

# THE BING TIMES

BING NURSERY SCHOOL, STANFORD UNIVERSITY

OCTOBER 2020, VOL. 46

## Director's Column: COVID-19 Crisis Reinforces the Importance of Play

By Jennifer Winters, Director



**T**he prolonged COVID-19 crisis restrictions have certainly changed everyone's world. It has also sharpened our focus on what's important.

For the children and families that we serve, the crisis has highlighted the short window of opportunity to maximize a young child's development, confirmed the critical importance of play in overall development, and shown what it's like when a child's daily play in nursery school is removed.

Serving young children and their families with our play-based curriculum is a primary reason for Bing's existence, and in the 55-year history of our school we've never been closed for anywhere near this long. Following our sudden closure in March, there were times we actually wondered "if" rather than "when" our school would reopen. So when, on Sept. 16, we were finally able to open our doors to children again—with new health,



safety, and operating guidelines—all of us at Bing experienced an even greater sense of joy and satisfaction.

I'd like to express our deepest thanks to the entire Bing community of families and friends for their very generous and immediate support of the Bing Emergency Fund. This fund, established shortly after we closed, is what has kept us going and enabled us to reopen. Without it, we would not be where we are today.

The "perfect storm" of a sudden and prolonged school closure and the resulting loss of tuition revenue posed a threat to our very existence. The Bing community's response to the Emergency Fund was overwhelming, and the result is that we have been able to reopen without having made a single layoff. I speak for all of us when I say

we are truly humbled to be serving a community that so values what we do.

I'd like to elaborate on the importance of being able to keep all of our teachers and staff throughout this crisis. I'm frequently asked by parents and visiting educators what makes Bing such a special place, a place that has been able to consistently provide a rich, early-childhood educational experience for over half a century. My answer is always "our teachers and staff." The accumulated early-childhood wisdom, knowledge and practice of our teachers and staff make a difference for both children and parents. It's that wisdom and knowledge that is put into practice in our classrooms and

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communicated to parents. Our teachers and staff are our “secret sauce.”

I would like to thank and acknowledge our teachers and staff for all of their detailed planning and hard work during the shutdown to ensure that we were able to implement our play-based curriculum under the new operating guidelines from state licensing and the univer-

sity, without sacrificing any quality and while adhering to the highest standards for health and safety. The guidelines changed often, including the week before opening, but our team was able to respond to every new requirement.

I would also like to thank and acknowledge several family members of current and past Bing children: Dr. Paul Mohabir, Dr. Ryan Padrez, Dr. Yvonne Maldonado and Dr. Robert Luo. They are all working on the front lines of the COVID crisis and generously volunteered to work with us on our health and safety plans. I would be remiss if I failed to thank Stanford University’s Russell Furr, Associate Vice Provost for Environmental Health and Safety, and Dr. Rich Wittman, Medical Director of the Stanford University Occupational Health Center, for arranging weekly COVID-19 tests for teachers—and, additionally, Steve Olson, Senior Associate Dean for Finance and Faculty Affairs in Humanities and Sciences, for guiding us all along the way. They have been invaluable!

Our new operating guidelines have required us to make changes to our program that, most unfortunately, have reduced the total number of children and families we can serve. We hope the guidelines will change and allow us to add more children to the classrooms, but for now our three nursery school classrooms have a maximum allowable cohort of 24 children with five teachers. The Twos room cohort is currently 12 children and three teachers. Only five-day sessions are allowed in the nursery school classrooms. We are able to operate a morning and afternoon session in each classroom, but each cohort of children and teachers must remain consistent for the five days. Classrooms and materials are disinfected between morning and afternoon sessions, and again at the end of the day. Because of health and safety concerns, parents, guardians and caregivers are not allowed into the school! They pick up and drop off children at entry/exit points that are unique for each classroom. All the staff and children (including the 2-year-olds) wear masks—which hasn’t slowed down their play at all!

While we regret serving fewer children under the new guidelines, we have the maximum number of children currently allowed in each session. In the first two weeks of school, the new drop-off and pick-up procedures have gone very smoothly, even more so than expected. And, while we wish parents could come into the school to see their children playing, learning and having fun, we can assure you that the children have proven exceptionally resilient to any

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By Maeve L., 2 years 5 months



By Zain M., 2 years 6 months

effects of the extended lockdown and have embraced with a passion the new time, spaces and opportunities to play.

Watching the first few days, we can confirm the intrinsic nature of play in young children and can convey what being back at Bing means to them and to us. In the words of a parent of one of the children at Bing: “Since the reopening, I’m seeing Claren’s biggest smile and excitement. Beyond happiness, I see the immediate return of creativity, curiosity about the world and passion in life inspired by the magical Bing experience. The interpersonal relationships and communication have enriched Claren’s perspectives—the songs she composed changed from a bittersweet tone of missing her friends to talking about love and dreams. It also sparks her creativity—since the first day returning to school, she picks up building blocks again and spends more than two hours every day on building at home. Two weeks into school, she is bringing back the wood works from Bing to enrich her block projects from a house to a city.”

At Bing, our play-based, child-centered curriculum is built on our belief that self-directed play is what best promotes a young child’s development across all domains—cognitive, social, emotional and physical. Young children learn by doing, and playing is doing. Through active play, children are stretching themselves across all these important developmental areas, often across many simultaneously.



The window of opportunity to very positively impact a young child’s development is brief, and we have an obligation to make the most of it. A child’s brain reaches 80% of its size by age 3, is almost fully developed by age 5, and by age 7 all of the synapses in the brain will be formed. Synapses are the connections between the neurons, or brain cells, forming our human computer-like system that will enable future learning and the development of educational ability. Recent evidence has shown that real-world, 3-D play by young children is what best creates those synapses in their brain and maximizes its development.

Bing’s founding principles are:

- *Treating every child as an honored guest*
  - *Giving children the gift of time*
  - *Giving children freedom of movement*
- The closure of the school and the extended lockdown of families and children have clearly shown why these principles remain as relevant today as they were a half-century ago!

The “gift of time” and “freedom of movement” are essential for the development of young children in our modern world, where opportunities for real-world play continue to decrease.

Young children have a natural curiosity about the world around them and an inherent desire to explore it. They want to move around, to touch and feel, using all of their senses. The best way to encourage young children to learn

through play is by giving them the time to play, the freedom to move about, and by providing open-ended materials that allow them to exercise their creativity and imagination. Watching young children moving around their environment—interacting with peers,

grasping, manipulating and examining a new object, painting on a blank sheet of paper or building with unit blocks—is to see them engaged, exploring, discovering and learning. In all of these examples, what’s clear is that young children learn best using all of their senses in the physical world and with the fewest constraints on their imagination.



The past six months of sheltering-in-place have shown us that young children have been particularly impacted. While their opportunities to play, explore, discover and interact with the world around them have been limited, the good news is—observed in the first days back at school—their desire to play has not at all diminished, and they are embracing this renewed freedom of movement and this gift of time. Play is just what our young children need for their development, and the children are embracing their newfound play with a passion. It is magical to see.

Learning through play is integral to our philosophy and practice of early childhood education. While this crisis has forced all of us to adapt to new realities, a silver lining has been that it has reinforced the importance of play. While much has changed, the need for young children to play has not. This should be one of our top lessons for 2020. **B**



# What We Did During Shutdown

By Jennifer Winters, Director

Though Bing closed on March 13 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the staff remained hard at work through the spring and summer. And though the school was still officially shut down during the summer, it was far from quiet, as major renovations were taking place!

After the shutdown began, teachers continued their deep connections with their classes in a number of ways: through video recordings of nearly 150 stories and songs for children to enjoy at home on Bing's online portal for parents; live story and music times via video conferencing software; emails and letters sent through postal mail; and a website listing dozens of publicly available COVID-19 resources for families—from at-home activities for building math skills to a podcast of original bedtime stories (<https://bit.ly/bing-covid-resources>).

During the six months away from the physical school, Bing teachers and staff found many opportunities for professional development in addition to curating resources for supporting families during the shutdown. To ensure a smooth transition back to school, teachers worked on committees focused on a range of topics, including community building, health and safety guidelines and classroom set-ups. Additional committees focused on under-

standing disease transmission, creating a culture of belonging, identifying books and music to support social/emotional well-being, planning parent conferences during COVID-19, and preparing parent orientation materials for reopening.

In addition to the committee work, teachers and staff attended online conferences. Many staff members learned valuable information at both the Play First Summit (see page 35 for more information) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children annual professional learning conference. In addition to these two large conferences, teachers and staff attended many webinars, such as Pacific Oaks College's *Anti-biased Education Symposium: Fighting Against Racism*.

We began our summer with the entire staff reading *Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do*, a book by Stanford psychology professor and former Bing parent Jennifer Eberhardt. The reading and resulting conversations led to timely introspection after the death of George Floyd, providing the opportunity to expand our understanding of some of the issues of race and bias that are so prevalent in our culture. Replete with science on implicit bias and historical events, Eberhardt's personal anecdotes were vivid and led to deep discussions about the book and how racial bias impacts our own personal experience.

Bing teaches two undergraduate classes on site each quarter that are instructed by Bing staff. One of these, *Psychology 146: Observation of Children*, was taught online in the spring quarter, and it was a great success. It helped us understand what we needed to do to create an online version of *Psychology 147: Development in Early Childhood*, for the autumn quarter. Our intent is to create online courses that have high

student engagement, are academically rigorous, and give our Stanford students a solid foundation for understanding the stages of young children's development.

Stanford psychology researchers designed an online platform for conducting research in child development and launched it in June. Starting in March, the researchers spent a few months to thoughtfully set up a video chat forum for online sessions. Their goal was to create a fun and engaging experience for children that closely resembles in-person participation. Children can interact with Stanford researchers virtually in the comfort of their own home. The researchers are continuing the online platform. Parents with children aged 3 to 10 are welcome to sign up to participate at [http://sll.stanford.edu/participate\\_online.html](http://sll.stanford.edu/participate_online.html).

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, Bing had plans to close over the summer for a much-needed air conditioning and heating project, in collaboration with Stanford, that had been in the plans for three years. We would like to especially thank our facilities manager, Greta Simpson, and her team at Stanford Buildings and Grounds; our facilities director, Julie Hardin-Stauter, at the School of Humanities and Sciences; RC Benson and Sons construction company; and Jon Florez, our Stanford project manager. As a result of the project, the school now has air conditioning with MERV 13 rating air filters (used in hospital settings and providing close to 90% efficiency for filtering particles), a new heating system, fans in the classrooms and office spaces, hot water at the children's sinks, new carpet and flooring in the classrooms and offices, and fresh paint throughout. As a result of the air conditioning, the children can comfortably come inside on a hot or smoky day. The team did an incredible job on all the construction work, as well as completing the project on time so that Bing could reopen in September. **B**



# Scholar Alexandra Carstensen on Early Diversity in Abstract Thought

By Catherine Xie, Teacher

Imagine you are presented with two images: a chicken and a patch of grass. After you are presented with a third image, a cow, which of the first two images do you pair it with?



Alexandra Carstensen

In other words, do you see the cow as belonging with the chicken or the patch of grass? According to cultural psychological research, your answer may provide some insight into your cultural background. When education psychologist Lian-Hwang Chiu and his colleagues presented this scenario to Chinese and American children in 1972, they found that Chinese children were more likely to categorize the cow and grass together, whereas American children were more likely to group the cow with the chicken. To explain this difference, Chiu and his research collaborators highlighted a cultural tendency that is one of the cornerstones of cultural psychology: Collectivistic societies (like China) emphasize relationships more than individualistic societies (like the United States). Accordingly, American children were more likely to classify the images based on category membership, grouping the cow with the chicken, while Chinese children more often made classifications based on relationships, grouping the cow with the grass.

This study is one of the inspirations for Stanford psychologist Alex Carstensen's investigations into how culture, in addition to language, can play a role in abstract reasoning. A postdoctoral fellow in Michael Frank's Language and Cognition Lab, Carstensen and her research assistants have been running a study at Bing since summer 2019, and she shared some of her findings with Bing teachers and staff in February

at the school's staff development day. Adults are good at abstract reasoning, easily being able to, for example, complete an analogy. Interestingly enough, American toddlers, and even infants, show sophisticated early abilities in relational reasoning (distinguishing between same and different pairs or groups of objects), but some of these abilities get worse over time before improving. Thus, their relational reasoning abilities can be represented by a U-shaped curve—dipping down before increasing again.

So why is there this dip in children's ability to reason about relationships?

To explore possible causes for this phenomenon, Carstensen investigated two perspectives on relational reasoning: the relational shift “paradox” view and the rational learner “paradigm” view. The former suggests that language learning causes both the decline and reemergence of relational understanding by directing children's thinking away from relations temporarily before later providing support for relational reasoning. The latter theory takes a broader view, suggesting that experience with language and the environment may vary across groups of children and create corresponding variation in learned biases for either relational or object-based reasoning.

To test for variation in relational reasoning across cultural and linguistic contexts, Carstensen and her colleagues examined early relational reasoning abilities in American and Chinese children. They considered the role that relational word acquisition may play: relational words, such as “speak,” “give” or “marry,” encapsulate relationships between entities. Because Chinese culture has a greater focus

on relationships, and children learning Mandarin Chinese learn more relational words than American children learning English, the researchers thought that Chinese children may display relational reasoning abilities earlier than American children. They carried out their study in three parts. In the first experiment, 3-year-old children saw four pairs of blocks that were placed atop a music-making toy. Of the four pairs, two pairs consisted of identical blocks, while two pairs consisted of different blocks. In the “same” condition, the toy was activated and played music only when the identical blocks were placed on it. In the “different” condition, the opposite pattern was observed. The researchers then presented novel pairs of blocks to the children and tested their ability to select the “correct” pair to activate the music-making toy, depending on which condition they were in (see Figure 1). They found that while U.S. children's selections appeared to be random, preschoolers in China correctly selected the pair exemplifying the relation (same or different) that had worked before, demonstrating successful inference about same-different relations.

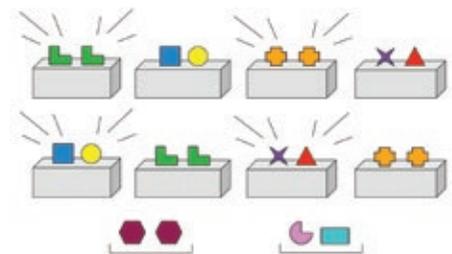
The results from the first study led to their next question: Do these findings point to distinct developmental trajectories of relational reasoning, or are Chinese preschoolers simply further ahead on a similar developmental trajectory? Examining children's performance from 18-to 48-months, they found that there are distinct developmental trajectories:

Figure 1

Same condition

Different condition

Choices for trials



Children in the United States perform well initially, and then decline to chance during this period (corresponding to the first half of the U-shaped curve) but not in China, where they show gradual linear improvement over the same period. Psychologists still don't have a complete understanding of the time course for the U shape, but American adults perform this task with high accuracy, demonstrating a recovery sometime after age 4.

The paradigm view predicts that cultural variation in relational reasoning is the result of learned biases (rather than differences in attentiveness or ability). To test this prediction, researchers presented 3-year-olds with a task that was similar in structure to the one in the first study, but with a key difference: The children were given a forced choice between a relational and object-based solution, both of which were reasonable based

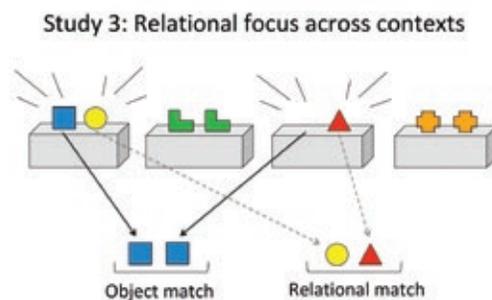
on the examples the researcher had shown (see Figure 2). In this ambiguous scenario with no clear correct answer, they had to decide whether it was the recurring object or the relationship (that is, two different objects) that activated the music. The researchers found that Chinese children tended to select the relational match, while U.S. children preferentially selected the object match.

Based on their findings across the three studies, Carstensen and her colleagues concluded that there are indeed distinct developmental trajectories of relational learning across cultures. This difference suggests that certain kinds of reasoning are privileged in different cultural contexts.

This study lays the groundwork for future research that can potentially

disentangle the specific features of the learning environment, including language, that influence children's abstract thinking. Carstensen's research invites us to contextualize children's abstract reasoning within a culturally diverse society and appreciate a stunning truth about children's learning: that it is dynamic, complex and ever-evolving. **B**

Figure 2



**RESEARCH**

## Researcher in Profile: Natalia Vélez on Social Learning in Children

By Chia-wa Yeh, Head Teacher and Research Coordinator

In the past few years, more than one hundred 4- and 5-year-olds at Bing have played a game featuring appealing green cartoon aliens called Gazorps.



Natalia Vélez

The game is part of a study, designed by Natalia Vélez, that looks at how children make inferences about individuals' preferences and group memberships—for example, which team an individual is on.

Nicknamed “The Science Sketcher” in Stanford's psychology department, Vélez is known for doodling on a digital tablet at talks and posting portraits of speakers and her notes on her Twitter feed. She grew up in a family of artists and

often got scolded by her teachers for drawing in her notebook during class. She tried to stamp out the habit until two years ago, when she saw that one of her Stanford professors tweeted his doodles of conference speakers along with comments about their talks.

Originally from San Juan, Puerto Rico, Vélez moved to the mainland United States 10 years ago for college. She received her bachelor's degree in brain and cognitive sciences at MIT in 2014 and her doctorate in psychology at Stanford in June.

In addition to drawing, Vélez enjoys cooking, baking bread and sewing—hobbies she picked up during graduate school. While she loves doing research, it can often be frustrating, given the long time it takes to get results and

to obtain grants. Engaging in activities that she found inherently rewarding and were separate from her work was very helpful, she said, because even if she had a week when all her projects failed, at least she would still have baked a tasty loaf of bread!

Following is an excerpt from a conversation with Vélez.

**What is the topic of your studies?**

I'm studying how children learn and use information about social groups. Children and adults alike can learn a lot about the people around them based on the groups to which those people belong. Knowing which of these groups others belong to provides a glimpse into that person's knowledge and interests, even when we've just met for the first time.

For example, I might describe my research differently depending on whether the person I'm talking to belongs to categories like "parent," "cognitive scientist" or "child at Bing." However, the very things that make social groups such a powerful tool for learning about other people can be a double-edged sword. The mere presence of social groups—of a boundary between "us" and "them"—can also create biases and prejudice.

### What led you to study children's social cognition?

It was a series of happy accidents. As an undergrad at MIT, I worked in all kinds of labs, studying fruit fly models of Huntington's disease, among other projects. During my senior year at Rebecca Saxe's lab, I worked on an fMRI project where we scanned adults and children ages 7–12 to study the relationship between children's budding socio-cognitive skills and their brain development. As part of my work in the lab, I learned to program, I helped out with fMRI scanning sessions, and I got to work one-on-one with children. As I applied to graduate programs, I knew that I wanted to join a lab where I could do anything. Such labs are rare; most labs typically just do fMRI or just study children's behavior, but not both. It was extraordinarily lucky that professor Hyowon Gweon happened to be recruiting her first graduate students for her Social Learning Lab at the same time—she's the rare researcher who can do everything. I still feel very lucky to have worked with her and to have learned all these techniques from her.

### Tell us about the studies you've conducted at Bing.

The first project explores how 4- and 5-year-old children use statistical information about groups to make quick inferences about new individuals.

The project involves a game where children watch aliens called Gazorps pick out which of two alien fruits, kiki and bubba, they'd like to eat at snack-time. Gazorps belong to two different



Which team is this Gazorp on?

teams: Some Gazorps are on the blue team, and some Gazorps are on the red team. Different children see different distributions of fruits across the two teams—for example, one child might see that every Gazorp on the blue team likes bubba, while every Gazorp on the red team likes kiki. We then introduce children to a whole new Gazorp, and ask them either (a) what this Gazorp likes, based on which group it belongs to, or (b) which group this Gazorp belongs to, based on what it likes.

The second project explores how 3-year-old children infer the difficulty of a task by watching someone else do it. We hypothesize that children's inferences about difficulty integrate the observable outcomes of other people's actions and the competence of the person doing the action. For example, if you see someone struggle to lift a box, you may expect that it's heavier than if they had instead lifted it easily. And if the person who's struggling to lift the box is a champion powerlifter, you might expect the box to be much heavier than if a toddler does the lifting.

The trouble with studying children's inferences is that we can't just ask them to tell us a number; for example, a 4-year-old probably can't tell us "this box weighs five pounds." So I instead measure how much force children use to move the box themselves: The heavier they think the object is, the more force they should apply in anticipation—as measured by a computer sensor hidden inside the box. This project is still in its early stages, but my hope is that it'll give us insights into how children use social information to decide how much

effort to invest into their goals, as well as which goals are worth pursuing.

### What are your findings?

So far, we've found that children can use just a few observations of each team to make quick, sophisticated judgments about new individuals. These results are cause for both hope and concern: On one hand, my work finds that children's judgments about social groups are sensitive to the evidence that they've observed. On the other hand, outside of the lab, these inferences can easily go awry. This work is thus relevant to understanding how more problematic beliefs about social groups, such as stereotypes, might form—and how they may be overcome with evidence.

### What was it like to conduct studies at Bing?

It was wonderful! Bing is really a special place. My research assistants and I often conduct studies with children ages 3–12 at children's museums. To recruit children, we often have to cold-call families on the museum floor and convince them to play our game. I sometimes wonder what children think of us, these strangers who are pulling them away from all the fun museum exhibits! My favorite thing about conducting research at Bing is that the research is seamlessly woven into the rest of the child's world. As a game room teacher, I not only got the chance to play research games with children, but I also played Red Rover with them, read them storybooks and listened to them talk about their birthday plans over snack time. It's a unique experience. I'm really going to miss it, and my research assistants enjoyed their time at Bing, too.

### What's your next step?

I'm now a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Psychology at Harvard University, working primarily with Sam Gershman. Moving forward, I'm interested in studying not only how children and adults receive information from other people, but also how information is pooled and shared across communities. **B**

# Life in a Nursery School: My Adventures in Psychology 147

By Rizina, Stanford junior

*Bing Nursery School staff members teach a few Stanford courses at the school each quarter, among them, “Psychology 147: Development in Early Childhood.” Students taking this undergraduate course attend weekly seminars and interact with children in the classroom under the guidance of a Bing liaison teacher. In this article, one of these students describes her experience in the West PM classroom during the 2019 autumn quarter.*

Early childhood education, while immensely pertinent in the holistic development of an individual, is often undervalued. My deep interest in the Psychology 147 course arises from a fascination with educational pedagogy, an appreciation of the nuanced inner world of the child, and a desire to contribute to the prioritization of early childhood education.

On my first visit, I was largely in awe of the nursery school, wishing that I had been able to attend Bing Nursery School as a child. The dedication of the teachers, the ample resources available to the children, and the emphasis on learning through play impressed me. This being my first visit, I expected to be met with coldness from the children. However, I was surprised and impressed by their welcoming nature. They asked who I was, what my name was, and if I would join them in play.

Looking back, what stands out most about my first week is that I was already starting to gain insights about the inner world of the child and was beginning to connect the theoretical with the practical. Prior to my first day, I read *Playing to Get Smart* by Elizabeth Jones and Renatta Cooper. They note: “We teach young children to play by providing them with the space, time, and materials; offering them support in problem solving; presenting new problems for

them to solve; paying attention to their spontaneous interests; and valuing their eagerness to learn about the world in which we all live together.” During my first week, I saw this philosophy appears to have been actualized successfully at Bing Nursery School.

Students taking the course are required to keep a weekly journal reflecting on their experiences in the classroom and to connect them with assigned reading materials. Included below are a few of my journal entries.

## Cherry Pies and Pizzas

*Oct. 22, 2019* From the sand area, a number of exuberant voices arose. I ventured over, curious to see what had transpired. Maddie and Ellie were cooking up a feast. Cherry pies and pizzas, made with sand and the buds of playground trees, were being crafted with a mix of fastidiousness and flurry. All this had been created with unstructured and basic materials, which, as Elinor Griffin asserts in *Island of Childhood*, provide the appropriate inspiration and freedom to explore and innovate. The pies, upon being “baked,” were placed on a table. Both children stood appreciating their creation, “becoming more aware of their own powers and their influence on the people and things around them.”

## Making Hot Chocolate

*Oct. 29, 2019* Taking the basic concept of a chocolate drink, Denali, Isabelle and Drew first tried to understand its components. “When we make hot chocolate, we put milk in it,” said Denali. Isabelle responded: “We don’t have milk here.” Subsequently, I asked, “What might we use instead of milk?” They stared at one another quizzically, hesitating. “Water!” yelled Drew. “Yes!” Denali and Isabelle both responded excitedly. Hoping to continue this learning opportunity, I asked:

“Why is water OK to use?” They considered this momentarily. “Because they’re both wet,” Isabelle said, shrugging.

Quickly they got to work. Measuring, pouring and repouring, they excitedly mixed their concoction. Although I was present, the activity was entirely child-directed. Even when encountering challenges in the execution of their idea, they hesitated to ask for help. Instead, they worked with one another to reach a resolution. Upon reflection, I would attribute this to the availability and integration of basic materials and the children’s ability to independently determine the direction of their play. The latter ability appears to have been cultivated through the emphasis on learning and personal growth at Bing, whereby teachers facilitate the children’s learning, rather than enforcing or directing it. In support of this philosophy, early education scholar Lilian Katz warns of the negative ramifications of teacher dependency. She states in *A Developmental Approach to the Education of Young Children*: “When young children are required to learn about things that are not real to them, they are obliged to be teacher-dependent; children are dependent upon adults for many important aspects of their lives; excessive dependence on adults in learning may undermine the development of intellectual dispositions (e.g., to be curious, experimental, analytical, exploratory, investigative, thoughtful, and to construct and test hypotheses).”



By Henry L.,  
3 years 7 months

## Rushing River Rocks

Nov. 5, 2019 “I think this could be lava,” said Derin, referring to a tube. Vik responded, “That would be fun. But what would the balls be?” “I don’t know, maybe we should do something else,” replied Derin. Then Raya proposed an idea, “Maybe water.” Derin and Vik, both enthused by this idea, agreed. Eventually, it was decided: The tube became a river, in which animals and humans swam, and the balls became rocks that could endanger swimmers. In reaching this conclusion, Raya, Derin and Vik were all engaged cognitively, physically and socially. They had to grapple with the different ways in which a tube and tennis ball could be interpreted, and then communicate their respective ideas in order to choose one as a group. As they did so, they threw the tennis balls and maneuvered the tube: flipping it, moving it and even smelling it. At times, they needed one another’s help—the tube was too heavy, or it got stuck—and they worked together, solving problem by problem. This observation is reminiscent of the ideas of Jonathan Tudge and David Caruso, who write in “Cooperative Problem Solving in the Classroom: Enhancing Young Children’s Cognitive Development”: “Free play activities involving construction or building present opportunities for creative problem solving because children are already involved in pursuing objects intrinsically interesting to them.”

Being immersed in the children’s dramatic play was eye-opening. While observing and interacting with the children, I was flooded with questions: *What will happen*



Giraffe.  
By Calista L.,  
4 years 2 months

*next? How will they resolve this situation? How will they carry this?* All three children exhibited significant complexity in their responses to the varying stimuli and situations they encountered, creating—without any formal instruction or academic imperative—an intellectual and imaginative wonderland.

## Woodworking: Making a Ginormous Flower

Nov. 12, 2019 Sienna moved to the woodwork table. “I’m going to create something,” she said, her voice brimming with confidence. Her eyes moved rapidly between the tools and wood, deciding what she would create. She began simply, placing one diamond block next to another. “They have to be aligned,” she said. “Why?” I asked. “So that it stays together and there aren’t any gaps. It wouldn’t look nice,” she responded, then nodded furiously, as though appreciating her own response. I watched with care as she diligently arranged six blocks, then 12, then 18, across the woodwork table. Each was aligned exactly with its corresponding diamond block, demonstrating her ability to quickly process information about the spatial characteristics of shapes. Sienna stared at her arrangement with immense interest and then said, in a reflective tone, “I made a flower. It’s ginormous.”

Next came the wooden connectors, which are small pegboards that can bridge two pieces of wood. Although she admitted, “We might have to use them all,” Sienna picked each with care. One by one, she grabbed a wooden connector and then a couple of nails. A nail and wooden connector in one hand, and pliers in the other, she looked at me quizzically: “Can you please help me?” “Of course,” I said, “What can I do?” Sienna guided me effortlessly: “Place the nail in the pliers and put it on the wood. Connect it here, so it holds the blocks together.” Diligently, I followed her instructions. Over time, a predictable pattern ensued, shaped by Sienna’s ability to delegate: I held the pliers, while she positioned the wooden connectors and selected the nails we would use. This



rhythmic ease was helped by the clear organization of the woodwork space, allowing both teacher and child to easily navigate the materials. Griffin notes the importance of order and predictability in the chapter “Self-Directed Learning Spaces,” stating, “Many practical learning experiences are provided by the need for the school to be kept in reasonable order. When children are able to find what they want quickly and easily, not only does their play proceed more smoothly and with a longer attention span, but they also feel secure and independent in a setting they understand.”

## Dolphin and Superman

Nov. 19, 2019 “I’m a dolphin. I like being on my tummy in the water. I’m not as fast as Lochlan,” said Salar. To which Lochlan replied, “I’m Superman, I’m really fast and I save people. This isn’t water, it’s a building.” At the same time, and playing within the same space, Salar and Lochlan had envisioned very different perceptions of the world. “Where did these ideas come from?” I wondered out loud. “I saw a comic about Superman and how he saves the world,” said Lochlan. “I saw a book with dolphins, and they slide like this,” said Salar. Play provides children a forum for uniting and testing their internal and external representations of the world.

Children utilize the ideas explored in books to test their conceptions about the world and then promulgate their own. For example, I asked Salar, “What else can you tell me about dolphins?” He began initially by recounting details grounded solely in facts—what dolphins do, what they might eat, and how they swim—then proceeded to ideate using

his imagination. “I think they hide on land sometimes. I think they sometimes get angry with their friends.” Pausing, he asked, “Is that true?” I replied, “I’m not sure if they hide on land. I think they might need water to stay hydrated.” “What was the last word?” asked Salar. “It’s like when we feel thirsty: dolphins feel like that if they aren’t in the water.” “Okay,” said Salar, “I don’t think dolphins hide on land.” For children, their knowledge about the world is constituted primarily by the things they read and observe, and the ideas that their parents share with them. They do not yet have a formal avenue for testing their theories. Yet, as they read books, enact their thoughts in play, and converse with other children, parents and teachers, they form and revise their frameworks for viewing and interacting with the world.

Early childhood education can empower children in this process by providing exposure to various schemas and contextualizing their imaginative dispositions with information that enriches their understanding. Over time, this results in them developing more sophisticated representations of self, others and society.

### An Invaluable Experience

My first day at Bing Nursery School was fraught with anxiety: Would I be able to effectively interact with the children? Would I be able to emulate the expertise of the teachers? Would I have any autonomy over how I navigated my time in the classroom? Over time, though, arriving at West PM brought an eagerness and solace. I looked forward to my time in the classroom and felt empowered to do

a good job. These feelings of self-efficacy, as well as the autonomy I was granted by the teachers, ensured that I was a more effective classroom participant. Experiencing this firsthand, I recognized the need for school administrators and policy makers to afford autonomy to educators. Educators’ work is done best when they have the freedom to explore, to make mistakes and to improve.

I’d like to express my appreciation for the wonderful teaching of Jennifer Winters, director, and Beth Wise, associate director, the expertise and humility of my liaison teacher, Roberta Udoh, and of course, the children in West PM. Due to their influence, I am more knowledgeable, hopeful, and dedicated to improving every child’s educational experience. **B**

## CLASSROOM CURRICULUM

# Explorations of Inclines, Gutters and Ramps in the Twos

By Rinna Sanchez-Baluyut, Head Teacher

**B**uilding ramps and rolling a variety of objects down the resulting slopes captivated children in the Twos classroom this school year. The interest arose after teachers placed plastic rain gutters and a variety of balls on the patio for the children to explore.

Children in the Monday/Wednesday/Friday AM and Tuesday/Thursday PM classes placed the gutters at varying heights and experimented with rolling whiffle balls,

tennis balls, wooden balls, hacky sacks and rubber band balls. Many children gravitated toward this activity and were fascinated to see how the balls traveled at

varied speeds. A child observed, “These small balls are the fastest.” Hacky sacks did not roll—they just slid down—which puzzled the children. They continued to slide these bean bag-like balls down the gutters, and after a while realized that they needed to exert more force to make them go all the way down.



varying heights and surfaces for children to explore. After repeated experiences, one child formed a theory about why some balls roll faster than others:

“This incline is higher and the ball rolls faster.” Additionally, as children became more comfortable using these open-ended materials, they were often seen adjusting them to control the distance and direction the balls would go.

We extended this play by adding small vehicles for children to use with the gutters. This added a different kind of experience for the children, as the cars and airplanes had wheels and moved along the gutters differently than the balls had. Given more time and opportunities with the same vehicles, the children continued to experiment with the gutters. One child used a chair to prop up both ends of a gutter and create a bridge for the vehicles to cross. Then the same child explored other ways to use the gutter. While the vehicles were all parked at the bottom end of the gutter, he decided to lift that end and cause all the vehicles to roll backward,



right into the bin used to store them. This demonstrated his understanding that adjusting the height of these gutters influenced the movement of the vehicles.

We also placed gutters in the water table along with some toy boats, ducks and fish—at first a short piece of gutter for children to test out, and then longer gutters so they could extend their play. Using water in the gutters offered an additional learning experience for the children. They investigated ways to pour water down the gutter to make the boats, ducks and fish flow down. They learned that adjusting the angle and amount of water produced varying results. Even when children weren't able to attain their immediate goals, they persevered with this play, exhibiting an amazing amount of resilience.

Through their repeated play with gutters, children gained a better understanding of inclines and began independently pursuing these interests in various areas of the classroom. For instance, in the block area, a child used unit blocks to build a ramp for her cars. The child stacked several blocks and then leaned a long block against the stack, creating a slope. She then excitedly exclaimed, "I

made a ramp. It's ready." As she gathered several small cars, she said, "I need lots of cars to go down the ramp." She then positioned the car at the top of the ramp and excitedly exclaimed, "See how it goes ... it went down!" The child was happy with the success of her ramp and then turned to a friend and offered her a car, saying "Your turn!" In another instance, the children excitedly played with toy school buses outside on the patio, moving the buses from one end of the road to the other. While exploring the buses and roads, a child decided he needed ramps. The child went over to the area in the classroom with hollow blocks, picked up a long board and carried it over to the carpeted platform where the buses were being used and propped this piece on the edge to create a ramp. While this was being carried out, another child quietly observed what he was doing and began helping. This child got more wooden planks to add a longer ramp. Without any hesitation or any requests for help, these two children built a longer ramp together.

Evidently, the act of playing with ramps inspired social engagement and collaboration. The children invited one another to play, took turns and shared

materials, and collectively built inclines. The children exhibited resilience and perseverance while figuring out ways to make the ramps work, and they exercised problem-solving skills when some of the ramps fell down and came apart.

Additionally, these open-ended materials supported the learning of many scientific and mathematical concepts, such as force, pressure, gravity and cause-and-effect. Through trial and error, children gathered information regarding the movement of balls and vehicles, made predictions about which items would roll faster or slower, and learned that the height and angle of slopes affect how the objects on them roll. They frequently exercised mathematical skills such as counting ("I have four balls"), sorting (organizing the different kinds of balls and vehicles), comparing ("These small balls roll the fastest"), and understanding spatial relationships (honed as they arranged the blocks to create the ramps). Through active engagement with these materials, children learned so many essential skills, and, most importantly, they loved the joy of learning through play! **B**



## The Allure of the Swing

By Jeanne Zuech, Head Teacher

**H**ey, stop the swing! I want to get on!" This phrase can be heard throughout the day, on any day, floating in the air in the outdoor play space of East PM.

They're talking about the nest swing—a cross between a swing and a hammock that resembles a bird's nest. It consists of a sturdy ring framing a netted seat and hangs from two strong ropes.

The site of much activity and adventure, the swing engages children's large muscles, fosters increased balance and encourages children to be highly physically engaged.

There are two ways children typically play on the nest swing. One way is when children stand up on the base of the swing to hold on to the ropes, as seen in the photo, to get the swing moving. The second way is when children sit on the netted seat and sway their bodies to add to the swing's momentum. As the swing moves back and forth, children hold on to the ropes and adjust their bodies to maintain balance and propel the nest higher. It certainly seems fun, yet to be a nest-swinger also requires attention and responsibility. Children gain strength and spatial awareness when they choose to climb aboard the nest swing.

Beyond the physical experience, using the swing often has a social component. Although occasionally we'll find a child or two lying leisurely on the nest, lounging as if on a vacation hammock, the nest swing is predominantly a highly interactive social experience.

Initially, joining others on the swing might mean a child is thinking about:

- *Where do I sit?*
- *Is there room for me?*
- *I want to sit right there!*
- *I want a turn to stand and pump the swing!*

Once on the swing, there might be other social strategies to consider, such as:

- *Pretend play*
- *Joke telling*
- *Singing and more singing (songs from Moana and Frozen seem to echo in the air even after the children have gone home!)*
- *Science discussions*
- *Chats about family or pets*

### The Conversation

Listen in on this hour-and-a-half-long conversation, which took place on the swing as children came and went. It started with three children, yet eventually included as many as eight. Players included Maya, Bea, Gigi, Jingshu, Miyu, Wanda, Asha and Caroline.

*Maya: Want to play family with me?*

*All: Yes!*

*Bea: Is everyone OK? OK!*

The children start the swing into motion.

*Gigi: I can sit like this!*

*Miyu: Want faster and higher?*

*Gigi: Sometimes my dad pushes me high.*

*Maya: If you want to have a play date, I'm available but you have to talk to my mom—she does all that.*

Other children run over to join as Jingshu and Asha climb into the center section.

*Jingshu: Wait for me! Let's go really high!*

*Maya: I can do the push-jump—it's really cool!*



*Miyu and Jingshu: More faster! Faster, faster, faster... [laughing]*

*Miyu: You like it high?*

*Maya: Now I can sit down and just enjoy the ride we made.*

*All: Wheel! [more laughing]*

*Jingshu: I want to go higher!*

Children keep swaying as a team and laughing together.

*Maya: At nighttime, look at the moon. You know what? Some flowers only open at night.*

*Maya: If I say "A" someone else can stand up to push. When I say "B" it is my turn again.*

*Maya: Is the ground a little bit shaky?*

*Miyu: More, more, more!*

*Faster, faster!*

*Maya: "B"—can it be my turn now?*

*Jingshu: Sure!*

It is crowded on the swing. The central section is full and two children are sustaining standing positions by holding fiercely to the ropes.

*Maya: The wood chips are not pleasant on your feet.*

*All: We do it higher, higher, higher!!*

*All singing You're Welcome from*

*Moana: "What can I say except you're welcome!"*

*All: That's Maui! The Moana song! [Laughing]*

*All singing Let It Go from Frozen: "Let it go! Let it go!"*

After a few minutes, the song fades and a few children get off.

*Maya: Want to play family?*

*Gigi: I'll be the sister.*

*Miyu: I have gymnastics. It is almost Happy Halloween. My home has pumpkins.*

*Gigi: Me, too! I have three pumpkins.*

While children play, the roles of educators at Bing vary throughout the day. Sometimes we are supporting children to enter play or solve problems, and sometimes we are guiding or observing a game. Other times, teachers are investigators alongside children. However, one of the most important roles as an educator at Bing is to not be in the play and not interrupt unless safety concerns arise.

The conversation on the nest swing was one of those instances when no adult involvement was needed. It didn't matter if the conversation made sense to adults or if everyone got a turn to talk. The priority was for this group to freely engage with each other in a dynamic experience on the swing, making friendships organically just by being near peers and joining in.

So, next time you are in the yard in East Room (or any yard at Bing), glance over to the nest swing. You just might be witness to a friendship being formed as children swing together, hands tight on the ropes, laughter resounding round the yard. **B**

# Weaving: In and Out in East AM

By Brianna Kirby, Teacher

**A**s a yarn craft enthusiast, I am always trying to find ways to incorporate my love for fiber arts within the classroom. In previous years, I've offered yarn at the woodworking table, where children have used it to make everything from shooting stars to fire blasters. One year, I set out yarn, tape and large cardboard boxes for a collaborative fiber collage. Other times, I've invited children to sew or weave individual creations at the art table. This past year in East AM, I had the idea of a collaborative, traveling weaving project. It became a reality with help from the school's beloved carpenter, Gene Aiken, who custom-made a large portable loom. The intention behind this experimental project was to engage and inspire collective creativity and exploration over an extended period of time and in a variety of physical locations and play contexts. The art and craft of large-scale weaving was new to me, and the children quickly joined

with interest and enthusiasm as we set out to explore this unique medium.

At first, the East AM children were most excited to pluck the warp yarns on this unfamiliar, oversized, harp-like addition to our classroom. After frank disappointment in the musicality of the loom, but closely followed by an invitation to participate in a community weaving project, many children became intrigued by the long, colorful strands awaiting them nearby. This latest yarn project began on the patio in East Room, and it traveled with me throughout the indoor and outdoor classroom each week. From the sand area to the outdoor block-building platform, the children in East AM visited the loom in passing and on purpose, for a single minute and for repeated stretches of time, independently and in partnership with their peers. They handled the threads with curiosity, purpose and the subtle hesitation that accompanies unfamiliarity and learning a new skill. For



some, simply feeling the fuzzy textures of yarn and appreciating the myriad colors offered a new sensory adventure, while others earnestly moved their chosen weft over and under, in and out, from one end of the frame to the other.

Although a finished product did not exactly materialize from these weeks of weaving, the process itself sparked magical moments that far surpassed my vague visions of a classroom carpet or decorative wall-hanging. Familiar friends joined forces, and previously unfamiliar peers acquainted themselves in their shared interest for the project. A combination of knots, loops, twists and other maneuvers of the yarn resulted in a dense, 6-to-8 inches of tactile togetherness—a sort of carpet-in-progress, much like our young community of learners. Over the course of several weeks, I became enamored with the unlikely social connections, the industrious focus of determined children, and the stillness and tranquility that certain children enjoyed through their meditative relationship with the loom. Crafting, creativity and collaboration strengthened our classroom community and gave space for children to connect with themselves and each other in unforeseen ways. This beloved swatch of effortful weaving, with lots of loose ends, represents the hard work and lingering possibilities available to us each day in our classrooms. **B**



# “I Have Lots of Time to Build This ...”

By Mary Munday, Head Teacher

A 4-year-old child had been playing with a group of her East PM peers when she decided to venture off on her own to the unit block area in the classroom. She was carrying her two favorite stuffed animals, which she picked up every day upon arrival—a dog and a cat. The block area was quiet, and at this time she was the only builder. She carefully stacked shorter unit blocks on their sides and then balanced a longer block horizontally on the top, upon which she placed her cat and dog as if they were on a teeter-totter. After this, she used colored cube blocks to create patterns. “Look, teacher, I made a rainbow!” She continued adding to her structure, thoughtfully placing each piece. She paused, looked over at the teacher and said, “You know, teacher, I have lots of time to build this.”

At Bing Nursery School, children have two hours of uninterrupted time to play in the half-day session. Our founding director, Edith Dowley, believed in a program where children were treated as honored guests and given the “gift of time.” She believed in giving children back what hectic, busy, modern living had taken away. This founding principle continues to be a very important part of our program. Children can work on an activity of interest for this extended period of time without feeling rushed to move onto something else. Knowing she



had time to build her structure, the child built it slowly and thoughtfully. She added more blocks, windows and signs, smiling as she did so. Another child became interested and asked if he could help. She said, “Sure!” Airplanes, cars and a bridge were added as she paused to watch. She returned and placed one last block and said, “I’m done, teacher.” She looked at her structure, stood up and ran off to find her friends.

The child inspired others to begin block building that day. Another child, age 4, who was watching, started a project nearby. She began placing unit blocks vertically, and then worked hard to figure out how to get a large flat board to stand upright. A teacher helped hold the board while the child collected and carried over more blocks to stabilize the board. She continued to place blocks on either side to help hold it up. When it fell, she tried again and again until finally the board stayed up on its own. “It worked! Let’s pretend this is a house. I made a TV. Pretend I’m a kid and I’m going to watch. I’m watching cartoons. This is the remote.” She scooted back and held onto a unit block, pushing on it as if it were a remote and smiling while watching her show.

Each day, a teacher sets a few blocks out to invite the children to begin building. One day, a teacher placed a large, flat board with blocks underneath one end to create a ramp. A 3-year-old walked by and looked at the ramp. He ran over to where the wooden cars were on the block shelf, picked one up, and ran to race it over the ramp. He rolled the car a few times in a fast motion over the board and then paused and looked around at the block shelves.

He began choosing blocks and placing them on the carpeted floor, starting next to the ramp and continuing around to build an oval racetrack. He moved quickly and enthusiastically as he added more and more blocks. He tested out the structure with his car while describing his work to a teacher nearby: “This is a racetrack. You go over here and over this block! You grab these [flat boards for ramp]. Yeah! Almost there!” He placed the ramp pieces next to each other. “So, the racetrack has a speed car and it goes vroom vroom and then it does a big jump ZOOM!” He drove the car around and around the racetrack. “Jump! Vroom!” A peer was watching nearby and became very interested. He picked up a car and tried out the



racetrack, and the builder stepped back and watched. Soon the two drove around the track, racing their cars together.

Stories also inspire building. We have many books at Bing about building, construction and architecture. A 4-year-old was interested in the book *How a House Is Built* by Gail Gibbons. He read it at the end of the day with his mom and asked many questions as she carefully described each step in building a house. The following day he went to the block area and began laying long blocks on the carpet horizontally. “I’m building a house. I put the cement on the



ground. The cement is under the bricks. It’s graham cracker cement (he says with a laugh).” He then placed another layer of blocks on top. “This is the cement. If you jump here, be careful because this is concrete.” He placed a flat board on top. “This is the floor of the house.”

Next, he began stacking long blocks on top of each other very carefully. They began to slip, and he tried again. A teacher nearby observed that the blocks kept falling, so she offered to hold the blocks as he placed a new block on top. “Now I’m doing the walls,” he said, as he completed one side and then did the other. As he was about to place one more block, he looked at the other side and stopped. The blocks were evenly stacked. “Now I need to do the roof.” He held two large flat boards next to each other at an angle making a triangle shape on the carpet. “How do I make it stay? How do I make my roof stay?” A child was watching nearby.

“With one of these giant boards. You need to do it like this.” She placed the board flat onto his house. He went on to describe his house: “I put no windows or doors because a long time ago houses did not have windows or doors. This house is built out of wood and bricks and cement. The floor of the house is cement and the roof of the house is cement. This is a door [large flat board on side] and that’s another door [board on other side]. The doors are made of cement. It made me think of ideas in this book (he pointed to *How a House Is Built*) when I built my house. I need a flashlight because it is so dark inside my house.”

A few children stay for late care, which is one 5-year-old’s favorite time to build. It is a quiet time with only a few children, and she can focus and work without interruption. She has built many complex structures involving careful vertical placement of long blocks. If a block fell, she picked it right back up and carefully placed it again. The use of this open-ended material to build anything a child can dream of brings out so many creative ideas. She built castles, beds for her babies, houses, and desks, and she often tested to see if she could fit inside her structures. She experimented with



many mathematical concepts such as balance and symmetry, used her problem-solving abilities by rebuilding if it came crashing down, and she expressed her creativity as new ideas emerged each day.

Children work independently or with peers in the block area. Many times an idea inspires a child to begin building, and others observe and later join in the play. A group of 3- and 4-year-olds worked cooperatively each day building with the large hollow blocks. A few who have worked on many block-building structures initiate the play while others observe at first. This group began as a small group and then later moved outdoors to the hollow blocks to create life-size structures—beds, desks, tables—with many rooms inside of their homes set with dishes, food, keyboards, phones, blankets and pillows: a place to work and play!

Children learn many concepts through block play as they work on their gross motor skills and problem-solving abilities, and express their creativity. Many mathematical concepts are learned through block play, including length, measurement, patterns, symmetry and balance. Science concepts such as weight, height and gravity are tested. Literacy is shown with signs, stories about their structures, and inspiration from books. And block play helps children socially and emotionally as they take turns, negotiate, cooperate with others, become self-reliant and build self-esteem. Block play supports all areas of a child’s development and, thanks to the “gift of time” at Bing, children have “lots of time to build ....” **B**

# You Can Go *Anywhere* ... with a Map: A Study of Maps

By Parul Chandra, Head Teacher

Children learn by using their senses to investigate the world around them. Through these investigations, they learn how things work and why things happen. One such investigation started last December when a section of our classroom yard was closed off with yellow caution tape to let the newly planted grass flourish. Accessing the sand area and the grove area, which are on opposite ends of the half-acre play yard, was not as simple as before. Teachers in Center AM used this real-life situation as an impetus to spur new ideas from the children about how to navigate the cordoned-off yard as well as an opportunity to stimulate their awareness and enable them to develop creativity and flexibility in thinking and planning.

Driven by the need to be problem-solvers, many children started drawing paths that one could take to access the yard without hurting the baby grass. We set up a mapmaking table, and soon many children were invested in creating their own maps of the yard and sharing them with others to show them the way.

Limited access to the yard was the catalyst that launched us into our map project. Drawings that emerged made us curious about the children's understanding of the event. We would ask questions and document the children's words on the drawings. These representations from the 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds revealed the cognitive process they undergo to represent what is on their minds.



Our children had prior experience with viewing teacher-made maps of both the indoor and outdoor areas of the classroom. We had seen children use these maps in their dramatic play by following the maps and by creating a script for their play around them.

Now, children were creating their own maps and testing them out. They were building logical reasoning skills, which involve relationships between real objects and the testing of hypotheses: "What will happen if I go this way?" Children were exhibiting these thinking skills through play. The change in the yard and its accessibility was a shared experience, and children were motivated to share their ideas as they worked on their plans. For example, Naia enjoyed creating a new map based on the old outdoor maps, marking red X's over the taped-off areas where we couldn't walk. Naia, along with other children, followed her map to get to the grove. She was delighted to realize that all they needed to do was to go along the fence to get to where they wanted. This realization sparked another idea in her mind, and she came back inside to the map table, where she gathered cardboard to use as stepping stones guiding children to the sand and grove areas.



## Logical Thinking: Sharing Theories

*The process of back-and-forth connections turns into an opportunity for us to label words and for children to map those words together with their ideas, to understand the intents and minds of others, and to express what they want to say.* —Kathy Hirsh-Pasek, co-author of *Becoming Brilliant: What Science Tells Us About Raising Successful Children*

Since our new project had just taken off, the teachers as co-investigators of this project worked to find out more about the children's understanding of maps. We asked questions and had discussions with the children to discover their notions about how the two-dimensional representations of their maps reflected three-dimensional spaces. These conversations revealed children's theories, misconceptions and questions that needed further exploration. Among the questions we had were:

- Do children know what maps tell?
- What are children's perceptions of how and why maps are used?
- How does one create a map?
- How do maps represent distance, time and landmarks?

We urged the children to listen to and share ideas so they could assimilate

new information to reconstruct their understanding of maps. We also encouraged them to represent as many of the facets as they could through the drawings, extended descriptions and other media such as paint, design materials and blocks. Their rich representations revealed the full context of each child's theory. Here are some examples:

*Teresa: Map is for when you are lost, and you don't know where to park.*

*Jules: You can follow the map if you want to go to the bank and you haven't been to this country before.*

*John: Do you know how to map the ocean floor? You go on an underground ship. Zooming in helps you see things up close on the map.*

*Mila: This is the map of Hawaii. The tricky part is the bumpy hill. The bumpy is in danger, you have to slow down the car.*

*Eliana: It is to show you where places are and how to go there. It's a flat piece of paper and the globe is like a ball that shows you where to go on it.*

*Charlotte: It is made of paper.*

*Kabir: Maps tell you where not to go. See, this says "no going here."*

*Izzy: When I go far places, I use maps. Only when I go to Tahoe.*

*Ayaan: A map is to go somewhere. It can take you to San Francisco, Africa and even India. If the pilots don't know where to go, they can use a map.*

Children were appreciating the value of literacy and numeracy skills as they applied them in purposeful ways to aid in their investigation. The map project strengthened the children's intellectual

faculties, such as analyzing, predicting, hypothesizing and explaining.

### Orientation and Mapmaking

*You can't know who you are until you know where you are. —Wendell Berry, poet, essayist, farmer and novelist*

Through their representations of maps, the children were thinking about creating new connections to places. They were also grasping an understanding of orientation, spatial awareness and the relationship between their current location and where the map was guiding them. We introduced a 24" x 48" world map and several books and puzzles related to maps and travel for the children to explore. The children then began to create amazing maps of cities, countries, ... and the classroom garden. Some representations were drawings and paintings, while others were 3D representations made with the basic materials. Children were creating maps of their neighborhood with unit blocks along with paper and collage materials. Many wanted to share their maps or written directions of their route to Bing from home. Some re-created these with clay or blocks and used wooden signs to provide directions. At music time, we encouraged children to make maps to go with the "Bear Hunt" song, and then, as part of a movement activity, the mapmakers led us through the yard as they "read" their maps.

As the quotes below indicate, children's conversations reflected their growing understanding of spatial relationships:

*Lara: Directions on your maps are left, right, straight.*

*Salman: Also, backwards.*

*Jocelyn: Maybe you can take this map to go forward to go home and then backwards to come back to Bing. When you go backwards it's called reverse.*

*Alina: I made this map because I wanted us to be on it. (She could not find Bing on the Stanford map.) So there is where we are! The pink line is medium. The blue line is good to go to Bing School and the red one is traffic.*

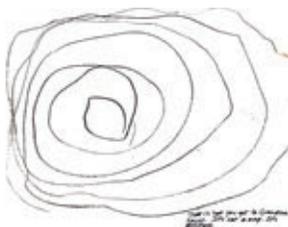
*Leo: To get to my house, go down the freeway. Then you go the long, long, long way. Then turn around and turn around again and mine is the first house there.*

*Faye: This is how you get to grandma's house. It's not a map. It's directions!*

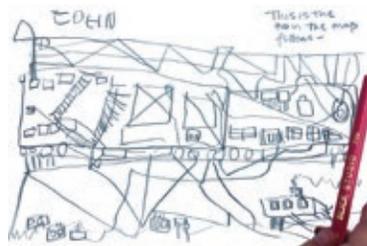
*John: This map is for ground level and underground. (He draws carrots growing below the ground.) It's like the subway in New York.*

### Creative Extensions: Taking It Beyond Mapmaking and Geography

Maps, however, were not just used for going places. These representational drawings sparked the children's ability to visualize beyond geography. For example, Jules decided to draw a body map, saying: "The red stuff is blood. The veins bring blood to the heart. Then it goes to the lungs to get air. Then the blood goes all through your body to deliver the air." Others were interested in his understanding of how the body works as Jules drew the veins, blood, heart and brain. Inspired by him, others started drawing their own "body maps." We displayed a collection of these drawings with books



That is how you get to Grandma's house. It's not a map. It's directions. By Faye S.



This is the train the map follows. By John F.



A northwest map. By Nate R.

of the human body as well as X-rays on the light table for reflection and dialogue.

An interaction between Jules and Henry is an example of how this project sparked abstract thinking and brought out their curiosity about many other topics. When they stopped at the light table in the quiet classroom after snack time to look at the body maps and X-rays, Henry held up the rib cage X-ray to the chest area of Jules' body map drawing. Jules said, "Do you know where the ribs are? They're right here," as he patted both sides of his chest. They held up a foot X-ray on the body map as well, and correctly placed it at the end of one of the legs. Henry put two chest X-rays together, aligning the spines, and said, "This is how you make a whole person. You connect the spine." Jules explained that "the spine has all of these tiny things in it."



### Multiple Means of Action and Expression

*There is always a variety of child responses that demonstrate knowledge or skill, across stages of development.* — Sallee Beneke and Michaelene Ostrosky, co-authors of *The Project Approach for All Learners: A Hands-On Guide for Inclusive Early Childhood Classrooms*

Rich, dramatic play scripts involving maps emerged, and the children engaged in role-playing during the map project that built on their strengths and extended their skills. Children imagined visiting grandparents and being with their families while traveling all over the world. They visited many familiar children's attractions, such as Legoland

and Disneyland, and had many visits to the beach. We looked for buried pirate booty, had a scavenger hunt, visited outer space to see the Mars Rover and even had an underwater adventure to find sunken treasures. These mapmaking activities supported creative expression and the children's sense of agency.

The children also started to use map vocabulary in play. For example, Theo said, "My map is on my navigation in my car. I don't need paper. My car always pairs me properly!" John said, "The scale tells you how far everything is. It is a symbol." Children understood that maps employ symbols, that they are dependent on the concept of scale, that they display images from a "bird's-eye view," and that they reduce the size of an actual place. John further questioned, "Why on maps does it look very close but it's very far?"

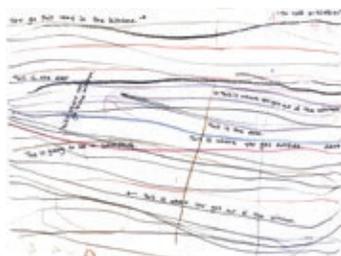
Children incorporated some travel and map-related books that we read at story time into their play. For example, they made their own versions of some of these books, using yarn to indicate the lines of travel between countries. Many conversations followed about travel time and distance.

One day, several children were waiting to play with a child who had not yet arrived at Bing, and they were wondering where she was. The children's discussion revolved around the possibility that their friend's father

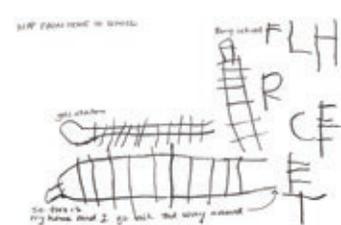


did not know the way to Bing, and he was lost because he didn't have a map. Together, as they were waiting, this group of children decided to make a map so that the father would never get lost again. Children gathered around a large, easel-sized paper and drew the route each took to Bing school. The children described to one another what they each saw on the way to school and drew what they imagined their friend's path to be. Later that week, the children proudly presented their collaborative map to the child's father.

By experimenting, observing and collaborating with other children and teachers, children were able to gain new knowledge about maps and build on what they already knew. Typically, the length of time it takes to move through a project can vary depending on the richness of the topic, the time available to develop it, and the children's and teachers' desire and skills in sustaining the project. Though the time spent on our map study was shortened due to school closure in March because of the COVID-19 pandemic, what is important is that all the children benefited from engaging in this project, each in their unique way. Maybe we can revisit it when we see each other again .... **B**



To the kitchen. By Ayla A.



Map from home to school: So this is my home and I go all the way around. By Fletcher L.

# Building a Classroom Community Through Gardening

By Jessica Predom, Teacher

As Center Room approached the end of the winter quarter, the sun began to remind us that spring was on the way. Springtime signifies an opportunity to celebrate growth, both in our natural environment as well as in our classroom. Our garden bed, lush with overgrown greens, provided an invitation for children, ages 3 to 5, to demonstrate some of their newly mastered fine motor and gross motor skills. Our afternoon class collaborated with the morning class on the garden. Coming together initially to trim pieces of the overgrown flora, children became excited and very dedicated to the ongoing task of renewal. Once the sheath of overgrowth was clipped, children showed perseverance and strength as they wielded their shovels to dig deeply into the soil, unearthing root structures, bulbs, worms and insects. Children dug cautiously, slowly removing each specimen for further inspection. Worms became the children's honored guests and were treated to a myriad of delights. Children prepared residences for the worms out of containers with magnifying lenses in the lids and filled with soil and carefully selected leaves. Children toted their worms in wheelbarrows and gave them the grand tour of the yard, introducing them to other children along the way.

There was a collective pride in our classroom garden. Transforming the space brought children together to sow seeds and grow plants, which will surely inspire future projects and experiments in Center Room.

## Planting Seeds

As the children gazed upon the open garden plot, they began to collectively dream of the possibilities. The open soil inspired inquiry, brainstorming and collaboration among the children and adults in our community. Children thought deeply about the kinds of plants

that were important to them. Many of their ideas were motivated by their love for our outdoor environment. Together they lobbied for carrots to feed the rabbits, vegetables to enjoy at the snack table, and flowers to bring cheer to us all. Children planted radishes, peas, carrots, peppers, lavender, California poppies and snapdragons. They also found new places to plant all the daffodil bulbs discovered during tilling.

## Caring for the Garden

Once the seeds lay in their newly blanketed beds and the bulbs had been tucked neatly beneath the soil, children took turns watering the garden. After planting, the soil looked nearly the same as it had before. Children grew curious and asked with concern, "How will we know where our seeds are?" In order to protect the seedlings, children began creating signs to indicate which areas in the garden were occupied by each seed. Children carefully observed the images from the seed packaging in order to prepare labels.

## Creating Space to Explore

Navigating the garden became a challenging task as the seeds lay hidden under the soil. In a further demonstration of their empathy for the plants, children did their best to tiptoe around their new seedlings. It became evident that the children needed a clear pathway to continue exploring the environment they had created. Employing clay, one of the



basic, open-ended materials commonly used as a foundation of the Bing curriculum, children constructed stepping-stones to indicate a path. Children created individualized pieces, using their hands to flatten the clay into the desired shape. Some children pressed leaves and pinecones into the clay while others drew intricate designs with tools and sticks. Paloma Moreno, one of the teachers in Center PM, toted nearly 50 stones to be fired in a kiln provided through a ceramics class she was taking at Foothill College. The final layout of the stones resembled city roadways, allowing access to every section of the garden.

## Watching the Transformation

*"Let's go to the garden and not do anything else for the rest of the day."*—Dominic

For three weeks, children arrived at school excitedly asking, "What is happening in the garden today?" Children began to notice green buds and thin stalks popping up from beneath the soil. They eagerly watered those spaces, making sure to tend to their new responsibility. Children were also eager to show their parents and caregivers how they had contributed at the end of the day. Children drew pictures and kept records of the transformation they observed. The teachers marveled at the children's increased comfort and confidence in working on collaborative projects with a larger group and their rising sense of responsibility toward the shared physical space. **B**



# Constructing Our Understanding: Building with Hollow Blocks

By Todd Erickson, Head Teacher

A play-fueled morning in East AM is filled with opportunity, excitement and wonder. Dramatic play and oral, visual and written storytelling bring imaginative narratives to life. Around the classroom, children engage deeply with Bing's basic materials (blocks, clay, paint, sand and water), supporting the notion that children approach their play with the same seriousness that adults approach their professions. In the sand area, rivers are planned and excavated. At the water table on the patio, measurement and conservation become part of the hands-on experience. Inside, children manipulate balls of clay, applying a sense of aesthetics with a potent mixture of fine and large motor skills. Nearby, the paint easels invite rich and satisfying self-expression and experiments with color, texture and space.

Meanwhile, the East AM child interested in building with blocks has several options. Unit blocks, which were invented over 100 years ago and have since become a staple of early childhood education, are inside our classroom and can be used for abstract and representational building on a smaller scale. Outside in the area known as the neighborhood, a storage shed holds our newest blocks, known as Outlast blocks. Resembling huge wooden Lego pieces, these interlocking blocks create more prescribed building possibilities while also allowing for greater structural stability.

Located on our patio are the hollow blocks. Hollow blocks are substantial, sturdy and, thanks to open ends on either side, easy to carry and move. Crafted out of maple by Community Playthings, hollow blocks come in square, rectangular and triangular ramp shapes as well as flat boards. The smallest rectangular blocks are 5 1/2 inches high, 5 1/2 inches deep and 11 inches long, while the biggest rectangular blocks are 5 1/2 inches high, 11 inches deep and



22 inches long. As might be obvious from these dimensions, one of the potent features of hollow blocks is the representative pretend play they engender.

This year, the East AM children were especially driven, regardless of age, gender or experience, to create structures that allowed for play in, on and under these simple yet elegant design components. On any given day, our entire collection of hollow blocks (well over 100) was in use by the industrious and adventuresome builders!

Building homes is a basic and powerful use of the hollow blocks. Simply by



stacking the rectangular blocks on their long ends, a child can easily compose what looks like a wall. This was the idea a 5-year-old girl brought to the patio one morning as she repeatedly stacked pairs of our smallest rectangular hollow blocks on their short ends to build four walls. After finishing her walls, the girl laid our flat boards across her structure to create what appeared to be a roof. In addition, she created shelves for plastic plates and cups by again stacking the small rectangular blocks on their long, flat sides. Her structure was not only functional, with a space within the walls and under the roof to play, but also visually appealing. After finishing her work, the young architect climbed atop her home and used two blocks as pillows for her mid-morning nap.

As is often the case in East AM, that morning several hollow-block structures were simultaneously taking shape. Across the patio rug from the child above, two 4-year-old twin sisters were crafting a home of their own with a 5-year-old female playmate. While their building was slightly lower to the ground and featured fewer walls, the girls were enjoying their big screen television, made out of blocks. "You are the mom and we are the sisters," one twin told the



5-year-old. “And we’re watching TV!” When the blocks became the symbol that represented a television, the girls were engaged in *symbolic representation*—the process of using symbols to take the place of other objects (or concepts). This process becomes paramount as children apply their symbolic representation skills to making sense of the symbols known as letters and numbers.

Just as important to the three children, however, was the dramatic play stimulated by their newly constructed home. Play invites children to try on new or reinvented roles and construct rules that allow them to make greater sense of their play scenario and, in so doing, the world around them. In this instance, one child was able to try on the role of a mother, while the sisters were experimenting with household rules like the use of the television. Our hollow blocks served as a springboard for this dramatic play episode.

On a separate morning, a 4-year-old boy approached the blocks and began to build what looked like mirror-image, back-to-back staircases out of the rectangular hollow blocks. Once he was satisfied with this portion of his work, he placed triangular blocks atop each of the rectangles, creating identical, back-to-back ramps that offered the opportunity for children to walk up and then down. “It’s a roller coaster,” he told the curious children in the area as he moved up and over the pinnacle he had created. Some of his peers challenged their sense of balance as they traversed the roller coaster hill while others moved in to help him finish the rest of the roller coaster “tracks” that ran in a large oval around the edges of the patio rug. A playmate



engaged in emergent literacy, as he set to work writing and mounting a sign for the roller coaster. The roller coaster creator then cut paper into tickets and handed the tickets to children interested in sampling his new ride. Once the tickets were given away, he switched roles and became the ticket taker as his peers embarked on their roller coaster journey. His sense of ownership, pride and competence swelled as he not only built his own roller coaster but also entertained his classmates. The children who rode the roller coaster were able to test their sense of balance and large motor strength as they made their way up and over the hill, holding a teacher’s hand if needed. By facing and moving through a physical challenge, children built both self-assuredness and physical capacity.

One of the exciting aspects of working with young children is witnessing the endless creativity they bring to their play. The very same hollow blocks that once served as homes and a roller coaster were put to a very different use on a separate occasion. Two 4-year-old boys began by first constructing four tall walls that created a long, narrow enclosure. Next they carefully placed a series of rectangular blocks along the top edges of the walls. When a teacher inquired about their block structure, one of the children replied, “It’s an army castle.” With this information, the rectangles were transformed into castle battlements or perhaps turrets, and our two builders were now the lords of this formidable structure.

No sooner had they finished building than other children were interested in stepping inside. At first, the two children were hesitant. They had worked for

almost 40 minutes to create their castle and were worried that visitors might knock down their structure. This was an instance for a teacher to facilitate a dialogue between the builders and their prospective visitors. The builders requested care and respect from the visiting children, while the visitors assured the two boys that they would be vigilant. This bit of conversation allowed both sides to experience successful problem-solving, reinforcing the power of words and listening. And through the sharing of needs and hopes, the children were also able to widen their perspective-taking skills. These skills allow a child to more fully consider the viewpoint of a peer and are an important part of friendship, collaboration and empathy.



As East AM children pursue deeper understanding of, and meaning from, the world around them, the hollow blocks become an essential part of their hands-on experience. In addition to providing a tremendous amount of fun, these blocks offer children repeated opportunities to bolster their fine and large motor abilities, their social-emotional skills and their cognitive growth. As a teacher of young children, it is inspiring and invigorating to witness children committed to their open-ended play with hollow blocks, one of Bing’s trusted basic materials. **B**

# Harold Comes to West Room: Adventures in Drawing and Storytelling

By Nandini Bhattacharjya, Head Teacher, and Betsy Koning, Teacher

*“But, luckily, he kept his wits and his purple crayon. He made a balloon and he grabbed on to it. And he made a basket under the balloon big enough to stand in.”*  
—Crockett Johnson, *Harold and the Purple Crayon*

After winter quarter began, teachers in West AM soon realized that many children were hesitant to try to represent their ideas on paper. We heard children saying things like, “Can you help me draw a picture?” “I want to draw a cat, but I don’t know how,” or “I am not a good drawer.”

At first, we talked with children about how they could combine lines and simple geometric shapes to represent objects they wanted to draw. For example, a cat could be broken down into the components of a circle for a head, triangles for ears, a rectangle for a body and lines for legs and a tail. However, even though we encouraged the children and supported them to find ways to express their thoughts on paper, we saw reluctance to try to create even simple drawings and frustration with the drawing process and the results of their efforts. As teachers, we knew we had to find a way to make the children feel more confident and willing to build on their drawing skills.

After some brainstorming, we decided to read the story *Harold and the Purple Crayon*, the tale of a young boy who uses a purple crayon to illustrate his imaginary adventures, to see if this character and his simple drawings could inspire the children to find ways to record their ideas and stories on paper. This led us to embark on a journey into the world of Harold through the series of books about Harold written by Crockett Johnson. The teachers set up a table with all of the Harold stories, a few Harold



cut-outs, some purple crayons and paper. Every week at story time, we read a story from the series, which seemed to give children an opportunity to see how lines and simple shapes can turn into castles, fairies, hot-air balloons and more. As we continued to work on this project, we saw more confidence among children, while they, with purple crayon in hand, attempted to represent their ideas at the language table. Furthermore, we saw growing interest among the children in regard to this series of books. Many children spontaneously asked us to read several Harold stories in one sitting. Some picked up one of the books and flipped through the pages independently. Others drew a picture with a purple crayon and told us an adventure of their own.

Each Harold story inspired a different type of response from the children. The original story led children to try to visually represent the author’s ideas in their own ways. As Arnold drew shapes on a piece of paper, he asked the teacher to label them as Harold’s bed and window, the moon and the policeman who shows Harold which way to go. Others wanted

to add to Harold’s adventure, picking up where Johnson left off. For example, Pieter drew a building and a group of people and said, “Harold went to the Exploratorium and saw Mike, Sarah, Cece, Pieter, Elena and Maggie” (all of Pieter’s family members and their neighbor’s dog). Upon reading *Harold’s Trip to the Sky*, it was interesting to hear what the children thought Harold could see happening on Earth from his perspective on the moon. In Elena’s story, Harold saw “Emilia, Cate and me playing in Bing School.” Caroline had thoughts about how Harold’s family would feel about his journey: “His mom and dad were proud of him for taking the trip to the moon in a rocket ship.” The Harold story about a fairy tale and another about dinosaurs generated drawings from children who were interested in these themes.

We were pleased to see children starting to show an eagerness to draw and to expand on the original stories by adding their own ideas. A group of children’s interest in books on sea life led to the creation of a collaborative story on “Harold Under the Sea.” One morning a child was showing friends and teachers a detailed drawing of coral she had made. This inspired another child to want to create a drawing of “huge coral.” As he looked at a large blank piece of paper, he said, “We should make lots of underwater creatures to



Underwater creatures. By Natalie P.



go with it!” The first child, who was nearby, heard his comment and agreed by saying, “Yes, we could make an under-the-sea adventure for Harold, so he could explore the ocean!” They both set about drawing deep water with a sandy bottom and murky spots for animals who prefer the dark. They wanted to know what sorts of creatures lived in different depths of water, and the teachers provided them with some informational books on the topic. They paged through the books, finding creatures they wanted to include and asking the teachers what they were called.

As these two children drew, other children became interested and asked if they could help, to which the answer was a resounding “Yes!” The drawing grew to cover six pieces of easel paper taped together, and the first child sought out more children to contribute. As more children added to the drawing, the theme expanded to include boats and submarines, divers in wetsuits, mermaids and treasure chests. Some children wanted a teacher to label their additions to the work so that others (including Harold) might learn new information while exploring the drawing. The teachers then laminated the drawing and made it available in the block area with small Harold figures so that the children might continue to play out their ideas on this topic. It was remarkable to see how Harold had inspired them to draw and collaborate.

At story time, teachers told the Harold stories by drawing them on an easel. Of course, some of our representations were not as skillful as the original book’s illustrations. However, when the children pointed that out to us, we acknowledged their thoughts and let them know we were doing

our best. This kind of modeling really helped the children feel more confident to explore their skills and attempt to draw in order to represent their ideas. Natalie painted a shooting star in the art area and let the teacher use it to help narrate the story of the trip to the sky.

We had been reading the book *Harold’s ABC*, and one morning a child came to school, saw a purple crayon on the design table and said, “I can draw Harold’s house.” He drew the house and then proceeded to make specific rooms within it. He described the house: “It has an attic and you have a ladder to go up to the attic. This is Harold’s bed. He needs a window in his room. Now, also a moon because he likes to see the moon. This is his shower. This is where he eats his oatmeal. It’s hot. He sits on a chair. This is the door he can go outside. He has lots of grass and there’s a snake in his garden” (*he added a purple pipe cleaner to make the*

*snake*). The teacher offered the child a printed letter Y from the alphabet story to help represent the word “yard,” and he cut out the letter and added it to his drawing. He added balloons to the yard by punching some circles out of purple construction paper, attaching them to popsicle sticks and placing them around the house. At this point his friend came in. The child proudly showed him his design for Harold’s house, then said, “We can make his house.” They went out together with the design and used the hollow blocks to build the structure:

*First boy: We need four walls.*

*Second boy: And a roof.*

*First boy: Lots of food. He is hungry.*

They gathered food from the outside dramatic play area and built their house. As they played in it, we heard them say, “We are both Harolds! There can be two Harolds!”

At the end of our seven-week adventure with Harold, we found that the children were feeling much more confident in representing their ideas with simple lines and shapes like Harold had in the stories. We also saw some children who hadn’t been interested in drawing begin to try illustrating their ideas. Several of the children started telling—and then drawing—original stories about their own adventures. Parents let us know how their children could “read” the Harold books by describing what they saw in the books’ illustrations, and that the children were choosing Harold books for their bedtime stories at home. Children also wanted to search for more Harold stories with their parents at libraries and

bookstores. As teachers, we were thrilled to see that Harold had empowered our children and given them the tools to represent their ideas in an accessible way. *Harold and the Purple Crayon* will forever hold a special place in the hearts of the West AM teachers. **B**



# The Ongoing Legacy of Frog and Toad

By Mark Mabry, Head Teacher

*“Frog and Toad are friends. They have adventures. Sometimes existential dilemmas. All in brilliantly limited vocabulary and sentence structure that kept me sane and entertained through no less than 4,785,421 readings with beginning readers.”*

—Jon Scieszka, celebrated children’s author and former second grade teacher

*“Arnold Lobel had a special genius for incorporating Socratic irony into his simplest children’s stories. His one-liners have the grace, humor and profundity of great poetry. Yet Frog and Toad, because of the utter simplicity of its vocabulary, counts as a primer, an “I Can Read” book.”*

—Gareth Matthews, *The Philosophy of Childhood*

Fifty years ago, a small children’s book about the exploits of two dear companions, an anthropomorphic frog and toad, was published. Written and illustrated by an up-and-coming author, Arnold Lobel, the volume contained five charming stories that related the trials and tribulations of a genuine friendship. *Frog and Toad Are Friends* was the first volume of four that Lobel gifted the world over the next decade. Though intended as a series for emerging K-2 readers, the books have become icons of quality children’s literature, with equal appeal as read-aloud picture books for nursery school children and timeless classics enjoyed by older children and adults. The themes, language, warmth and humor found in these books continue to resonate with audiences to this day—these stories have not seemed to age.

The two protagonists in these books have personalities that permeate all 20 stories. Frog is affable, thoughtful and somewhat unflappable, though he can at times be a bit condescending with his friend. Toad, on the other hand, can be stubbornly pragmatic, worrisome,



sometimes easily frustrated (he is prone to confronting problems by taking to his bed), and often looks to Frog to help him through what Lobel called his “neuroses.” Though they are very different creatures, it is clear that they accept each other for who they are. These two friends experience the ups and downs of a real relationship, sometimes getting on each other’s nerves, but more often supporting, laughing with, and ultimately always being there for each other.

Our experience over the years in reading these stories with the young children at Bing has been compelling. Whether we’re sitting on the couch in the book area, surrounded by a small group of children, or presenting the book to the entire classroom at storytime, the children pay rapt attention as the narratives unfold. They smile and chuckle appreciatively at the understated humor and irony with which Lobel imbues these tales, and they’re charmed by his illustrations that perfectly capture Frog and Toad’s rapport. And during storytime readings, parents, caregivers, grandparents and older siblings often seem among the most appreciative—tittering in delight as the stories unfold.

In the challenging days of 2020, when we, as a community, were forced to reach out to each other online because of the global pandemic, we kept reading to the children via videos of stories

and songs. Some of these Frog and Toad stories were also shared with Bing alumni. The response from the parents of these former students was quite touching. For instance, they related that their now teenage children were still interested in listening to these stories with the same smiles on their faces as when they were 4-year-olds. And parents also felt the stories transported them back to a place of solace and peace.

So what might be the transcendent magic of the Frog and Toad books?

When Lobel wrote his first Frog and Toad volume, many publishers of books for young English learners employed something called the Dolch List, which consists of the words that appeared most frequently in children’s books. Authors constructed children’s texts using this limited vocabulary so that children would have similar reading experiences across books. When Dr. Seuss arrived on the scene, he somewhat bent this practice, in that he mostly stuck to the list but also enhanced his stories with nonsense words. However, when Lobel started writing “I Can Read” beginning reader books for Harper & Row, the publisher placed no such restrictions on him. “I have total freedom, and the only harness is that I am aware as I work that I’m doing a reader. If there are words I can’t find a comfortable substitute for, I’ll put a big word in. My theory is, if the child is interested in the story, he’ll learn the words.” When Frog and Toad are testing their bravery in *Dragons and Giants*, they—and the reader—encounter an “avalanche” rather than “rocks rolling down a hill.” This sensibility allowed Lobel the freedom to write compelling narratives that had a natural flow and captivated children as they unpacked the mechanics of decoding the written word.

This liberty to expand the possibilities of storytelling in books for young children

was complemented by Lobel's notion that, rather than writing for children, he was writing about things that were personally meaningful to him as an adult, but in a way that would be relatable for children. "All of the Frog and Toad stories are based on adult preoccupations really. I was able to tilt them somehow so that a child could appreciate them too, but I think that adults also enjoy them—and I think that's probably why. It's because they're really adult stories, slightly disguised as children's stories." He had a firm belief in the competence of children and saw them as just as capable as adults in relating to the uncertainties, joys, dilemmas and humor in life. Lobel took great pride in the fact that his Frog and Toad stories were equally enjoyed by children and adults.

Trained as an illustrator, Lobel never thought of himself as a natural writer. He said that the books in the Frog and Toad series were the first in which he was able to express himself, which made the writing process less onerous and more intuitive. He always wrote the text

first, as the illustrations were the easy part for him. But part of the genius of these books is the way that he integrated text and drawings across the pages. He knew that young children derive as much meaning from the pictures as the written word, and he managed to always pick the most salient parts of the story to illustrate. Without his beautifully detailed drawings, rendered in muted green and brown tones, Frog and Toad's personalities could not have come to life. And the layout of the pages in these books is often underappreciated. Lobel likened each page to film scene cuts: while each is part of the fabric of the story, each can stand on its own merits. And many parts of the stories feature illustrations that span facing pages to provide continuity for the text.

Fifty years later, we feel a sense of the timelessness found in the Frog and Toad stories. These tales of two great friends experiencing life's everyday challenges and triumphs together, married with warm illustrations focused on home and nature, create a world that

hasn't aged over time. As a result, the appreciation for the authenticity and relatability that Lobel put into these little stories has spanned generations of enthusiastic readers. Parents can share the joy and nostalgia of these precious childhood memories, knowing that their children will be just as charmed and enraptured with Frog and Toad's adventures as they were.

Not surprisingly, the ageless landscape that Frog and Toad inhabit was quite intentional:

*"Everybody can relate to Frog and Toad because they don't exist in this world. And I'm very careful in the stories not to make any direct allusions to modern life. That's something I just sense not to do. Frog and Toad don't call each other on the telephone. Toad takes a walk, and he visits Frog. He could, I suppose, pick up the telephone and call, but that would be too much, the world would be too much with them. And I do that purposely because I feel that it really creates a wider audience."*—Arnold Lobel **B**

## Painting: A Powerful Form of Self-Expression

By Nancy Verdtzabella, Head Teacher

*"I'm an artist today! I'm an artist every day! I paint. I draw. I love to paint! It's fun!"*—Kelia, painting a rainbow at the easel

*"Why do we always have paint at school? What would happen if someday we came to school and there was no paint? And the children talked about it and they said, 'Where's the paint?'"*—Bella, mixing colors at the easel

**P**ainting is a powerful form of self-expression. It has been used by creative minds since time immemorial to record ideas and experiences. One does not need to know how to speak or read to engage in this form of language.

Yet, it is a powerful way of expressing one's ideas, which may be one of the reasons why children are attracted to painting. With children in West PM painting daily, the teachers were eager to explore how children's knowledge is made visible through their paintings.

In order to learn more about painting, the teachers took a trip in early February to visit the pop-up gallery of a well-known local artist and former Bing parent, Mitchell Johnson. Known for his use of bold colors and shapes, Johnson enthusiastically shared how color and the position of shapes in his paintings communicate ideas. The next step was to share Johnson's work with the class. The children were inspired by



what they saw and learned by focusing on the details of his paintings.

The teachers returned to school invigorated and ready to create opportunities for children to work with paint. Over the following weeks we set up materials and tools they could



Teachers also provided the children with a variety of surfaces with different textures to paint on. Children experimented with painting on paper placed on ground surfaces such as asphalt and grass or painting directly on tabletops and three-dimensional objects.

### How Children Launched a Gallery of Their Own

Outdoors, an art installation emerged when a child became curious about a large branch that he found on the ground. The teacher asked him if he had ever painted on a surface like this before. When the child said he hadn't, she brought him a paint cup from the outdoor easel, and he sat on the edge of the hill painting. This captured the interest of many onlookers. Soon other children wanted to paint nature materials, too. The teacher quickly went inside and brought a new array of colors while the children searched for branches, leaves and artifacts they created at the wood-working table. After painting, children arranged the painted objects as an art exhibit, and when satisfied with the installation, they invited peers playing in the yard to visit the exhibit. At storytime, the teacher shared photographs of the installation, and at the end of the day, children could take their painted pieces home.

The same sequence of events continued for the rest of the week, with children

initiating and sustaining the project, independent of teachers. Here's how play unfolded on one afternoon:

"I am starting it!" said a child. "What are you starting?" asked the teacher. "I am starting the installation," he said, as he collected branches and leaves and began painting them. The child also brought over tires and cones to add to the installation. As children came with their painted artifacts, they placed them carefully in a spot that resonated well with them. Some children would position the art piece, step back and observe, and then adjust it until they were satisfied with the placement. One of the installations incorporated easel paintings propped on chairs. When all the objects were in place, another child spread out her arms and legs and stood as still as a statue. The teacher smiled and watched. After a long pause, the child said, "I am part of the installation." Two other children who were also invested in the project jumped into place and froze, too!

Teachers also began to see representational artwork emerge from the older children in the class. According to Rhoda Kellogg, co-author of *The Psychology of Children's Art*, "Left to themselves, children will draw representationally when they are ready. They will want to picture something from their own lives."

When a boy found a flower blooming in the garden, he brought it inside and exclaimed with joy, "Look at this flower!" A teacher marveled at its beauty and wondered aloud if he would like to paint a picture of it. He mentioned that his plan was to take a closer look at the flower with a magnifying glass. As he and the teacher looked for a magnifying glass, they heard a girl at the easel speak up:

*Girl: I need yellow.*  
*Teacher: Yellow?*  
*Girl: Yes. I want to paint the flower in [the boy's] hand!*

use in indoor and outdoor painting projects. We also shared artworks with them and taught them painting techniques to support them in the development of their own creative process.

Outdoors, teachers set up a table displaying Johnson's images and a tray of colorful rhombus shapes. The children arranged the shapes in ways that were visually appealing to them. When satisfied with their configurations, some children expressed interest in painting a version of their creation using the paints at a nearby table.

The dialogue that accompanied their paintings revealed that every shape formation and color selection was intentional:

—"I am making a color pattern," said Sienna, as she carefully picked colors from the 12 hues made available to her. —"I used almost the same colors for both of my shapes. Only the orange and red are different," explained Maya.

On an indoor table, teachers set out a matching game of Johnson's paintings. Children engaging with the game were able to take a closer look at the bold colors and patterns in Johnson's work. At the easels, children also had access to Johnson's work and extracted ideas from the visuals that were meaningful to them.





When the boy asked the girl if he could write her name on the picture, she agreed, and a new friendship emerged.

### Lessons Learned from the Painting Project

The boy zoomed over to the easel with the flower, holding it up for her to see. He stood very still while the girl painted a flower resembling the one in his hand.

*Boy: I wish I was a bee! Then*

*I could drink all the nectar!*

*Girl: You can. Just imagine it.*

The girl smiled, and the boy continued holding the flower still while he made a buzzing sound.

*Boy: The flower is beautiful!*

An introduction to tools and art images, along with the gift of time, afforded children opportunities to creatively use paint as a visual language. As the months progressed, we noticed an increase in the amount of time children invested in using paint to express themselves. There was meaning behind each painting. Children discussed the intentional patterns and shapes in their work. They also collaborated with peers on projects such as the art installation.

Many conversations took place about color selection, techniques to apply the paint, and the messages conveyed by the paintings. As teachers, we became more cognizant of children's competencies through observing their creative process in each painting experience. We exposed the children to various ways of applying paint, which provided them with new ways to express themselves. And we shared artists' work with the children as a means of inspiring them to use paint in different ways. Our focus was always to follow the lead of the children and note how they responded to painting experiences that were meaningful to them. Overall, this project made visible how affording children an array of ways to express ideas through paint can spur a complex, active creative process. **B**

## STAFF DEVELOPMENT

# Winter Staff Development Day

By Jade Arellano, Teacher

**B**ing Nursery School staff members consistently work to cultivate an environment that nurtures a curiosity and passion for learning. On Feb. 18, Bing hosted a staff development day where staff reflected on the curriculum, ongoing research in child development at Bing, and the power of creative movement.

Nancy Verdtzabella, head teacher in West PM, began the day with a presentation on emergent curriculum in outdoor environments. Emergent curriculum is a teaching philosophy in which the teacher tailors the curriculum to the children's interests as they arise. She posed the question of how educators can make outdoor spaces more intriguing for children: "What happens when the outdoor environment is viewed as a place for in-depth learning?" She illustrated how aesthetically pleasing, ecologically diverse natural spaces offer children the opportunity to form a relationship with the environment

through their senses. In one instance, children were able to process the devastating impact of the Northern California wildfires through dramatic play in the redwood grove in the yard: As imaginary firefighters, the children showed that they were able to organize and collaborate and demonstrated a deep concern for the state of the world. Noticing that fire was a recurring theme in the children's play, Verdtzabella provided markers and paper, which the children then used to create props that further enriched their exploration of fire. Here, close observation of the children's play formed the basis of an emergent curriculum that facilitated a thoughtful and empathetic engagement with the outdoors, where the children used their immediate outdoor surroundings to empower themselves as members of a larger society experiencing a crisis.

Following Verdtzabella, Alexandra Carstensen discussed the development of relational reasoning in a presenta-

tion titled "Early Diversity in Abstract Thought." Carstensen is a postdoctoral fellow working with psychology professor Michael Frank in the Language and Cognition Lab at Stanford. Her current research at Bing examines the roles of language and culture in children's early reasoning about abstract ideas like causes, relations and space. To learn more about Carstensen's work, see page 7.

The next presentation was given by Emily Lake, a PhD candidate in linguistics at Stanford and a Ric Weiland Graduate Fellow. Like Carstensen, Lake is interested in language, but she focuses more on how children vary their speech in social interactions. Lake analyzed recordings of interviews, conversations, and a matching game she played with the children. She found that children pronounce words slightly differently based on their social groupings within the classroom. This correlation between the children's speech and their preferences in

play suggests that nuanced differences in language are socially meaningful to even very young children: “It is important because it suggests that the children are important members of linguistic communities and not just passively absorbing language patterns from their parents.”

To close the day, Mara Beckerman, the music and movement specialist at Bing, led the staff in a series of open-ended movement exercises to demonstrate the power of creative movement in the classroom. Beckerman started studying modern dance at the age of 8 and cites

dance as a central influence on how she processes her life experiences. Rather than directing young children to move in set ways, Beckerman prefers guiding them to “explore and discover the many ways their bodies move naturally.” The movements that Beckerman used in the workshop and applies in the classrooms are largely inspired by Anne Green Gilbert’s “Brain Dance,” which is a series of eight movements that humans do naturally during our first year of life. Beckerman emphasized the importance of being creative when describing new movements; for example, she explained how the idea of

“bubble space” helps children visualize and understand personal space by imagining their bodies as being surrounded by a bubble that will “pop” if they come into contact with another. She also demonstrated the use of objects to teach movement—staff found an unexpected source of inspiration in the colorful scarves that Beckerman distributed, twisting them and whirling them through the air, and then mimicking one another’s movements. The scarves have certainly become a staple of movement exploration at Bing, where children can be seen dancing in a whirl of colors across the sun-soaked yards. **B**

## On Documentation and Movement: Takeaways from the Innovative Learning Conference

By Emily Mendonsa, Teacher

**F**orty-four Bing teachers and administrators attended the Innovative Learning Conference at the Nueva School for our fall staff development day on Oct. 5, 2019. The conference, held every two years by the K-12 Nueva School in Hillsborough, California, brings together teachers and innovators from other fields to discuss critical issues facing education. Speakers presented on a wide variety of topics, ranging from curriculum to social-emotional learning to neuroscience and neurodiversity, and conference attendees had the opportunity to choose to attend sessions that were most interesting and applicable to them. This article summarizes the main ideas from two such talks.

### Documentation and Learning

Many Bing staff attended a presentation by Carolee Fucigna, a former Nueva pre-kindergarten teacher, and Saraleah Fordyce, a teacher at California College of the Arts who teaches critical theory in relation to design. Their talk focused on documentation—the practice followed by educators of collecting, interpreting and reflecting on students’ learning activities

by photographing, drawing and writing down what they are doing and saying. It began with a simple question: Why document? One audience member did not hesitate to answer: [We document] to keep traces of learning, to reinforce, and to show the children that we care.” Nearly every person in the room nodded in agreement, including Fordyce, who then showed a photo she had taken of one of her students reading a book. “I wanted to show her that her act of looking at books was valuable to me,” Fordyce explained.

Documentation is about valuing students, and it is also about reflection. John Dewey, who was a leader of the progressive movement in education in the United States, aptly posited that we do not learn from experience itself, but from reflect-

ing on experience. Good documentation is not only a reflective act done by the teacher, but it also provokes the teaching community to “consider and reconsider, observe and re-observe, represent and re-represent,” stated the speakers. It is reflection that inspires more reflection.

At Bing, this reflection and re-reflection occurs in every classroom. Teachers use audio and video recording, photography and note-taking to capture children’s learning experiences. Children, parents, visiting Stanford students, and other teachers can often be found contemplating walls filled with thoughtfully arranged photos of children’s art, woodworking, dramatic play, block structures and more. Captions for these photos feature children’s authentic language. We are committed to documenting each child’s learning experience, and strive to do so in meaningful, effective and creative ways.

Loris Malaguzzi, founder of the Reggio Emilia educational philosophy, which emphasizes self-directed and experiential learning and relies heavily on documentation, stated that “(Through



By Rory S., 4 years 10 months

documentation, children) become even more curious, interested, and confident as they contemplate the meaning of what they have achieved.” Thus, Fordyce and Fucigna explained, “documentation answers the question, ‘What might come next?’” Children’s interests, captured and carefully considered, drive each Bing classroom’s unique, emergent curriculum.

Documentation is a valuable practice for all types of educational communities, said Fordyce and Fucigna. Attendees of their talk included a wide range of educators—from preschool and elementary school teachers to medical school professors—and the principles we discussed were nearly universally applicable.

### Movement for Learning

Many other sessions had wide applicability, including one led by physical education teacher Zubin Mobedashi that explored the ways that activity can benefit memory, focus, motivation and comprehension. During the session, attendees took active breaks every 10–15 minutes. The breaks gave them opportunities to go outside and engage in activities like sitting, walking and run-

ning while reflecting on what they had just learned on their own or with others.

Mobedashi, a Nueva alumnus, teaches at Nueva School. His talk presented exercise as a way of improving students’ ability to learn. A multitude of studies demonstrate that exercise is directly associated with increased hippocampal size, both in animal models and human subjects. Given the fact that the hippocampus is a major brain center for learning and memory, it is not surprising that improved spatial memory has been demonstrated among participants who had participated in regular aerobic exercise, according to research by psychologist Kirk Erickson and his colleagues.

Mobedashi referenced John Ratey, associate clinical professor of psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and author of *Spark: The Revolutionary New Science*



By Shunjiro Y.,  
4 years

of *Exercise and the Brain*, throughout his talk. Ratey has said, “Exercise is probably the best thing that we know of to boost neuroplasticity and to parse information and to put things together.” Exercise is known to increase expression of brain-derived neurotrophic factor—“Miracle-Gro for the Brain,” according to Ratey. Aerobic exercise literally changes brain chemistry, improving attention, memory, motivation and mood regulation as a result. Furthermore, it prepares individuals for learning by promoting the growth of new brain cells and increasing brain activity. In short form, exercise increases the brain’s potential for learning.

At Bing, children can often be found running up and down the rolling, grassy hills, climbing structures designed to challenge them physically, pumping themselves and pushing their friends on swings, and dancing to music, to name just a few of the ways they engage in play. The half-acre of outdoor space in each classroom provides endless opportunities for children to build their brains through movement. Mobedashi’s talk prompted discussion among Bing teachers about ways we can acknowledge and support children’s need to move throughout the day. **B**

## CONFERENCES

# Learning & the Brain Conference: Educating Anxious Minds

By Mischa Rosenberg, Teacher and Librarian

For three days in mid-February, a record 2,500 attendees, including eight Bing staff members, gathered at The Fairmont Hotel and the Masonic Auditorium in San Francisco for a conference held by the Learning & the Brain professional development organization. Titled “Educating Anxious Brains: Creating Calm, Connected, Mindful and Trauma-Sensitive Schools,” the conference featured keynotes and breakout sessions that were able at turns to emphasize the gravity of childhood trauma, elucidate the neural underpin-

nings of stress responses, and share compassionate, actionable strategies for the classroom. Some sessions focused on the well-being of educators as well, because, as expressed in these sessions, the best ways to psychologically support teachers are frequently the same ways to psychologically support children.

Upon entering the grand expanse of the Masonic Auditorium for the first round of keynotes on Friday, Feb. 14, 2020, attendees saw an enormous screen displaying the image of a toddler, with

a quote from W.R. Inge: “The best time to influence the character of a child is 100 years before they were born.” The quote speaks to the idea that trauma lies not only in the recent past, but also in the systemic inequities that have been transmitted through generations of toxic stress, often inextricably linked to race, culture and socioeconomic status. In his presentation on the impact of trauma and neglect on the developing child, keynote speaker Bruce Perry, senior fellow of the Child Trauma Academy in Houston, referred to these embed-

ded issues as part of “cultural DNA.” Perry is a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the Feinberg School of Medicine at Northwestern University and co-author, with Maia Szalavitz, of *Born for Love: Why Empathy is Essential—and Endangered*.

Perry created the Neurosequential Model, which he described as a “developmentally informed, biologically respectful approach to working with at-risk children” that can be used in therapy, caregiving and education. The model is premised on the belief that a family, community or society that values children thrives, while one that doesn’t fails. Perry explained that “each person has a unique pathway to the present and deserves individualized care,” and that a “one size fits all” approach rarely meets the needs of the individual. Stress is an inescapable part of life—and, in fact, a necessary one for a person to build resilience—but some individuals fall into what Perry calls a “sensitizing pattern of stress experiences.” Perry divided these stress experiences into four categories: intrauterine insults, disruptions in attachment during infancy, trauma and marginalizations. Trauma-informed educators need to take this into account when designing a classroom environment and curriculum. For example, a high school teacher could design a course that has an ebb and flow of difficulty and workload, rather than one that grows more and more challenging. Such “differential dosing” of stress could help students increase resilience and learn successfully without overwhelming their ability to cope.

Also on Friday, Nadine Burke Harris, California’s first and current Surgeon General and a national leader in pediatric medicine, presented her keynote, “Breaking the Cycle of Intergenerational Adversity.” As Surgeon General, Burke Harris has brought childhood issues to the forefront—the office’s priorities are now health equity, early childhood and adverse childhood experiences and toxic stress, defined as prolonged or excessive activation of the stress response in the body and brain. Toxic

stress can result from a combination of a high number of adverse childhood experiences, a predisposed vulnerability toward a strong stress response and a lack of protective factors such as positive relationships with adults. Adverse childhood experiences have been found to dramatically increase risk for 9 out of 10 of the leading causes of death in the United States, including heart attacks and cancer. Higher numbers of these experiences have been correlated to greater levels of mental health issues, substance abuse and homelessness. However, Burke Harris expressed emphatically that adverse childhood experiences are not destiny. Early detection and evidence-based interventions can buffer the toxic stress response and significantly improve health outcomes. Burke Harris highlighted the role of schools and educators as a critical part of the public health response. Schools are not only places for academics but also central places for children to connect with informed, caring adults and supportive peers outside of their immediate families.

During their Saturday breakout session, Julie Kurtz, the CEO of the Center for Optimal Brain Integration, and Julie Nicholson, the organization’s chief strategy officer, presented “Trauma-Informed Practices and Resiliency Building for Early Childhood.” The two are co-authors, with Linda Perez, of the book *Trauma-Informed Practices for Early Childhood Educators: Relationship-Based Approaches that Support Healing and Build Resilience in Young Children*. Kurtz and Nicholson explained that

young children who experience trauma see the world as a dangerous place. Their stress response systems are continually activated, communicating to them that they are not safe. Kurtz and Nicholson spoke of three areas in the brain that respond to trauma in different ways: The hindbrain—which they also referred to as the “reptile brain” or “alarm center”—is responsible for automatic functions such as heart rate and body temperature. The limbic system is the center of emotion and memory. The prefrontal cortex, or “executive center,” is the realm of reasoning, abstract thought, perspective-taking and impulse control.

Looked at another way, these brain areas move from sensory to emotional to logical. When a child experiences a trigger for past trauma, the child’s brain will become ensnared in the “reptile area,” which may lead to fight, flight, or freeze responses such as yelling, running away or shutting down. In such situations, Kurtz and Nicholson suggested that educators use strategies such as being still and present with the child, using minimal words, and letting them “borrow” the educator’s calm state. Since sensory awareness occurs before emotional or cognitive awareness, Kurtz and Nicholson recommended creating an area in the classroom to help children express how they feel. Such an area might include items that help a child to identify what they sense in their bodies. For example, a shell with rough edges might help a child express that they are feeling prickly, a toy frog could convey that they are feeling jumpy, or a rock could mean

#### SELF-PORTRAITS



By Leo D., 3 years 7 months



By Faye S., 4 years 6 months



By Ethan B., 5 years 2 months

that they are feeling heavy. Metaphorical expressions such as “butterflies in my stomach” may also be helpful for children before they can grasp that this means they are nervous or anxious.

On Sunday, Clayton Cook, a professor in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Minnesota, presented “Promoting Teachers’ Stress Reduction, Emotional Wellbeing, and Positive Social Interactions through Resilience.” The essential point of his talk was that the best way to nurture children also applies to teachers. When teachers thrive, children thrive. For all, a crucial element for well-being is psychological safety. The concept of psychological safety was first identified by Amy Edmondson, a

professor at Harvard Business School. A workplace that embraces psychological safety fosters a belief that one will not be punished or negatively judged for speaking up, for making mistakes, or for being vulnerable about one’s needs. Psychological safety breeds collaboration and healthy relationships, encourages self-efficacy and confidence, and leads to less exhaustion and burnout.

At Bing we are fortunate to work on teaching teams in which we collaborate with other educators. Each team builds a microculture within itself, synthesizing teaching styles, interests and personalities to build an inclusive community. Cook shared that for all members of a team—but particularly for supervisors—humility and acknowledgement

of one’s own fallibility are essential. And for all teachers, whether seasoned or brand-new, psychological safety is essential for mental and emotional health. When the members of the team thrive individually, the team will be more effective for the children in our classes.

The keynotes and sessions at Learning & the Brain offered a balance of solid—if sobering—information about childhood trauma, hopeful and practical ideas for addressing toxic stress and countering its effects with compassion in the classroom, and strategies for educators to support themselves and each other. The Bing staff members in attendance—myself included—returned to their classrooms with much to reflect upon and to put into practice. **B**

## 2019 Children Learning with Nature Institute

By Jess Goodman, Teacher

**W**aldkindergarten, skogsmulle, bush kinder, forest school: all terms that describe early childhood learning environments that occur primarily or exclusively in nature. In such settings, trees, birds, streams, leaves, mud and rain serve as the curriculum that guides and dictates children’s explorations.

While Bing does not define itself explicitly as such a school, we are privileged to have expansive outdoor spaces where naturalistic basic materials such as sand, seed pods and sticks become the tools of children’s play. Therefore, teachers benefit from gaining their own sense of how forest schools operate and how children flourish in these settings. Conveniently for Bing teachers, in 2019 the Children Learning with Nature Institute—featuring prominent advocates of nature pedagogy from across the world—took place in California. Hosted just outside scenic Yosemite Valley, this three-day conference was a convergence of educators committed to developing their under-

standing of nature-based learning spaces for children. Teachers Kelli Agnich, Betsy Koning and I represented Bing.

One notable presenter was Kate Hookham of Auchlone Nature Kindergarten in Scotland. Hookham spoke about their school, where the children spend the majority of their time outdoors, and she facilitated a workshop on tool usage and risk assessment when working with children. Participants, including the Bing teachers, practiced safe shoveling, whittling and rope-tying techniques, empowering us with a sense of fulfillment and resourcefulness. Similarly gratifying, there was a hands-on session on safe fire practice with elementary-age children, presented by Amy Butler from North Branch Nature Center in Vermont. In a small group, we gathered dry grass and branches for kindling and larger dead branches for a more sustained burn, just as Butler’s elementary classes do year-round. Using a Swedish fire starter (Light My Fire’s FireSteel 2.0 Scout, which I highly

recommend), we achieved a modest fire over which we could boil water for tea in a lovely cooking vessel called a Kelly Kettle. Butler’s communal fire-making experience and Hookham’s tool workshop reinforced our own commitments at Bing—to honor children as capable, competent, and worthy of responsibility and appropriate risk.

Max Christie and Ben Clark of Northland Childspace in New Zealand were sages throughout their sessions on nature-inspired art, music and storytelling. In their session on storytelling, they modeled an open-ended, rhythmic storytelling style based on origin stories of New Zealand’s Maori people. Impressively,



Earth. By Zeina H., 4 years 2 months

New Zealand has a unique national early-childhood curriculum called Te Whariki, which combines a play-based foundation with the indigenous beliefs of the Maori people. The curriculum requires a commitment to understanding the Maori culture and preserving the Maori language. Consequently, Child-space offers a child-centered experience with a deep exposure to nature that honors the local history and beliefs of the Maori. Te Whariki beautifully amplifies the spiritual connection with their land.

At the end of this training program, I felt inspired by the other educators and the school settings dedicated to ensuring opportunities for children to be in nature. I left contemplating how these forest schools could influence Bing's environment and philosophy. More importantly, I left with questions: How can we continue to honor children at Bing by providing them with the challenges and risks of working with tools? How can we honor our own local origin stories and recognize the Ohlone history and connection

to our own area? How are we as teachers showing children that we value their engagement with our outdoor spaces?

As the naturalist John Burroughs once said, "I go to nature to be soothed and healed and to have my senses put in tune once more." I was thankful for the restorative nature of this unique conference as well as the global perspectives of its presenters. I am excited about the new directions the experience has pointed me toward. **B**

## NAEYC Conference

By Parul Chandra, Head Teacher

**E**quity in early childhood education was a central topic of the 2019 annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. The conference, held in Nashville in November, also featured talks on a wide range of other topics, including several presented by Bing teachers.

Each year thousands of teachers, program administrators, students and researchers attending the conference choose from hundreds of presentations and exhibits to explore the latest trends and research in the early childhood field. Four Bing teachers were among the attendees. This year was special since NAEYC had recently released a position statement on advancing equity in early childhood education and wanted to use the meeting to gather input from early learning communities and set equity goals for the future. The position statement shares a bold vision in which all children, families, educators

and communities thrive. It states: "All children have the right to equitable learning opportunities that help them achieve their full potential as engaged learners and valued members of society." In practice, equity means all children and families receive necessary supports in a timely fashion, so they can develop their full intellectual, social and physical potential. One can read the statement at <http://naeyc.org/equity/>.

The opening keynote address by Gail Christopher, former vice president for program strategy at the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and a longtime advocate for racial healing, explored how change is created at individual, community, organizational and systems levels and how each one of us has a part to play in this change. Her session was titled "Overcoming the Belief in the Hierarchy of Human Value: What early childhood educators and parents can do." Interpreters simultaneously translated the inspiring address into Mandarin and Spanish. Christopher left the attendees motivated to address the need to be aware of equity and celebrate diversity in their classrooms.

I was excited to attend a session dedicated to the late renowned educator and author Vivian Paley called "Teaching

for Equity: Legacy of and lessons from Vivian Gussin Paley." Patricia Cooper, an associate professor in early childhood education at Queens College; Gillian McNamee, a professor of child development at the Erikson Institute; and Christopher, discussed Paley's signature practices, including her dedicated study of young children's thinking and reasoning through pretend play, storytelling and story acting activities. They showed how Paley's 40-year pursuit of fair teaching is revealed through her iconic studies of classroom life and children's thinking as well as her self-examination of teacher bias around race, gender and developmental difference. Her work also demonstrates her commitment to a classroom environment in which all children's interests and needs are met and in which kindness and empathy are fundamental principles. Paley's achievements offer a much-needed roadmap for our profession towards equity, inclusion and the well-being of every child.

In a talk titled "Promoting Effective Communication Strategies: Affirmative guidance for young children's learning and growth," Bing head teacher Nandini Bhattacharjya and I presented our work on how to speak with children in order to foster fulfilling interpersonal relationships. These relationships are



Butterfly. By Lucy L., 4 years 10 months

central to children's social-emotional development and self-image. Additionally, Mara Beckerman, our music and movement specialist, presented on the power of creative movement. Her session highlighted how focus, spatial awareness, confidence and creativity are valuable outcomes of guided music and movement exploration. [For more information on her presentation, see page 30.]

Alicia Noddings, associate dean of education at Missouri Baptist University, spoke about using sensory integration techniques to improve self-regulation, focus and learning in the classroom. Her talk was very informative and relevant to our work with young children and their diverse developmental needs. Noddings defined sensory processing disorder, where sensory information goes into the brain but does not get organized into appropriate responses. The brains of people with sensory processing challenges have trouble filtering, organizing and interpreting information taken in by the sens-

es. This can cause extreme reactions to sensations like bright light, noises, smells, tastes and textures. The critical piece for appropriate intervention is determining whether attention problems are related to hypersensitivities—when children exhibit extreme sensitivity to particular conditions—or hyposensitivities—when children have a lower than normal sensitivity and thus have problems processing information through their senses. We learned about a variety of sensory-related practices that can help children pay attention, such as cross-lateral integration, core strengthening, climbing and hanging, balancing, swinging, spinning, rocking and the use of fidget devices. Noddings also brainstormed how to use sensory-related tools in our teaching and learning environments.

A session about the powerful potential of project work especially resonated with the Bing teachers since we implement components of this approach in Bing classrooms. Judy Helm, inter-

national speaker, author and trainer on project work, documentation and school design, spoke about offering opportunities for all children to engage in project work. In project work, teachers identify a topic of high interest to most members of the class and then facilitate an in-depth study of the topic through firsthand investigation, reflection and representation of their findings. It was motivating to hear about other educators' experiences with project work. One advantage of this approach is it focuses the student on a big, open-ended question, challenge or problem to research and respond to and/or solve. Other advantages of project work are that it gives children practice at skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration and creativity and, most importantly, it builds children's choice and agency into the learning process. This session affirmed our founding director Edith Dowley's vision of offering children the freedom of choice in our learning spaces. **B**

## The Play First Summit

By Jess Goodman, Teacher

**T**he Play First Summit, an online conference held July 20–24, was an exciting collaboration between Sally Haughey of Fairy Dust Teaching and Tom “Teacher Tom” Hobson. With the COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement as impetus, Haughey and Hobson assembled a platform of 20 speakers from six continents to have pertinent conversations about the current state of play in early education. More than 75,000 people from over 100 countries (including the bulk of Bing teach-

ers) tuned into these pre-recorded Zoom conversations. The virtual nature of this conference allowed a global community to rally together and reflect deeply on the rights of children and the necessity of play for the betterment of our world.

For those joining in from the United States, the webinars shed light on the ways other countries are reopening and adjusting in response to school health restrictions. John Yiannoudis, founder of Dorothy Snot Preschool and Kindergarten in Athens, Greece, discussed how children retained relationships with peers during shelter-in-place through Zoom. These digital meetings provided meaningful opportunities for social sharing, much like the ways Bing teachers provided comforting and connecting experiences for children through virtual storytimes

and snacktimes during spring quarter when, in response to the pandemic, the school abruptly closed in March. The semblance of togetherness afforded by these online gatherings preserved continuity until Dorothy Snot school reopened in June. Suzanne Axelsson's school in Stockholm, like all Swedish preschools, remained open amid the coronavirus outbreak. Sweden's preservation of preschool operations necessitated a heightened level of trust between families and teachers, and Axelsson felt a strong sense of solidarity in her school as members rigorously adhered to safety protocols. And Wendy Lee from New Zealand touted her country's containment of the virus and their commitment to quarantining at home as a gesture of compassion. She shared New Zealand's culturally responsive approach to both confronting



Rainbow.  
By Jacob A.,  
4 years

the virus and respecting children's well-being. All of these stories provided food for thought as the United States confronts its own back-to-school challenges.

Ijumaa Jordan and Chazz Lewis provided relevant and frank reflections on the national racial tumult ignited by police brutality through their lens as people of color living in the United States. An early childhood education consultant focused on anti-racism, Jordan challenged educators to work toward uncovering their own racial biases and to scrutinize the ways in which dominant white culture can quietly permeate schools' daily practices. Haughey, the interviewer, concurred with Jordan that it is uncomfortable for her as a white person to recognize and address racial biases entrenched in society. Jordan called for actions to dismantle racism and to create culturally responsive environments for children of color. Lewis, an educational specialist in the Washington, D.C., area, used TikTok as a medium for sharing his perspective on school during shelter-in-place. Lewis addressed the discrepancy between protest as a language

of expression within our democracy and children not being taught this essential strategy of advocacy. Thus, children are left less empowered and informed on how to use their voices for change.

Two participants that perhaps most amplified the essentialness of play at this summit were Lenore Skenazy and Peter Gray. Skenazy, nicknamed "World's Worst Mom" after she let her then-9-year-old ride the New York City subway by himself, questioned why our society is "defaulting to paranoid parenting" and lamented the trend to remove risk and freedom from childhood. After the subway incident earned her the disparaging moniker, Skenazy went on to co-found Let Grow, a nonprofit organization working to supply schools, parents and communities with free play experiences and resources. A bright side of the pandemic in Skenazy's mind is that parents are loosening the amount of control they impose on their children as they try to juggle working and caretaking from home. In the same vein, Peter Gray, professor of psychology at Boston Col-

lege and author of the seminal work *Free to Learn*, condemned the lack of play in the life of a child today. Far removed from a child's freedom in our hunter-gatherer evolutionary past, the modern world is awash with adult-directed and -supervised learning environments. Gray reminded listeners that children are entirely capable of educating themselves, and they learn skills that promote happiness and pro-social citizenship when afforded the autonomy of free play.

At the conclusion of the event, the chorus of international voices featured at the conference called out for a collective recommitment to unstructured play. The coronavirus catastrophe has rattled the world and confronted our educational systems, yet this disruption has forced educators to re-engage with their duty as protectors of childhood. A new and *improved* normal may await if educators advocate for the rights of children within local and national politics, confront the racial inequities staining our institutions, and value free play as a universal need for all children. **B**

## EVENTS AND INFORMATION

# Ready, Set, Go! Helping Your Child's Transition to Kindergarten

By Amy Shin, Teacher

As children get close to entering kindergarten, many questions emerge for parents and teachers hoping to make the transition as smooth as possible. To help answer these questions, Stephanie Agnew, assistant director at the Parents Place in the Peninsula, a family resource center, joined us at our annual kindergarten information night on Jan. 15. A mix of prospective kindergarten parents and Bing teachers was in attendance.

Parents often ask Agnew, "What would the best kindergarten look like?" Agnew's answer: "There's no one type of school that's the best." At the Bing

event, she suggested that parents should instead pose questions such as: What is my child like? How does she like to learn and socialize? What is our family like? What kind of educational philosophy do I want for my child's school? Ques-

tions such as these will lead to a clearer understanding of the school that's right for your family. Agnew emphasized that elementary school is where children learn to love learning. Building the perception of school being fun, exciting, and a

## SELF-PORTRAITS



By Graydon K., 3 years 7 months



By Parker H., 4 years 5 months



By Emilia S., 5 years 1 month

social center for families is essential because it will encourage children to make good intellectual and social choices.

One way to foster this love of learning is to prepare children with the tools to be confident and independent in their day-to-day activities. According to a study by the First Five Organization in California (see <http://bit.ly/first5-school-readiness>), which surveyed kindergarten teachers, a child's self-care and motor skills are foundational for kindergarten readiness. Self-care refers to a child's ability to be independent in taking care of themselves—for example, getting dressed, setting up lunch and using the bathroom. When children feel capable, they are confident, and therefore ready to learn and apply new concepts, Agnew said.

Social-emotional skills such as self-regulation provide additional building blocks for kindergarten readiness. Knowing how to resolve conflicts, advocate for oneself and manage impulses enables children to engage more deeply in the classroom. Some ways to support these skills at home are to provide a space for children to speak openly, to nurture their ability to articulate their feelings, and to help them find strategies for coping with different emotional states. Agnew also suggested setting clear

boundaries at home to promote the development of self-regulation skills.

The final building block for kindergarten readiness is kindergarten academics. Some of the essential kindergarten academics skills are recognizing letters, colors, numbers and shapes, and having some awareness of phonics—for example, being able to identify rhyming words. Finding opportunities to integrate these skills into everyday situations can help children acquire them. Oftentimes, parents place the greatest importance on academics, but Agnew highlights self-care and social-emotional skills as being foundational for a healthy academic setting and a smoother transition to the next school environment.

To create a positive outlook on kindergarten, Agnew suggested waiting until the summer before kindergarten starts to talk with children about what to expect in kindergarten. Providing an overview and talking about how children are feeling allow for familiarity as they enter a new environment. She also suggested refraining from overusing the phrase “kindergarteners do (or don't do) ...,” because it might put too much pressure on children. Reading together and visiting engaging play areas such as parks and museums will help children

build skills in problem-solving, social interaction, and communication, which will serve them well in kindergarten.

To conclude the event, Adrienne Lomangino, head teacher at Bing, presented the data she collected from former Bing parents on children who have transitioned to kindergarten in the past year. Her survey showed that of the 117 participants, 73% attended public school, while 27% went to private school. When asked about their child's overall transitional experience, 82% of parents said it was easy or somewhat easy, while just 3% said it was difficult. Much of the advice from prior Bing parents supported Agnew's suggestions on connecting with the community, talking about kindergarten just prior to entry, and avoiding overscheduling to give children some downtime. Former Bing parents conveyed the importance of remembering how every child is unique and will be on their own journey. The best thing for parents to do is to stay calm and be positive and empathetic through the peaks and valleys of transitioning to elementary school. **B**



Leaf. By Aria Q.,  
4 years 4 months

## Meet the Bing Office Staff

By Gene Aiken, Facilities Coordinator; Samantha Bologna, Operations Coordinator; Larry Ong, Development Coordinator; Jenny Rahn, Finance Coordinator; and Ereka Tinsley, Program Assistant

As parents, children and guests step into the Bing office, they are greeted by our wonderful Bing office team. Some team members work directly with parents, answering questions, providing tuition receipts and tracking our parent donations, and some work behind the scenes, making sure the school is maintained and the classrooms are fully stocked with woodworking materials. Meet our wonderful Bing office administrative staff:

**Gene Aiken,**  
facilities coordinator  
and carpenter

I was born and raised in San Carlos, in a house where my mother still lives today. I grew up surrounded by music. My mother and my grandmother both played violin their entire lives, and my



grandfather was a professional pianist and composer. So naturally I played instruments growing up: piano, violin, saxophone and drums—accompanied by my father on trumpet and my brother on the drums. I went to College of San Mateo and then San Francisco State, majoring in television and radio production, and got a job at KOFY TV. But my true calling was woodworking. I worked at custom cabinet shops for many years and later ran my own cabinet business. I

have two daughters, Emerson and Lily, and they were both fortunate enough to attend Bing. On Lily's last day at Bing, I visited the school and heard there was an opening for a carpenter. I interviewed for the position and was hired! I work in the carpenter shop that is located in the Bing parking lot. These days, I am supplying the wood materials for the children's projects and building structures in the yards. Come time for the annual fundraising auction, I create a one-of-a-kind furniture piece.

*Fun fact:* In the early '60s, Gene's grandfather played piano for the Leighton Noble Orchestra at Harrah's South Shore Room in Lake Tahoe, hosting the biggest entertainers of that era.

**Samantha Bologna, operations coordinator**

I sit at the front desk in the office, where I help answer any and all questions about Bing. I also work closely with the enrollment administrator on school enrollment



and applications. I have worked at Bing for five years, and my favorite part is getting to know the families and greeting the children as they arrive to the school, both at the main gate and when they come into the office. I graduated from California State University, Stanislaus, with a degree in English, and later completed my master's degree in business administration at San Francisco State while working at Bing. My first job at Stanford was with student housing, but then I saw the operations coordinator position at Bing, applied, and was hired. Some things parents might not know about me are that I enjoy salsa and West Coast swing dancing and love learning new things, which has led to me recently becoming certified to scuba dive. I've only dived in Monterey but cannot wait to explore more places. Come say hi to me at the front desk!

*Fun fact:* Samantha studied abroad in Denmark for a summer a few years ago, and she loves to travel.

**Larry Ong, development and accounting coordinator**

I started at Bing 15 years ago as the development coordinator, and then for several years I also took on the accounting coordinator role, processing tuition for all of our families. I now take care of our development efforts, process donations, coordinate the Bing Fair and help coordinate our Harvest Moon Auction fundraiser. I enjoy interacting with the children and their families at Bing when I welcome them or bid farewell while monitoring the school's main gate. My two boys are Bing graduates. One is finishing his collegiate career, and the other will be in high school next year. I went to college at the University of San Francisco and graduated with a degree in hospitality management and Asian studies. Before coming to Stanford, I worked for many years at UC San Francisco.

*Fun fact:* We call Larry the orchid whisperer. He takes care of and breathes life into all of the beautiful orchids in our office. He is also a master at origami. Stop by the office to see some of his creations.



**Jennifer Rahn, finance coordinator**

I have been part of Bing's office staff for more than seven years. I am a native Californian, growing up in the Bay Area, but I've also lived in San Clemente, California, as well as Nashville, Tennessee. As a mom to three grown children, I spend most of my free time with family, including my beloved dog Bella. Having a love for animals, I have eagerly fostered Bing rabbits from time to time, including Peter Rabbit (now in the Twos class) before he came to Bing. I have a degree in finance from the University of Phoenix. As Bing's finance coordinator, I am responsible for all the financial transactions at Bing,



which includes tracking and processing children's tuition. Of all my job duties, one has recently become my favorite. Along with my co-worker Larry Ong, I pick up and walk several Bing children to their afternoon program several times a week. I love that I can connect with the Bing children as well as their families at the end of their session.

*Fun fact:* Jenny loves creating special costumes to wear at our annual Harvest Moon auctions.

**Ereka Tinsley, program assistant**

I graduated from San Jose State University in 2017 with a bachelor's degree in psychology, and the next year I began working at Bing as a program assistant. This position allows me to have a well-rounded view of the duties throughout the school. I maintain and organize the school, and also assist with administrative duties and inventory. I don't have a specific office space, as I work all around the school as well as in the Tower House next door. And I get a lot of exercise every day, as I don't sit down very often. This last year, I also helped care for children during lunchtime in the Center AM classroom. I enjoy working with the children and talking with the parents at pick-up time. I was born and raised in California, and I am fluent in English and Tagalog, and I dance Tinikling, a traditional Filipino dance that involves dancing through large bamboo poles clapping on the floor, making sure your ankles do not get caught between the poles. I also enjoy drawing and singing in my free time. These are two activities that bring me peace and joy. *Fun fact:* Ereka is an adventurous thrill-seeker: She has been skydiving as well as zip-lining over alligators! **B**



By Leo V,  
3 years 11 months

# Teacher Research in Action: Exploring Children’s Multilingual Language Rights

By Vanessa Ibarra, Teacher

I have always known that I wanted to be a teacher. My parents migrated to the United States in 1989 to pursue the so-called “American Dream.” I grew up in East Palo Alto, surrounded by warmth and love from my siblings and parents. Although my parents did not speak English, they always did what they could to support me academically. Sitting at our old dining table, flipping my pencil up in the air and running my hands through my hair, I tried to figure out my math homework. Neither of my parents completed elementary school. They had very little knowledge of academics, especially math. I remember feeling saddened because they couldn’t help me, and I didn’t want to look like I needed help. If I didn’t understand the homework, I would pretend to do it and then put it away, so that I would not cause my parents concern. My mother worried easily, and I knew deep inside that she wanted to help me but just didn’t have the knowledge to do so.

When parent–teacher conferences came around, I sat with my teacher and my mother. It was my responsibility to translate, because I spoke both English and Spanish, and unfortunately my teachers did not speak Spanish. I remember feeling resentful, angry and frustrated because my teachers could not communicate with my parents. It became a burden on me because I had to take on that extra responsibility. Yet I’ve never felt anger toward my parents because they do not speak English. On the contrary, I happily dedicated my evenings to teaching my parents simple phrases and English words. I loved being their teacher, and I was proud of knowing two languages. I am proud of where I have come from and who I have become. These early childhood experiences of growing up bilingual led me to pursue a career in education.

As a Bay Area native who grew up speaking Spanish at home and English in school, I am deeply interested in the impact of multilingualism on young children’s social, cultural and intellectual development. This is an interest I am pursuing as a master’s-degree student at San Francisco State University. In February, I traveled with an SFSU team to Oaxaca, Mexico, to carry out a project aimed at enhancing multilingual education for young children. Our goal was to investigate the ability of teacher inquiry and reflection to empower teachers to support young children’s multilingual language rights. Teacher inquiry is a process that improves the quality of teaching and learning through self-reflection. It challenges teachers to question their practice and pedagogy, bringing to light bias and inequities in educational settings.

Educators in both the United States and Mexico face profound challenges when it comes to teaching multilingual children from immigrant and indigenous families, in part because many educators receive only minimal training that focuses on effective strategies for supporting multilingualism, and they are often unaware of children’s language rights, such as the right to continue to speak their indigenous language.

During our weeklong visit, we met and worked with children and teachers at the Centro de Esperanza Infantil children’s center and at the Andres Portillo elementary school. At Andres Portillo, I was able to speak with two kindergarten teachers about my interest and current engagement in teacher inquiry and reflection. At the Centro de Esperanza Infantil, I was able to sit down and read English books with a group of young children and a high school student. During this visit, the San Francisco and Oaxaca teachers shared strategies they value, such as making strong connec-



tions with families and encouraging families and children to honor and use their native language to communicate.

We also had the opportunity to speak with professor Mario López-Gopar about his experience teaching in-service teachers at the Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca. López-Gopar shared the process of teacher inquiry used by his teachers; some of the challenges he encounters, such as the lack of teacher retention and commitment; and some of the success he has experienced when teachers engage in an ethnographic study of themselves and the children they teach, and reflect on their practice in their teacher journals. López-Gopar and our team plan to continue exchanging ideas about multilingual education and teacher inquiry and reflection.

Upon my return from Oaxaca, I engaged in my own research project in Center PM: “Supporting Dual-Language Learners in the Classroom: Utilizing Teacher Reflection.” This project stemmed from observations I have made and questions I have been asking myself for many years regarding whether diversity is valued and how to best support multilingual learners.

For this study, I collaborated with teachers Amy Shin and Paloma Moreno. They were also dual-language learners growing up (Shin: Korean and English; Moreno: Spanish and English). Together,

we reflected on our early experiences as dual-language learners. We also took the time to examine our teaching practices in the classroom. To do this, we started our own teacher journals. Through the journaling process, it became apparent that we were all using our personal and childhood experiences as a base

to inform our practice, including the particular challenges we faced at home and in school as dual-language learners. The process of journaling together gave us the opportunity to create a safe and comfortable space to have these important conversations—conversations we might not have had otherwise.

Journaling and engaging together in reflection made evident how much we learned about ourselves and from each other through these practices. My hope is to encourage more of my colleagues to adopt these practices so that they, too, might experience the benefits of reflection. **B**

### BING NURSERY SCHOOL PERFORMANCE SERIES AND MUSICAL EXPERIENCES

**A** concert by cross-cultural music maker, clarinetist, tenor saxophonist and composer Oran Etkin took place at Stanford's Dinkelspiel Auditorium on Oct. 12, 2019, as part of the annual Bing Nursery School Performance Series. The concert, *Finding Home From Far Away: A Journey with Clara Net*, featured Etkin on a variety of musical instruments, including the clarinet he has named Clara Net. Etkin, who held an interactive concert for the series' inaugural season in 2013–14, returned in 2019–20 to perform songs from his new album, which was recorded with local master musicians while on tour in different countries in the past few years. Watch Etkin's 2019–20 concert on Bing's YouTube channel:

<http://youtube.com/bingnurseryschool>. The second show in the 2019–20 season—a performance of *Swan Lake* by the New Ballet School—was cancelled due to COVID-19.

The series aims to introduce young children to the performing arts. These early experiences open children's minds, expand their knowledge of different cultures through music and dance and set the stage for a lifelong appreciation of the arts. Bing teachers and staff also hold informal concerts in the school atrium throughout the year to bring the classrooms together for group singing experiences.



# Harvest Moon Auction 2019

By Sandi Gedeon, Associate Director of Finance and Operations, and Larry Ong, Development Coordinator

**O**n Nov. 9, 2019, at Bing Nursery School's 31st Annual Harvest Moon Auction, over 500 buccaneers and mates sailed to Treasure Island at the Frances C. Arrillaga Alumni Center on the Stanford University campus. Guests arrived with their eye patches, bandanas and seafaring wear and opened up their coffers to contribute to the Scholarship Fund, which provides financial support for tuition to families in need. As in past years, Helen and Peter Bing were major benefactors, with an initial generous gift of \$50,000. The auction raised a record \$600,000.

The pirates took to land for a good cause. After a hearty cup of "Treasure Island Punch," they made their way through the silent auction, offering their bounty in honor of the Bing children. The food, provided again this year by Weir Catering, was tailored to our theme, with such selections as "Polly's Crackers & Blocks of Gold," "Peg Legs," "Cannonballs," "Catch of the Day" and "Pirate Booty." Desserts were donated this year by Cocola Redwood City, and the decorations were sponsored by Tableart. This year's auction success was partly due to our business donors and sponsors, including Four Seasons Lanai Resort, Flexa, Hengehold, TaskRabbit, Tea Drops, Stanford Health Care, Little

Bytes Pediatric Dentistry, Amigos de Palo Alto, Nobu Palo Alto, Peninsula Pediatric Dentistry, Better Chinese, The Village Doctor, IlluminOdyssey-CuriOdyssey, Brutocao Family Vineyards, The Wine Group and Chloe Wine Collection. We also extend our gratitude to our generous Patron, Platinum and Gold family sponsors: The Acton Family, Ayesha Thapar and Nikesh Arora, Marissa Mayer and Zachary Bogue, Racheal and Lawrence Bowman, Jolin and Larry, Carson and Helmy Eltoukhy, Yuen Cheuk and Bo Feng, Anna and Ralph Harik, Peter and Gabriela Hébert, Marita and Zubin Irani, Sky and Snow, Laura Yip and Man-Hay Tam, Peter X. Deng and Charlotte Lai Deng, Christina and Jay Kang, Robyn and David Reiss and the Xu Family Foundation.

In the week before the campus event, more than 50 items had already been auctioned off online, raising over \$20,000. Once they arrived at "Treasure Island," guests maneuvered around the room to bid on over 500 silent auction items. As in years past, family-sponsored buy-a-spot events were highly coveted. Auction attendees rushed to purchase spots at more than 30 events, including Flower Arranging Party with Teacher Kathryn, Pizza and Movie Date Night, Private Performance by the Fratello



Marionettes, Hidden Villa Farm & Animal Tour, Dad's Poker Night, Mom's Movie Night, Bing Train Ride with Teacher Mark and Former Teacher Peckie, Mad Hatter Party, and many more.

With a hook in place of his left hand, Bing head teacher Todd Erickson and his co-captain, former Bing parent Adam Tobin, commanded the start of the live auction. Crew members enthusiastically offered their booty to outbid their fellow hearties for exciting trips to an exclusive Four Seasons resort on Lanai, cruise on a private yacht around San Francisco Bay and four tickets to the Ariana Grande concert at Chase Center. The surprise of the evening was a duel between passionate buccaneers over a hand-crafted treasure box, created by Bing's resident carpenter Gene Aiken, holding an incredible book collection, donated by Bing teachers and staff, which sold for \$110,000.00. The ever-popular Fund a Scholarship, a live bidding item with straight cash donations going directly to the Bing Scholarship Fund, raised over \$94,000 that evening, with an additional \$290,000 raised prior to the auction.

Behind every successful event, there is always a group of dedicated individuals who make essential contributions. We would like to extend our deepest appreciation for their incredible commitment and vision: THANK YOU CREW (parents, Bing teachers and staff) for making this event a tremendous success. **B**

**AUCTION CO-CHAIRS:** Stephanie Holson, Arturo Pereyra and Siddhartha Singh

**COMMITTEE CHAIRS:** Cargo Carriers: Danielle Benecke, Sam Schroeder • Check-In: Margaret Cantrell, Rona Yang • Class Gifts: Melanie Burchby, Marita Irani • Clean-Up: Guillermo Elias, Clayton Nall • Closing Auction Tables: Gabriel Blaj • Correspondence: Florie Hutchinson, Catherine Stoll • Creative Writing: Pasha Dahncke, Kimberley Morris Rosen • Data Entry: Lauren Angelo, Danielle Chammas, Gina Kwon • Decorations: Sonia Chang, LiMin Lam • Display and Setup: Maddy Elles-Hill, Samantha Wang • Events: Elizabeth Laraki, Lucy Zhang • Food and Beverage: Tegan Acton, Emma Pompetti • Graphic Design: Janice Chan, Mischa Rosenberg • Inventory: Seema Kamath, Michelle Reininger • Online Auction: Siddhartha Singh • Packers and Movers: Guillermo Elias, Doug Hoogendyk • Runner: Libby Jones • Solicitations: Angela Ghotbi, Summer Karam, Samantha Quist • Sponsorships/Family Ads: Judith Duval, Niloo Mansourian • Ticket Trackers: Jesus Betancourt, Joanna Sompolska-Klockiewicz