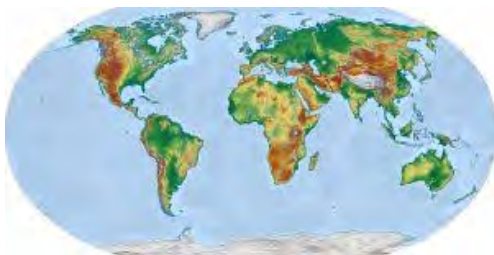


# Carnegie Mellon University Children's School February 2021 Family Newsletter

## Invitation to Explore Oceans

After last year's whole school study of Planet Earth, we have decided to go deeper, literally, by studying the **Oceans** this year. "A healthy ocean means a healthy planet. Covering 72 percent of the Earth and supplying half its oxygen, the ocean is our planet's life support system" (<https://www.nationalgeographic.org/media/why-ocean-matters/>). "Oceans feed us, regulate our climate, and generate most of the oxygen we breathe. They also serve as the foundation for much of the world's economy" (<https://www.unenvironment.org/explore-topics/oceans-seas/why-do-oceans-and-seas-matter>).



We invite you to join us from February 16<sup>th</sup> to March 18<sup>th</sup> as we explore the oceans that sustain our lives. We will begin by studying the properties of water and contrast fresh and salt water. Then we will investigate the landscape of the ocean and shore, the plant and animal life there, and the ways that we can support ocean conservation.

On Friday, February 12<sup>th</sup> from 9:30 to 11:00 AM, we will host a Virtual Parent / Educator discussion and exploration time to share the ways we will learn about oceans and their habitats, as well as ways that families can participate at home. We will then celebrate our learning with a Virtual Family Ocean Adventure in the early evening on Thursday, March 18<sup>th</sup>. See the March newsletter for additional details. The photos here are from a kindergarten unit on Oceans in early 2020.



We hope you will plan to join us in delving deeper into learning about the oceans that sustain our planet home!

### February 2021 Dates

February 12<sup>th</sup> – 9:30-11:00 AM – Educator / Parent Discussion re: OCEAN

Monday, February 15<sup>th</sup> - Presidents' Day Holiday (NO SCHOOL)  
4<sup>th</sup> Quarter Enrollment Decisions DUE

*All of these dates are posted on our web calendar!*  
<https://www.cmu.edu/dietrich/psychology/cs/>



## Women & Girls in Science

February 11<sup>th</sup> is the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, a day “to honor women’s significant achievements in science and place a much-needed focus on girls entering Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) careers.”

<https://nationaltoday.com/international-day-of-women-and-girls-in-science/>

At the Children’s School, our inquiry learning emphasis and month-long thematic units allow all of our children to build strong foundations for STEM careers. For example, the current PreKindergarten and Kindergarten unit is on Healthy Mind and Body (note some remote learning friends wearing their “cranium caps” while learning about brain functions), and our whole school will soon begin an Ocean unit.

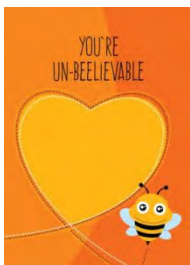


## February is Children’s Dental Health Month

The American Dental Association (ADA) sponsors National Children's Dental Health Month to raise awareness about the importance of oral health. Developing good habits at an early age and scheduling regular dental visits helps children start a lifetime of healthy teeth and gums. The ADA states that the most important concepts for preschool children to know are (1) our teeth are important, (2) we need to take good care of them, and (3) the dentist is a friendly doctor who helps you take good care of your teeth. Teeth are meant to last a lifetime. A balanced diet, limited snacks, brushing and flossing each day, and a regular check-up are the keys to healthy teeth and gums.

For programs where children are older than one year and receive two or more meals, NAEYC (5.A.16) promotes good dental hygiene by requiring the staff to provide an opportunity for tooth brushing and gum cleaning to remove food and plaque. At the Children’s School, since our children are not here for two or more meals, we talk about brushing our teeth and good dental hygiene. We also encourage children to rinse their mouths with water after eating. However, just as you encourage hand washing when your children come home from school, you should also encourage them to brush their teeth.

***Please note that, in compliance with Caring for Our Children 9.2.3.14, we require contact information for your family dentist on your child’s re-enrollment information update.***



## Valentine’s Day

February is also the month when some families celebrate Valentine’s Day. Each class may plan a simple celebration, reading a related story, playing games about friendship, etc. Please watch the daily emails for specific information from your child’s teachers. As always, children will have access to card making materials in the writing centers for use if they are interested in sending greetings to family and friends.

**Please do not send candy or any other food items for distribution to your child’s classmates.**

## Teamwork amidst Transitions

The one-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic highlights the incredible work of the Children's School educators, first the shift to support for meaningful remote learning in the spring of 2020, then partnering with parents to develop a safe and workable re-opening plan, and finally adjusting to the new realities of our return to campus. Every teaching team experienced transition as we split three teams into four, bade farewell to colleagues who needed to teach their own children at home, and welcomed three new educators. Even without many of our typical team-building traditions, all the teams rose to the challenge of working together to de-densify the school, implement the required risk mitigation strategies, creatively develop new classroom routines that would be developmentally appropriate, practical, and safe, and build close bonds that would sustain them through the year.

The two photos below offer a glimpse of the ways that our lives as educators have changed from planning in close huddles to physically distant interactions. What you cannot see, however, is that the substance of the dialogue and the support of colleagues shows amazing resilience and resolve. As we begin a new semester, we are deeply grateful for the blessing of amazing colleagues!



## Scholarship Funding Update

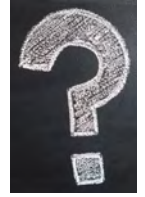
As you know, the Children's School participates in the state's Educational Improvement Tax Credit (EITC) program as well as the Opportunity Scholarship Tax Credit (OSTC) program. In addition to the contributing businesses mentioned in the November and December 2020 Children's School Family Newsletters, we received funding from UHS of Pennsylvania, Inc. in January 2021.

Through EITC, eligible Pennsylvania businesses can earn tax credits while providing financial assistance for children to attend preschool as well as grades K-12. Through OSTC, eligible Pennsylvania businesses can earn tax credits for contributing funds to provide tuition assistance in the form of scholarships to eligible students K-12th grade residing within the boundaries of a low-achieving school to attend another public school outside of their district or nonpublic school. In 2019-20, The Children's School's EITC and OSTC Programs funded 75 students, pre-Kindergarten – 12<sup>th</sup> grade, in 17 different schools throughout Allegheny and Westmoreland counties.

If you would like more information or can help us to build a list of prospective businesses, please contact the Linda Hancock ([lh37@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:lh37@andrew.cmu.edu)).

**Pennsylvania**  
WORK SMART. LIVE HAPPY.

# Big Questions for Young Minds



## Questions to Ask While Taking Car Trips

Often even short car trips can be challenging for families but, by asking questions, you can keep your child's interest and attention without resorting to DVDs. You can ask questions both about what is being observed outside the car and what might be happening inside the car.



Examples of "outside" questions: Where do you think the people in the blue SUV are going? Why do you think that? Point to a favorite store/restaurant/playground that we pass when we drive to school and tell me why it is your favorite. What do you think the people in that big apartment building are doing? What do you think people think about when they are stopped at a red light? What kind of animals do you think we will see on our way to school? Were you right?

Examples of "inside" questions: Who is the funniest person in this car? Why do you think so? Who do you think will be the first person you see when we stop? Why do you think that? If we could be driving anywhere, where would you like to go? If we had one family rule for our car rides, what should it be?



The most important thing to remember is that car trips are excellent opportunities to engage your child in conversation – take this time together to ask their opinions on any variety of topics – you will enjoy and appreciate the responses you get!

## Wish List: Used Little Tikes Doll Stroller



One of the most well-loved pieces of equipment on our playground is the Little Tikes doll stroller. It is sturdy, holds lots of precious cargo, endures the weather, and is easily cleaned. We would like to have a few more of these strollers available for the children to use. Before purchasing new ones, as part of our commitment to CMU's Green Practices (<https://www.cmu.edu/environment/get-involved/index.html>) and [Scotty Goes Green Program](#) (see below), we are asking if anyone in the Children's School Community has one that they no longer need and would like to donate to the school. Please contact Linda Hancock at [lh37@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:lh37@andrew.cmu.edu) if you have been doing some pandemic cleaning

and are looking for a new home for your gently used stroller.

"The **Scotty Goes Green Program** engages Carnegie Mellon faculty and staff in a voluntary, self-guided initiative that promotes a high standard for environmental practices at Carnegie Mellon. The Scotty Goes Green Program brings workplaces together to save money, as well as critical natural resources, such as energy, water and forests. True sustainability happens when it is embedded into our core operation and part of everyone's job. The Scotty Goes Green Program engages everyone in taking steps towards a more sustainable future."



## The Value of Joint Attention

Joint attention, simply defined, is to share the focus of an object or experience with another person. It starts with intentional communication between two people (words, sounds, or gesture) so that they come together to focus upon that experience or item. A good example is reading a book with your child, pointing to pictures, and sharing a conversation about what you see.

In early childhood, shared or joint attention is an essential part of skill development in communication, socialization and cognition. Very young children typically learn to gesture (point, wave, or reach out to be picked up) between 12 and 18 months. In this way, young children learn to bring others into their worlds by expressing their wants, needs and interests. Joint attention can be understood as a set of skills that makes social communication possible. It takes not only the ability to communicate but the recognition of the presence of another person, and the knowledge that communication makes things happen!



As children's communication and social skills grow through early childhood, so does their capacity to make shared attention experiences more complex. Elaborate dramatic play, independent of adults, is a wonderful way for our preschoolers to explore joint attention with peers. Adult guided games, such as board games or music games (like echo songs or songs with established hand movements) are also forms of complex joint attention.

If you are interested in learning more about joint attention and other powerful interaction strategies, we suggest that you review the Simple Interactions web site to learn more about the science and practice of human interactions (<https://www.simpleinteractions.org>). "Simple Interactions is a practice-based, strengths-focused, and community-driven approach to support helpers who serve children, youth, and families." All of the resources they develop are free and accessible for those who serve children, youth, and their adult helpers.



## Lost and Found

We have accumulated quite a collection of unclaimed and unlabeled coats, sweaters, hats, gloves, etc. If your child is missing anything, please send a note to your child's teacher with a description, and we will see if we have it!



## Family Spotlight: Improvisation and Adventure

February greetings from the Swarnapuri-Kamaraj family! We are Silpa, Deepan, Advait and Lana, and we live in Regent Square, just a few blocks from our favorite place in the world, Frick Park! Deepan is a physician from India, who graduated with a PhD in Rehab Sciences from the University of Pittsburgh and works for UPMC Enterprises. Silpa studied law in Pittsburgh and is a writer. Lana is our active, loyal and fiercely protective border-beagle. We are into our second year at The Children's School, and Addy is loving online Zoom classes with Mrs. Blizman and his "faraway" friends.

Our world, as it is now, is a product of serendipity, faith and curiosity. We both made the journey from India to the US about a decade apart in pursuit of higher studies. We met in Pittsburgh after living in several other cities. After meeting, we realized that we had connections through friends and family that surprised us – India is a country of about 1.4 billion, after all! Even our discovery of The Children's School was the fruit of a happy, unexpected friendship, and, oh, how thankful we are for it. That there should exist an educational institution that syncs with our philosophies and whose educators strive to address and communally work through the questions that have sprung to the fore this year has been a blessing.



If 2020 has taught us anything, it has been the value of improvisation and adventure. Last summer, we had planned an extension of the school's unit on rainforests by visiting some of India's most verdant jungles in search of tigers and elephants. Instead, we picked up amateur birding books, a pair of trusty binoculars, and trudged hours every weekend on the hills and dales of nearby state parks. We discovered so much beauty in our own backyards. We picnicked and stargazed, discovered bugs, and learned to make cookies and wildflower bouquets before returning to a modified version of school in the fall. Our new routine became the much-anticipated Zoom classes and cacophonous multilingual Skype calls with the grandparents (which often included a rehash of things learned in class). Addy was also thrilled to be at school on campus for the second quarter, and he carries the memories of his friends and hopes to be reunited with them later in 2021.

We have celebrated and learned a new appreciation for the little certainties of routine while negotiating the vagaries of the year. Addy has taught us that there can be newness in things we take



for granted, joy in re-discovering the mundane through young eyes, and that love does not have to be limited by distance. We know that in many ways, he is who he is because of the experiences he has had in school. This time has been a difficult stretch, but we might have found it harder to be the happy, thriving little quartet that we are without the loving infrastructure The Children's School has afforded us.

## Research Spotlight

### The Naming Game

Dr. Anna Fisher and Dr. Bonnie Nozari are collaborating on studies of word learning with the help of research associate Tania Dhaliwal, beginning with two studies conducted remotely this spring. When individuals produce words, their ability to select the correct word from memory is affected by the words they produced previously, and whether the items for these words are related to each other (e.g., dog and cat, or dog and bone) or whether they are unrelated (e.g., dog and fork). The researchers are interested to see how these relationships affect word learning in children.



The aim of the initial study is to test children's familiarity with items that the researchers could use in future word learning studies for young children. In the Naming Game, children will be introduced to the game and asked to help the researcher name some things. The researchers will present the child with pictures of familiar items, such as animals, fruits, and furniture, one-by-one and ask the name of those items in English. The results of this study will help the researchers choose age-appropriate items for future word learning studies.



Pencil



Clock



Watermelon

### The "Poko Teaches New Words" Game

The second study investigates how relationships between words affect word learning in children. This study is designed to explore how word learning is affected differently if the items in a group are related in a way that they share features (e.g., dog and cat are both animals, have four legs, etc.), or if the items in a group share a similar context (e.g., dog and bone have no shared features but are likely to occur together in the world), or if the items are unrelated to each other (e.g., dog and fork).

The researchers will first introduce children to a picture of an alien named Poko and tell a story about Poko visiting Earth and wanting to teach them a few words in his own language so that he can talk to them. The researchers then give picture-word pairs with pictures of familiar objects and new words that do not exist in the English vocabulary. They ask children to repeat the new words twice after hearing them. Next, they ask children to recall those words in a picture naming task like the one above and also to match the correct picture to the word that they hear in the word-matching task. Based on prior research, the researchers expect that the children will have more difficulty naming items that they learned together with other



items that are strongly related to each other, compared to items that they learned together with other items that are more weakly related. The results of this study will help the researchers better understand which practices are more effective in word learning in children, as well as predict second language learning in adults.



Modeta



Porbi



Zipen



## Director's Corner: The Best Medicine

The continuing Coronavirus pandemic, with the resulting changes in routines and plans, plus a myriad of other uncertainties and inconveniences, sets the perfect context for considering the sixth and seventh practices advocated by Zander and Zander in *The Art of Possibility*. "Rule #6", which is actually the only "rule" in the book, is to lighten up rather than taking ourselves so seriously. The authors explain that replacing our calculating, exacting, demanding selves with ones who acknowledge the power of humor, laughter, and play will reveal our more compassionate, creative and expressive sides. For most of us, that means being willing to laugh at ourselves when the best-laid plans fail, when nature trumps our control of the schedule, and when perfection eludes us. Some say, "Laughter is the best medicine."



One children's book that highlights this practice from a child's point of view is "The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes", by Mark Pett and Gary Rubinstein. In the story, 9-year-old Beatrice is perfect; she never makes the mistakes other children make, and she always wins the town talent contest with her juggling act. As the authors introduce us to Beatrice's day, we see her avoiding her friends' activities because of the risk of making mistakes. We also begin to understand that Beatrice spends much time worrying about her performance and that the anxiety builds as more people affirm her for never making mistakes. Beatrice and her community learn an important lesson about Rule #6 when she makes a very public mistake and experiences the freedom that comes from being able to laugh at herself and with her friends about it.



In a similar way, the practice of being present to "The Way Things Are", including our reactions to the situations we encounter, prevents us from becoming paralyzed. "The capacity to be present to everything that is happening, without resistance, creates possibility... you can leave behind the struggle to come to terms with what is in front of you and move on (p. 101). This kind of thinking is especially important when we make mistakes. If we first follow Rule #6, then we can take the next step to own mistakes as part of the learning process and attend fully to the possibilities ahead. When situations happen to us or are in other ways out of our control, Zander and Zander emphasize eliminating our focus on what "should be", as well as avoiding the common responses of avoidance, denial, and blame. While it may be that the reality of the bad situation cannot change, the way that we view the situation – as a glass half empty or one half full, for example – will determine whether our thinking spirals in a negative direction or radiates with possibility.

When raising or teaching young children, we gradually realize that much of who they are and will become is out of our control. How will we react when they, or we their caregivers, do not meet "the standard"? In the children's book "Ish", Peter H. Reynolds explores this question as Ramon, whose passion is drawing, encounters an older brother who tells him that his pictures are no good. Ramon struggles to meet his brother's standard but gives up drawing when he continually feels inferior. His younger sister offers a new possibility by suggesting that Ramon's drawings may not look exactly like a flower, house, sun, etc. but that they look flower-ish, house-ish, sun-ish. Her perspective frees Ramon to think "ish-ly" about his drawing and other aspects of life so that he can fully engage once more. Let's encourage each other and our children to adopt such playful and positive attitudes as we continue to navigate the typical challenges of life and work while in the pandemic context.





# February

<i>Sun</i>	<i>Mon</i>	<i>Tue</i>	<i>Wed</i>	<i>Thu</i>	<i>Fri</i>	<i>Sat</i>
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12 9:30AM Virtual Family Preview: Whole School OCEAN Theme	13
14 Whole School Theme: OCEAN (February 16 – March 18)	15 NO SCHOOL Presidents' Day  4th Quarter Enrollment Decisions Due	16	17	18	19	20
21	22 February Safety Week	23	24	25	26	27
28						



## Children's School

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