situations or new environments. According to David Elkind, play is “a way in which children learn, and in the absence of play, children miss learning experiences.”

So...if play is so crucial what happens to children who are not playing enough? Ultimately no one really knows at this point – but many psychologists are worried. “Because play is somewhat risky – animals that are not alert and watchful are at risk of being attacked by predators – it probably evolved and persists because it confers survival advantages. If it wasn't important, it wouldn't have evolved in its elaborate form,” says Bekoff.

“Play actually appears to make kids smarter.”



Director's Dialogue cont.

In fact, the higher on the phylogenetic scale animals are, the longer their childhood and the more they play. Snakes and other reptiles who are born to be independent and do not have a nurturing time with parents do not ever play. Dolphins, on the other hand, who are highly intelligent and have extended periods of parental nurturing, play while maturing and seem to maintain much of their playfulness into adulthood, not unlike humans.

Many parents today believe they are acting in their child's best interest when they swap free play for what they see as more valuable learning activities. Some parents may also hesitate to let their children play outside unattended, and may fret about the possibility of the messiness, scrapes and broken bones that sometimes arise during play fighting or rambunctious fantasy play. According to Sergio Pellis, a behavioral neuroscientist at the University of Lethbridge in Canada, "Although those instincts are natural, over protecting kids simply defers those costs to later, when those same children will have difficulty in dealing with an unpredictable and complex world. A child who has had a rich exposure to social play experiences is much more likely to become an adult who can manage unpredictable social situations."

And finally, according to David Elkind, "Parents should allow their children to be children-not just because it should be fun to be a child but because denying youth's unfettered joys keeps kids from developing into inquisitive, creative creatures." Elkind warns, "Play has to be reframed and seen not as an opposite to learning but rather as a complement. Curiosity, imagination and creativity are like muscles: if you don't use them, you lose them."

So folks, don't feel guilty if you have not enrolled your child in every possible organized activity available for preschoolers. And don't feel like a totally irresponsible parent if you let your kid leave the house – and the TV and computer - to play outside in the yard from time to time. We really do need to allow our children some freedom in their young lives and to respect their right to have a childhood.

When you think back to your own childhood it is most likely the time that you spent on your own or with your peers, in your own world of childhood that you remember most clearly and fondly. It is probably not an accident that when children who have long since graduated from St. Paul's come back for a visit, the two things that they most consistently remember about preschool are the Big Room and "dirt mountain" on the play ground. Interestingly, when I ask they rarely remember anything about their classroom, or what went on there. What they do remember are the spaces and activities that were the most unstructured and entailed the least adult supervision. And that is because those activities were the ones that provided the most profound and lasting learning experiences!

Summer Program

Once again, summer program was enjoyed by all. As a staff, the summer program always reminds us that children thrive and learn best in a relaxed, low stress environment with lots of free choice and enriched child directed activities. It also reminds us that preschoolers are still very young, and even though we feel a responsibility and do our best to address the increased academic expectations of our public school's system, we must always be sure not to push to the point of too much stress. Like everything else in life, we need to find a balance that offers an appropriate and comfortable challenge for each individual child.

Many thanks to our fantastic staff that included Dottie Lust, Pat Hurd, Stephanie Woodruff, Eileen Sharbargh, and Martha Hudak. Also thanks to our college and high school staff and volunteers that included Caroline Hurd, Beth DeVito, Kate and Anna Sweeney, and Colleen and Maddie Carlos.

Now I am off to Canada once again for the better part of August to spend time relaxing on the Rideau, a beautiful lake in Perth, Ontario where my husband and I vacation every summer. In the mean time, I hope everyone enjoys the rest of the summer and has a safe and relaxing time. See you all in September!



"...children thrive and learn best in a relaxed, low stress environment."

Lunch Bunch

LUNCH BUNCH

We will continue to offer this popular program. [Lunch Bunch](#) is offered Monday – Friday. Morning children should be picked up at 12:30 pm and afternoon children should be dropped off at 11:40 am. Kathi Workman will distribute signup sheets with complete instructions after the first week of school.

LUNCH AND MORE

St. Paul's is pleased to offer a new program that includes an extended day Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. This new pilot program will be available to the children in the 4 day am classes who wish to stay for lunch and then extend their day until 2:00 pm. All 4 day am children should have received information about this new program. If anyone has questions about the program they should call the school.



Parent Volunteer Opportunities

Volunteers are an important part of our school. Parents often ask me how they can help, so listed below are some of our most needed volunteer jobs. If you would like to participate in any of the following [volunteer opportunities](#) please contact me here at the school – 412-531-2644 or e-mail me at jadams@stpaulspgh.org. or Mel Woods, at 412-563-3451 or e-mail at jeffmel@verizon.net.

Homeroom Parent Volunteer - Homeroom parents are needed for each class. Homeroom parents play an important role in the school, especially in terms of communication between parents and teachers about many important events such as field trips, Fall Fundraiser, snow days, class parties, and other things that your child's teacher may need to let parents know about throughout the year. It is also a great way to get to know other parents in your child's class and to get to know your child's teacher. If you would be interested in being a homeroom parents please let me, or your child's teacher know.

Fall Fundraiser Volunteers - As far as the Fall Fundraiser goes there are many different types of opportunities large and small, for you to share your time, interests, and abilities. It takes help on many levels and from lots of parents to put this fun event together! We will need people to help organize the food and decorations for the evening, to help collect and organize items for the raffle baskets, and we also needs lots of help in getting auction items. In the past we have gotten fantastic tickets to sports and cultural events, signed sports memorabilia, use of vacation homes at nearby locations such as Hidden Valley or Seven springs, unique jewelry items, photography, restaurant dining, activity passes to museums and the zoo – just to name a few. If you have ideas, contacts, and /or would like to serve the auction committee please let me know.

Santa Breakfast – We will need a couple of people to chair this event as well as some people to help with set up the day before. This volunteer opportunity primarily consists of getting out the invitations and organizing the food (bagels, fruit, and coffee) for the breakfast. Both Santa and Margaret, our music teacher, are already set to go!

Board Member – Each year in the spring parents are encouraged to send in a resume if they would be interested in serving on the Nursery School Board. The Board is primarily responsible for the overall school governance, which includes overseeing school policies and finances. If you would be interested in serving on the board or have questions about what it would entail please stop by the office and I would be glad to talk with you and answer any question that you might have.



ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL NURSERY SCHOOL

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We're on the Web!

Visit us at:
www.stpaulsnurseryschool.com

Save Your Junk

We use a lot of recyclables for our art program. The children use these materials for projects in order to encourage hands on exploration, learning, and creativity as they choose their own materials to create many different kinds of representations. This type of child directed self expression encourages self initiative and a solid self-concept for young children. Young children immensely enjoy representing the "culture of childhood" by creating models of all sorts of things that are universally fascinating from vehicles to dinosaurs, through the use of interesting materials that they can choose from on their own. With that in mind, please save any of the following items for the school and place them in the large recycle box outside of my office:

United Way Option

Again, this time of year St. Paul's will participate in the United Way Donor Plan. In the past we have received many generous donations from this plan as a non-profit human service organization. We use these donations to supplement our operating budget and tuition assistance program, which helps us to continue to provide the high quality early childhood experience that is distinctly ours. At this time, many corporations are beginning their 2010 United Way Campaign. We ask you to consider choosing St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School to be a recipient of your annual donation. We have been designated the code name of **St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery Sc** and our code number is **2774**. These designations are important to be included on your pledge form to ensure that St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School receives your contribution. If you have any questions or would like a pledge form, please call the school.

Tissue boxes

Cardboard paper towel and toilet paper rolls

Fruit and vegetable Styrofoam trays (NO MEAT TRAYS)

Large and small oat meal boxes

Plastic and metal jar lids - all sizes

Interesting and unusual packing materials

Twine, cord and yarn (all grades and colors)

Blueberry and strawberry baskets

Wooden materials such as dowel rods

Parmesan cheese containers

Plastic band aid boxes

Used wrapping paper, ribbons and spools

Beads of any type

Buttons

Anything else that you can think of that can safely be recycled for children's art projects - use your imagination!

SAVE THE DATE

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 14TH - 7:00 PM

This year our [fundraiser](#) is going to have an Oktoberfest theme. We will have a selection of beers, wine, delicious food, silent and live auctions, 50/50 raffle, basket raffle, and music. Each year we have a fundraiser in order to keep tuition as affordable as possible without sacrificing the high quality of teachers, equipment, and supplies necessary to make St. Paul's a quality educational experience for all of your children. It is also a fun and well deserved time for parents to socialize and enjoy an evening out with friends.

**So... FIND A BABYSITTER
AND SAVE THE DATE!**