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NURSERY SCHOOL

NEWS

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL NURSERY SCHOOL



January 2009

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February 13 - No School
Staff In-Service

February 16 - No School
Winter Break

✕ Director's Dialogue ✕

by Jane Adams

Kindergarten Readiness

For many of you this is the time of year to think about kindergarten readiness. Some children are obviously ready to move ahead, in chronological age and all other areas of development. Others, though meeting the legal age for kindergarten entry, are not ready for the shift. It is only January, and that is part of the difficulty. It is very hard to predict how much young children will mature in the months prior to September.

Children develop in unpredictable and uneven ways. This is further complicated by the fact that the average age of kindergarten entry has dramatically increased over the past 30 years. Along with the increase in age, not surprisingly, there has been a steady increase in the academics presented in the kindergarten year. What we have today is a typical chronological age spread in many kindergarten classes of almost two years.

In reality a group of young children cannot all succeed at the same time when pressed to learn on a set schedule, especially when that group ranges in age anywhere between a young 5 and 6 & ½ year old. It is unrealistic and unfair to assume that all students in the class will master the same concept or skill at the same time. Children need to be allowed to acquire skills at their own individual pace. Because of the diverse age spread and levels of development, those children who are the youngest and least mature may be at risk. The critical question that parents must ask themselves is whether or not behaviors of immature children or very young children will simply proceed forward with the passage of time. In other words, will another year in nursery school protect these children from the stress of possible over placement or will it be a waste of their time because they will naturally catch up later?

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Valentine's Day



Please check with your child's teacher before planning valentines. In any event, do not put the name of the recipient on the outside of the envelope. Simply include the correct number of cards for everyone in your child's class. Names on envelopes add confusion to a hectic day and make it very difficult for the teacher. This is not only the case for the very young children who cannot read names, but even the older children who can read names tend to become confused in the midst of the excitement! Finally - Please - no candy in the valentine cards. Many types of candy have hidden peanut products in them.

Board of Trustees Nominations

Our Board nominating committee is currently looking for parents and community members who would be interested in serving on our Nursery School Board of Trustees for a two year term.

We are particularly interested in people with backgrounds in education, law, finance, medicine, communications, psychology, and child development. If you or anyone that you know would be interested in serving on the Board, please contact Jen Broadhurst at 412-343-0514 or e-mail your resume to Jen at [HYPERLINK "mailto:jenbroad@comcast.net" jenbroad@comcast.net](mailto:jenbroad@comcast.net).

IS YOUR CHILD READY FOR KINDERGARTEN?

Gerriane Bobrosky, Ph.D., has developed the following guidelines for kindergarten readiness. You may be interested in them as you think about your own child's level of readiness.

A child must be *physically* healthy and strong enough to enjoy the challenge of going to school and dealing with the increased stresses.

Emotionally, a child must be able to *separate comfortably* from his/her parents and spend a significant number of hours each day in an initially unfamiliar place with new adults and children.

A child must have a long enough *attention span* to be able to sit for periods of time such as listening during story time, or *persisting in the completion of tasks* such as simple games or puzzles.

A child must be able to *tolerate some frustration* in not getting immediate attention from the teacher and others, and be able to wait and take turns. This implies a degree of mastery and control over impulses so that he or she does not have to discharge or react to internal or external stimuli.

A child must be able to follow 2 or 3 component directions.

A child must be obedient in that she is able to take what is said and act on it.

A child must be able to do some table work (eg. writing letters, cutting, coloring, drawing).

A child must be able to understand the concept of sequencing and have the ability to do and put things in sequence.

A child should have a solid self concept and sense of competency, and not be unduly threatened by new or difficult tasks.

A child should be able to express herself verbally so that she can indicate needs and carry on reciprocal conversations. Examples are: baby talk should be given up; sentence structure should be basically grammatically correct; should be able to participate in group discussions.

A child must be able to *retain information*.

A child should be *socially mature*. This includes daily living skills, self-help skills, tasks around the home, school, and neighborhood, and socialization skills (not requiring an adult to help in solving all problems).

Developmental levels should be commensurate with chronological age. For example:

Language (expressive and receptive): be able to answer questions about age, birth date, siblings etc.

Fine motor: print first name, copy a square, cross, circle, draw a person. Handedness is usually established by age 5.

Perceptual skills: ability to remember and differentiate forms, simple puzzles, etc.

Memory: verbal and nonverbal experience.

Conceptual: ability to classify and generalize colors, animals, shapes, etc.

Gross motor: stand on one foot, hop, walk a straight line, balance, etc.

Significant deficits in any area should be evaluated.

Nursery School Parking Space Reminder

SNOW DAYS

The nursery school parking spot that is designated by the sign with the school logo, was an auction item at the Fall Fundraiser and is reserved for the winners – AM and PM. So please refrain from using that space – unless of course you were the winner!

On snowy days check the local cable channel if you have cable and the status of our school will be listed. If you do not have cable check KDKA or WTAE for our school status. Typically we will be closed if the Mt. Lebanon schools are closed and if Mt. Lebanon has a late start time we will do the same.

We also have a phone chain that your child's teacher will initiate for each class when school is canceled or delayed. Sometimes the phone chain is ineffective, so listen to the radio or TV if it is snowing. Most important of all, whether we close or not – use common sense. This is preschool, your child will not receive an unexcused absence if they are not present. If you are not comfortable driving on the roads, please do not take chances!

Interviewing for Pain

OK, I admit this is a depressing thought – “interviewing children for pain.” Yet I believe that this is something we all unwittingly do from time to time as well meaning parents. At the end of the school day, parents often knee jerk automatically ask something like, “Who did you play with today, what did you do today, or did you have a good day?” Of course the highly anticipated answer is enthusiastic happy detailed feedback about lots of friends and wonderful meaningful activities. But alas, the universal answer to these kinds of questions is more often something like – “I didn't play with anyone and I didn't do anything today.” The ensuing parental response to answers such as these is a knot in the pit of our stomach as we picture our child standing alone with no friends, sadly not participating in anything. But rest assured, your child is not painting a very accurate picture of her day. The reasons are very simple:

Your child may not remember exactly who they played with and they really are unable to put into words and/or don't remember exactly what they did.

The other reason is that they frankly don't want to share this information with you, as school is their own separate time away from you. That's not a negative comment about your child's relationship with you, but a sign of their growing independence and separation from you – which is an important and positive task for a preschooler.

Sometimes our children choose to give mostly negative information because they are masters at reading our cues and reactions, and they quickly come to realize that it's the negative stuff that immediately causes our anxiety to rise and thus really holds our undivided attention. When they give us positive feedback, although we are glad to hear it, the intensity of our reaction and concern is typically just not as strong.

It is the negative feedback that causes us to start to “interview.” “What do you mean the other girls wouldn't let you play?” Or “Billy hit you, oh no, why did he do that?” We certainly don't react with the same level of interest and intensity when they report to us that, “Sally and I played with dolls today,” or “I painted a picture at the easel.” Our response to positive statements is more likely to be a casual, “Oh, that's nice.”

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Director's Dialogue continued from pg 1.

The research of Chess and Thomas in a longitudinal study of children found that high activity level, distractibility, and shy or slow to warm up behaviors are the result of inborn temperamental traits. While these traits tend to persist throughout childhood, they become less dominant with age and improve when children are thoughtfully cared for by adults. More mature behaviors can then emerge when children are provided with the needed time to grow in non-stressful situations. However, children who start school too soon often become stressed and turn inward, focusing primarily on their own concerns. Not only is this the case in kindergarten, but also with each additional year of over placement, the pressure increases and they are likely to become even more self centered and less able to cope with the increasing academic demands.

So there are a number of complex issues that we must attend to at the same time when we consider what is the best decision for each individual child:

We must consider the chronological age of the child.

We need to understand each individual child's strengths and weaknesses.

We must consider the expectations of the particular kindergarten that the child will enter in September.

This third issue has been less well defined and articulated in the literature than intellectual and social and emotional readiness. In most of the communities in our area, there is a component of readiness that is primarily a cultural process through which members of the community develop their unique local meaning of readiness.

An good example of readiness that differs from one community to the next is the City of Pittsburgh, which distinctly differs from that of Mt. Lebanon and many communities in the South Hills. I have a nephew with a late August birthday who lives in Squirrel Hill. When my brother and sister-in-law decided to send him to kindergarten when he was a very young 5, I was frankly alarmed. But once I saw the diverse levels of maturity that were acceptable in the city, I understood their decision.

So, there are clearly defined formal elements of readiness derived from child development theory and informal elements generated in local communities, neighborhoods, schools, and families. What is interesting and of real concern is that by most standards one would think children from our population would be less likely to be at risk for kindergarten unreadiness. This thought is based on the fact that most of our children enter kindergarten with a rich base of quality preschool experience and strong parental support for their education. Thus most parents have very high expectations for their children's kindergarten performance. The result is that our kindergartens have been caught in a system of ever increasing standards as children are held out of school and the entry age has increased over the years in an effort to make sure that they can meet the high standards and expectations. It is a bit like the "tail wagging the dog!" The more we hold our children out of kindergarten in order to ensure readiness, the older the average entry age becomes. The final result is that expectations and standards then escalate in response to the overall age of the children, thereby causing many children who are less mature or young to be at risk.

Readiness for kindergarten is increasingly being recognized as a crucial component in the education of children. It would simplify matters if parents routinely sent any child of legal age to kindergarten, and schools would in turn ***appropriately deal with and accept the wide range of young children's varied and unique patterns of development.***

According to David Elkind, parents tend to focus primarily on skills and academics when considering kindergarten readiness. He feels that this is not a very useful approach, and suggests that the following 3 abilities are the most important expectations that a child needs to have mastered prior to kindergarten entry.

The ability to listen to and follow instructions given by an adult.

The ability to start a task and bring it to completion.

The ability to work cooperatively with other children, take turns, stand in line, and generally follow the standards of reasonable behavior when in a group setting.

Elkind explains that, "These are all essentially social skills. It is important that parents read to children, talk about numbers and letters etc.; *but*, parents need to understand that all the research shows that children *must* have first mastered these skills in order to begin to learn academics."

As things stand now, there are distinct strengths, skills, and abilities that children need to have mastered for a good beginning in kindergarten. As long as we observe children closely, are aware of the kindergarten's expectations, put our children's needs first, and keep an open mind about the best time for each individual child to move on; we are far more likely to make good decisions and send our children on when they are ready and able to succeed!

If you have concerns or questions about your child's readiness be sure to schedule a conference with your child's teacher. Our teachers have observed many children over the years and really can help you make your decision about the best time to start your child in kindergarten. I am of course also available to answer questions and address your concerns.

Interviewing for Pain continued from pg 3

The flip side of fear is freedom. When our parenting is primarily driven by worries and concerns (fear), that our child's life may contain some little imperfections, difficulties or disappointments, in a very paradoxical sense, we are aiding their eventual unhappiness in life. When we believe that our job is to always rush in and rescue our children from every little distress, they will never have the opportunity to experience momentary suffering followed by the realization that they can recover on their own. When we over function for our children in this way we are creating short term gains for long term losses. We are ultimately robbing them of the opportunity to feel a sense of efficacy about their own ability to deal with all of the inevitable ups and downs in life.

The same goes for parents feeling complete responsibility for all of their children's imperfections, and hence, believing that it is entirely their responsibility to immediately "fix" those imperfections (as if that were even possible). Children are not a "finished product," especially during the preschool years. Some are more ready to sit and focus on academics, just as some have figured out how to follow classroom rules, directions, how to share, and how to cooperate with others. After all, parents send their children to nursery school to learn how to do these things in the first place, ***not because they can already do them***. If we stress and worry about every little imperfection, our children will get the message loud and clear that they have a problem, and worse yet, that our expectation of them is perfection. If, on the other hand, we remain calm about life's little bumps and unevenness of development, our children will be given the needed peace of mind and time and space to grow and mature at their own rate, and most importantly, to eventually take responsibility for themselves. And best of all, they will not be enslaved by our existential fears and anxieties.

So folks, here is the deal. You first have to come to terms with the fact that life for your child will be far from perfect. And not only should you not try and inoculate your child from ever experiencing difficulties and disappointments in their life, you alone are not responsible for causing their imperfections any more than you are entirely responsible for fixing those imperfections for them. Your role is to help your child grow and learn how to take responsibility for themselves through calm open-ended guidance, role modeling, and allowing them to experience, within reasonable limits, the consequences of their own actions.

The next time you find yourself anxiously "interviewing for pain," stop and ask yourself if this is the best approach. If your child does bring up some little bump in their day, simply reassure them that you believe that they can solve the problem on their own. Sure, you might want to calmly give them some ideas about how to solve their problem, but on the other hand don't let them think that you do not believe in their ability to handle things on their own. And of course, they take their interpretation of events from you. If you seem terribly worried and concerned about every little issue that they tell you about or imperfection that you observe in their life, they will perceive that their disappointments and momentary failures might just be insurmountable. It is certainly ok to show an interest in your child's day, but just remember – big picture - your most effective role and responsibility as a parent in terms of encouraging your child toward competence, independence, and a solid sense of self is simply not to overreact and jump in too quickly to try and "fix" everything in their lives for them.

Interviewing for Pain continued from pg 5

According to David Elkind:

“Parents and schools are no longer geared toward child development, they’re geared to academic achievement. No doubts there are economic forces pushing parents to invest heavily in their children’s outcome from an early age. But taking all of the discomfort, disappointment and even play out of development, especially while increasing pressure for success, turns out to be misguided by about 180 degrees. With few challenges that can be their own, children are unable to forge their creative adaptations to the normal vicissitudes of life. That not only makes children risk averse, it makes them psychologically fragile, riddled with anxiety. In the process they’re robbed of identity, meaning and a sense of accomplishment, to say nothing of a shot at real happiness. Forget, too, about perseverance, not simply a moral virtue but a necessary life skill. These turn out to be the spreading psychic fault lines of 21st century youth.”

So, it is certainly not that you should have no expectations or very low expectations of your child, actually it is the exact opposite. It is more about your ability to differentiate yourself and your own needs from your child’s, in order to understand that your child’s growth and maturation are best nourished by a steady and appropriate increase of your allowing and expecting them to do things on their own, without your constant input and intervention. Just try to remain calm and keep it all in perspective. It is not easy, but the results will be well worth the effort for both you and your child!

Newsletter Volunteer Needed

If you have experience with desktop publishing and would like to help the school in some way, think about volunteering to produce the Nursery School News! Jane provides most of the material and you would lay out the information and send it back to her. If you are interested or want more information please contact

Jane Adams at 412.531.2644 or jadams@stpaulspgh.org OR

Kelly Elphinstone 412.343.7480 or elphinstones@verizon.net



*Happy
Valentine's
Day*



**ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL
NURSERY SCHOOL**

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