



Nursery School News

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

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

Volume XXXIII, Issue 9

Summer 2004

From Jane: Undivided Attention



The author Scott Peck recently wrote that, “In our hurried, frantic, over programmed, and over scheduled world today, the highest form of love that one human being can give to another is simply their attention.” This statement really struck me as so pertinent to my own life, and to the lives of most of you folks that I observe here at school. Particularly when I think of young children and the ways we so often schedule them with play dates, extra-curricular activities, and allow them to watch unlimited TV and spend unlimited time on the computer. Basically anything to keep them busy through the many forms of easy and instant gratification that are readily available today.

Is there really anything more precious that we can give to another person than our undivided attention? Not only parents of young children, but the time that you and your spouse are willing to give to one another. Time and attention that is not related to some task or personal goal, and not time that becomes just one more piece of multi-tasking. It is so important in our parenting for our children’s sake that we try to slow our pace a bit once in a while in order to carve out time and attention just for them. With that thought in mind I would like to share an article that appeared recently in The Boston Globe written by Barbara F. Meltz.

There are Benefits to Boredom

Every Tuesday morning at 8:30, the 268 students in pre-kindergarten through eighth grade at the Cambridge Friends School sit silently in a circle on the floor for half an hour. Really silently, as in you can’t even whisper. Oh, the 5 year olds are allowed to draw if they need to—even second graders can do that—and if a student is really fidgety, a teacher might put a supportive arm around him. But that mostly happens at the beginning of the year.

This is a Quaker school. Sharing silence is part of the

tradition of the faith; a way to center one’s self within the community and to seek personal truth. These days, though, school head Mary Newmann sees even more value in it.

“If you want to raise children who can think critically, who can solve problems of all kinds—and we do—that’s our mission—they need the chance to think uninterrupted,” she says. That’s rare these days.

Beginning in infancy, children are bombarded with noise, stimulation, and instant gratification, from crib mobiles with flashing lights and music to DVD entertainment systems for the car. Quiet time? It’s virtually programmed into children never to have it.

Certainly, there are advantages to children from modern technology. Increasingly, though, educators like Newmann are wondering if it comes at a cost.

“The gadgetry may distract a baby from crying, but does he ever discover his toes?” wonders Wheelock College early—educator Diane Levin.

She means that on two levels. Literally, the fussy baby who is left alone long enough to find his toes (not more than a few minutes, after all) is making the first step in a long journey. “He’s figuring out that he can entertain and distract himself,” Levin says. “He’s also learning something profound: that he has the capacity to solve his own problem.” (cont.)

Inside this issue:

| | |
|-------------------|-----|
| From Jane | 1-3 |
| Mayfair A Success | 3 |
| Summer Camp | 4 |
| Back To School | 4 |
| Backpacks | 4 |
| Lunch Bunch | 4 |
| Homeroom Parents | 5 |
| Staff Changes | 5 |
| Birthday Parties | 5 |
| United Way | 6 |
| Save Your Junk | 6 |
| School Calendar | 7 |

From Jane: (Continued)

In terms of human development, that's an "Aha!" moment. The infant whose parent pushes the button to turn on the mobile may also be comforted and distracted, but he learns nothing about his capacity to solve his own problem, says Levin. This may seem like too much credit to give to 10 toes, but for Levin, Newmann, and others, toes are a metaphor for what they see as an erosion in opportunities for children to develop critical-thinking skills.

It's been happening ever since children started watching more TV, about 20 years ago," says Levin. "As the process for interacting with the world becomes more passive, children are robbed of the process of being an active agent in their own lives." There are no statistics or studies on this yet; it's something that will play out as time passes. Researchers and educators do know, however, that children learn best by initiating, manipulating, and observing cause and effect. Levin has coined a term: problem-solving deficit disorder. Minneapolis psychologist and author David Walsh, founder and president of the National Institute on Media and the Family have one, too: mental operating software.

"It's as if this software is wired into them in the crib that sets an expectation for entertainment and instant gratification," he says. "As a result, when things get tough, children are more likely to throw up their hands and throw in the towel than figure out what to do."

Beth Dimock sees this play out in her pre-kindergarten class at Cambridge Friends School. "Children today are easily bored and frustrated."

"They don't know how to carry through with a project-any project-on their own," she says. "Why do two playmates at your house end up in front of a video? Because they're bored. They can't even solve the problem of what to play." Researchers say time in front of screens is a big source of the problem.

"We think we are giving our kids an edge when we use software to introduce them to art, language, nature, you name it," says Pittsburgh psychologist Sharna Olfman. If she had her way, children under 7 would spend no more than an hour a day in front of any screen, educational software included. All it does is teach them to be dependent on the screen for instant gratification," she says. "They are not developing the capacity to use their own creative intelligence."

Indeed, Levin says problem solving is a cumulative skill that gives a child a sense of inner power. "The more you do it the better you are at it and the more you feel good about yourself as a learner, a social being, and a thinker," she says. "A problem-solver is someone who says, "I can affect the world. I can figure out how to build this tower so it won't fall. I can tell the teacher there's a problem on the playground."

Even seemingly benign conveniences may undermine a child's ability to solve problems. Consider Velcro, or the digital clock. Lace less shoes and zip less jackets enable some children to dress themselves at an increasingly younger age. Having that concrete sense of independence is important for a preschooler. So, however, is knowing how to tie a knot. Knotting is a basic skill, and more kids come to me not knowing how to do it than ever before," says Dimock. Ditto for shoe tying. Learning to tie a shoe takes small-motor skill and builds cognitive connections, she says. Children learn the properties of the material, the malleability of the string, how you can move it and loop it. They have to have a goal in mind and be able to visualize getting from string in your fingers to a finished bow.

"This is really complex," Dimock says. "To gloss over it or skip it altogether is not good." Digital clocks let young children tell time as soon as they know their numbers, but this convenience, too, may come at a developmental cost. "An analog clock is cognitively richer," says Levin. "It teaches you the logic of time in a way that the digital can't, that seconds fit into minutes, which fit into hours, which fit into days." (cont.)

From Jane: (Continued)

Olfman wonders if we are seeing more children labeled with Attention Deficit Disorder and other behavioral and cognitive disabilities as a by-product of inadequate problem-solving skills. "There's no question in my mind that we have more restless, agitated, and unhappy children because they are dependent on instant gratification," she says. "Life is boring when you haven't acquired the capacity to solve a problem as basic as knowing how to fill your own time. Why wouldn't that lead to acting-out behaviors that get you labeled at school and eventually even medicated?" Olfman is editor of the "Childhood in America" series.

Except for urging parents to limit screen time (the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends no TV for children under 2), no researcher is saying we have to eliminate gadgets that save time and make our lives easier. Rather, they stress using them in moderation and with an awareness of potential developmental short-cutting.

In-car DVDs are the exception. Walsh hates them. "They usurp conversation, word games, looking out the window, and, yes, quiet time and boredom," he says. "Some boredom is healthy." So is some quiet time. Just last week, a first grader at the Cambridge Friends School told Mary Newmann that when she has a problem with a friend, if she waits until the middle of the silent meeting, a solution to the conflict usually will come to her. "And if you don't have silent meeting?" Newmann asked. "Probably I would be mad until the next day," the girl said.

So folks – give your child your attention – your time. Sit with them long enough to teach them how to tie a knot. Or simply sit and listen to them tell you what is on *their mind*. Or better yet, the next time your child has a problem don't jump in and try and solve it instantly for them – perhaps just sit with them quietly for a while and encourage them to think about it until they can come up with a solution on their own. But whatever you do this summer, do make a concerted effort to take the time to turn off the TV and the computer for a while and give them your undivided attention.

Mayfair



Mayfair was a fun time for all! Katherine Doyle and Laverne Duffy did a superb job of chairing the event. The weather cooperated and we were able to be outside and enjoy the sun. I think all would agree that the addition of the train ride was the highlight of the day!

I would like to thank everyone who worked so hard to make it a success and also thank everyone who supported the school by coming to the event. Special thanks to those volunteers who gave of their time and energy on the various committees preparing for it in the weeks in advance to the actual day.

I'd also like to thank each of you for your generous donations –food items and toys for prizes. Everyone was incredibly generous and it all helped to make a fun day for the children.

We have changed Mayfair from our primary fundraiser to simply a fun day for the children. I think it is a nice way for us to end the year for the children and to make a small profit that we plan to use to buy some new large building blocks for Big Room this year.

Summer Program



We had a grand time this summer playing inside, outside, and doing lots of fun crafts. We got off to a good start in spite of construction still taking place on the roof during the first week of summer program. Thanks for your flexibility and trust in us to keep the kids safe. Actually the children enjoyed watching the heavy equipment and construction workers doing their job!

Mindy and her staff did a great job of keeping things smooth for the children. I'd like to thank Mindy and her staff that included Pat Hurd, Dottie Lust, John Mattie, Rita Neher, and Stephanie Woodruff. I'd also like to thank the staff of college and high school students that included Emily and Caroline Hurd, Elyse Easton, and Mike Doyle. They all did a terrific job.

Now that summer program is coming to an end I can turn my focus 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 that will be coming in September, and of course we look forward to seeing all of the children and parents who will be returning.

Back to School



The first day of school will be Monday, September 13th. This will be a visiting day for everyone in a MWF class and M-Th four-day class. Tuesday, September 14th will be a visiting day for all children in a T-Th class or T-F classes. A visiting day permits parents to stay with their child to make the separation easier.

Be sure to read the information in your welcome packet thoroughly. This information is important for you to be aware of in order to get things off to a good start for your child and family. It is also tremendously helpful for your child's teacher and me if you have filled out your GREEN FORMS in advance of her home visit. Also, if you do have any questions about the items in your packet, your child's teacher will be glad to address any and all issues while she is with you in your home.

Backpacks

Don't forget to send a backpack or some type of book bag for your child to transport artwork home from school. Many children like to bring a special blanket, stuffed animal, or toy from home, especially in the beginning of the school year. This is fine and it helps many children with separation. But once again, don't forget to put these "precious" items in the backpack so they are not forgotten or worse, lost!

Lunch Bunch

We will continue to provide this wonderful program. Joan Easton, Dottie Lust, John Mattie, and Stephanie Woodruff will continue to be the caregivers for Lunch Bunch.

Lunch Bunch is offered Monday – Friday. Morning session children should be picked up at 12:30 pm and afternoon children should be dropped off at 11:40 am. Kathi Workman will distribute the sign up sheets with complete instructions shortly after the beginning days of school.

Homeroom Parents Needed

I cannot emphasize what an important role homeroom parents play in terms of communication between teachers and classroom parents about many events such as field trips, snow days, class parties, class coffees, and other important information that the teacher may need to have communicated among the parents. It is also a great way to get to know other parents in the school and work closely with your child's teacher.

If you would be interested in being a homeroom parent please let your child's teacher know at the home visit. And if you have any questions about being a homeroom parent please don't hesitate to call me here at the office or call Diane Riley (412-429-3499) who is the homeroom parent representative for the Parent Partnership.

Staff Changes and Additions

This year we sadly say good-bye to Paula Harvey. Paula's husband, Drew, is retiring after over 30 years with Alcoa and Paula has decided that she will join him in retirement. As all of you who have had Paula as a teacher for your child know, she is truly "one of a kind." Paula was a wonderfully creative and nurturing teacher for the 3 year olds for the past 12 years here at St. Paul's. She will be missed terribly, but she promises to come back when her schedule allows her to work as a substitute from time to time.

On the up side of things life never stays the same and change is something that we need to embrace. We are truly fortunate to have Joan Easton who will be taking Paula's classes. Joan Easton has been a teacher here for over 10 years and will do a superb job.

Another addition this year will be Katherine Doyle who will be teaching the T-Th pm older 3's and young 4's. Some of you already know Katherine as William and Caroline's mother. Katherine comes to us as an experienced teacher with a bachelor's degree in education and masters in developmental psychology. Katherine is also on the Nursery School Board and an active member of St. Paul's Church.

Birthday Parties—A New idea



For many years we have celebrated birthdays in the traditional manner of having the birthday child bring in a treat from home. Because of our no nut guidelines this past year we have given the parents the choice of either allowing their child to choose one of the "special birthday treats" that we keep on hand here at school or bringing in a treat from home from our no nut list (everyone gets this list in their welcome packet).

This year in an effort to move away from always feeding children gooey sweets on special occasions – most children get cake and ice cream at home for their birthday anyway – we would like to suggest in lieu of a food treat having mom or dad come into the class at the end of the day to read your child's favorite story to the class. This was an idea that came from some of the parents in a recent Parent Partnership Meeting.

I thought it was a wonderful idea and the staff all agreed! This way you can come into the classroom to share in your child's special day and we can avoid some of the confusion around birthday treats. Personally I like to idea of not always attaching the idea of food in general and particularly the idea of sweets and unhealthy foods with special occasions. But I do know that traditions are hard to change or give up - so if you feel that it is necessary to send a treat in you may send one from the approved list. And of course your child may still choose to pick a treat here at school that we keep on hand for birthdays.

Do think about the alternative of leaving the treats at home and coming into the class to read to the children. I think it could be a wonderful way to share your child's special day with the class!

United Way Donor Option

Once again St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School will participate in the United Way Donor Option Plan. In the past we have received many generous donations from this plan as a non-profit human service agency. We use these donations to help fund our financial aid program.

At this time, many corporations are beginning their 2005 United Way Campaign. We ask that you consider choosing St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School to receive part of your annual donation. We have been designated the code name of **St. Paul's Episcopal 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. Many thanks for your continuing support.

Save Your Junk

We will put the recyclable box out once again in September. 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 also promotes self-esteem. 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 on their own.

With this in mind could you save some of the following items for the school?

- Fruit and vegetable Styrofoam trays (NO MEAT)
- Cardboard paper towel and toilet paper rolls
- Tissue boxes
- Large and small oatmeal boxes
- Plastic and metal jar lids – all sizes
- Plastic liter bottles
- Interesting or unusual packing materials
- Excelsior
- String, cord, yarn (all grades)
- Blueberry and strawberry baskets
- Wooden materials such as dowel rods
- Picture framing mat board
- Plastic band aid boxes
- Used wrapping paper and ribbons
- Spools (plastic and wood)
- Beads of any type including those from broken costume jewelry
- Bottle corks
- Buttons



Or anything you can think of that can be recycled for children's art projects – use your imagination!

Mark Your Calendar For St. Paul's Activities & Events September 2004

| MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY | SUNDAY |
|--|---|-----------|----------|--------|----------|--------|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 |
| 13 Visiting Day MWF classes & M-Th classes | 14 Visiting Day T-Th classes & Tues-F classes | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 |
| 20 | 21 Parent Orientation 7:00 PM | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 |

Save The Date

**Saturday, November 20th - St. Paul's Nursery School Wine Tasting Event.
Look for more information about our gala fundraiser this fall.**

Volunteer Needed: Editor for St. Paul's Nursery School Newsletter

The newsletter goes out at the beginning of every month during the school year with an additional edition that goes in the Welcome Packet during the summer months. Jane writes the articles in Microsoft Word. You will be responsible for editing the articles and then formatting them into a newsletter form. The current newsletter is done in Microsoft Publisher, but can be done on another software that you may be more comfortable with. If you are someone who enjoys and has knowledge of desktop publishing and who likes to be creative, please contact Jane at (412) 531-2644.