Director’s Column: Believing in Children
By Jeanne W. Lepper, Director

One day this spring I had a wonderful surprise. During a visit to Bing School, Helen Bing presented us with a typed, one-page document that her mother-in-law, Anna Bing Arnold, used when she taught parent education classes in Los Angeles in the 1950s. Suddenly, it all made sense. A genuine interest in young children and parents must have motivated Mrs. Arnold’s 1966 decision to fund, with her son Peter Bing, this comprehensive school, research laboratory, and training site.

Parents at Bing often report that one of the greatest benefits of their child’s enrollment is the opportunity to learn from the teachers about providing an emotionally supportive environment for children. Our staff strongly believes that parents know their children best, and we listen carefully to information parents share with us about their children. We know that it is important to acknowledge what children say and do and how they feel. Often we ask parents to provide a narration about their child’s work and activities so that we can interpret the child’s thoughts and feelings non-judgmentally.

Neither teachers nor parents can always say or do exactly the right thing for children, but we can do our best to provide genuine support. Consider this example of a three-year-old at the breakfast table who pours his own juice. “You tried so hard to pour your juice into the glass!” says the child’s mother. “Next time it will work better.” The child intuitively understands that his mother is his advocate and that she has confidence in his developing skills. (She may provide him a child-sized pitcher!) The child drinks his juice with a big smile on his face and pours a second glass more easily, with nearly all the juice falling into the glass. Contrast this scenario with one in which the parent scolds the child for spilling, thus setting up an adversarial relationship that reduces the child’s self-confidence.

The Bing philosophy is predicated on many of the same principles articulated by Anna Bing Arnold’s memo a half-century ago:

**Guideposts in Living with Children**
By Anna Bing Arnold, Parent Education Leader, Los Angeles Schools, 1950s

- **Discipline shows what is desirable; punishment only shows what is undesirable.**
- **Enjoy your child.** This is just as important as your devotion, and shows the child that you love him or her and that it is good to be a parent.
- **Accept your child** as he or she is, without trying to remold your child to fit your family’s or your own “ideal.”
- **Inform yourself about the growth and development of children**, so you may know what to expect and set comfortable standards for your child, within his or her ability.
- **Look behind your child’s disturbing behavior** to see the “why” of what he or she does. Ask, “Is this normal at this age and characteristic of most children, though annoying to grownups?”
“Normalcy” is a wide range. Keep in mind that each child has his or her own unique timetable of development.

Establish flexible routines. Children of all ages want reasonable controls for their safety and security. Too much restriction can cause rebellion or deceit, but too much freedom appears to children as indifference on the part of their parents.

Give positive, instead of negative, directives.

Give choice whenever possible, but do not offer it if there is no choice.

Consider your child’s natural tempo; avoid hurry and constant urging.

Praise good work or good behavior so your child will take pleasure in his or her effort and also learn, through it, what is desirable.

When disciplining, try to avoid adult moral judgments. A little feeling of guilt stimulates a child to try to do better, but a lot of guilt makes him or her feel unworthy and can make him or her feel hopeless.

Try to avoid severe criticism; it only arouses resentment and negative defense.

Try to avoid comparisons between children. They can create smugness in the one child and envy and hatred in the other.

Adopt a problem-solving attitude. When a difficulty occurs, try to attack only the problem, not the child.

Show affection. Though your child may have done something you think requires discipline, don’t let him or her think that he or she has lost your affection because of his or her behavior. Your child needs to know, always, that he or she belongs and is accepted and loved even though this behavior is “out of order” and unacceptable.

Try to control your own automatic reactions in troublesome situations where your child is too immature to control his or hers.

Give your child the opportunity and the necessary freedom. When your child shows that he or she is ready to cope with a new skill or situation, let him or her try it.

Remember that good habits and self-confidence develop through satisfying experiences, much more than through frustrations.

Having informed yourself and having tried thoughtfully to meet your child’s needs as they arise, trust your own judgment and enjoy your job.

Effective guidance is accomplished when adults:

Listen to children.

Narrate and interpret their actions.

Acknowledge their feelings.

Make suggestions that help children think, involve problem solving, and convey confidence in their developing abilities.
The Bing Beautification Project, a gift from Helen and Peter Bing, continues. Helen Bing and Michelle Olmstead, Bing parent and interior architect, have worked closely to create an appealing environment for the children and staff. Helen Bing has carefully selected art works for the school. The renovations this past year include the seminar room, staff lounge, children’s library, and bathrooms.

Right: Helen Bing, left, and Michelle Olmstead. Far right: Seminar room, with comfortable seating, lighting, and watercolors. Teaching teams hold staff meetings and parent conferences in this room. Below right: Staff chats over lunch in the staff lounge. The lounge was updated with paint, lighting, carpet, table and chairs, and paintings.

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Clockwise, from left: A folk art mirror graces the atrium bathroom. New book shelves, prints, and comfortable seats enhance the children’s library. A family reads a book together in the library.
As a returning staff member to Bing School, I was struck by the beauty of Bing’s environment: the atrium blooming with flowering plants and bushes, the renovations underway all around, and the enchanting original artwork selected by Helen Bing. I began to see the potential for field trips right outside the classroom doors that would increase children’s awareness of the school and provide an occasion for discussion and authentic work.

The stage for appreciating the environment is set in many ways throughout a child’s experience at Bing School. Children take note of the trees, flowers, and plants in bloom in their own classroom yards. They overturn garden soil, add new plants to gardens, and observe insect and animal life. This spring a red-tailed hawk nesting in the tall pine tree in the Center Room yard became a focal point of many children’s outdoor experience at school. By extending such observations beyond the classroom, they can see their school and the environment from other perspectives.

In early spring, I began taking children out to the atrium to notice the plants in bloom at that time. There is a rope surrounding the plants for protection, graced with children’s drawings and words. The drawings were beginning to fade, so we observed the plants and flowers and made new flower signs to laminate and hang. On one particularly rainy day, we sat under the roof of the atrium watching the rain fall on flowers and leaves, pooling in drops before making a slow descent down the stem to the ground. At tables set up with watercolors, Cray-Pas, colored pencils, and scissors, the children began making drawings of what they were observing. One child drew the following sign to serve as a reminder for all.

This activity started a conversation that illustrated the children’s compassion and their awareness of how we can help to maintain and protect this beautiful area. As spring progressed, we also noticed that the tree in the center of the atrium was blossoming. The abundant white blooms inspired us to sing “The Popcorn Tree,” as taught to us by Nathan Aldredge, assistant teacher of the West Room. Observations can be expressed kinesthetically, too, and as the children danced and sang around the tree, they were becoming aware of the cyclical nature of the seasons and how our tree was transforming. We spent time talking about how spring was approaching and when the tree would bloom each year. Just a few weeks later a child pointed out to me, “Look! The popcorn flowers are all gone. We’ll have to wait again for them next year!”

With the children enjoying and anticipating our trips outside the classroom, we turned our attention to the beautiful pieces of artwork throughout the school. Teacher Paula Smith took interested children into the staff seminar room to see Pamela Glasscock’s watercolors of flowers and do some observational drawings of the flowers. I continued this with other children throughout the school, with the intent of sending a card to Pamela Glasscock herself. The children challenged themselves to sketch flowers and dictate words of wisdom to Pamela. “Dear Pamela,” one child said, “This is a bulb that we have at home. This is the stem part and the flowers are in the middle. Flowers can be from bulbs, at the store or in pictures.” “Dear Pamela,” another said, “Your flowers are beautiful! I think that flowers are easy to draw.”

Some children experimented with putting the flowers on different ends of the stems, making observations such as “This picture is different because the flowers are on top of their stems. They stayed on their stems a long, long time. Somebody picked them and it takes forty years to die when you’re a flower.”

We sent the letters to Los Angeles, and in a few months a letter arrived from Pamela Glasscock.

Dear Jeanne, Jennifer, Bing School Children and Staff,

I was much surprised and delighted to receive the package of drawings, photos, and your kind notes. I am honored to have my paintings hanging at your school and will certainly come to visit someday when I am at Stanford. As an occasional art teacher with a particular fondness for younger children, and as an obvious believer in observational drawing as an enlightening experience, I am happy to know of your projects in drawing with the children, and to see their work. Thank you for the thoughtfulness in getting in touch with me and I look forward to meeting with you. A special thank you to all the children who wrote notes and sent their drawings to me. I love them.

Pamela Glasscock

The next time you wait in the atrium for class to begin, stop to read a library book, or visit the seminar room, notice the world through a child’s eye, and be your child’s guide to maintaining our beautiful environment. Start a lifelong appreciation for what lies right outside our door!
Some years ago, after a lecture, Professor Mark Lepper was approached by a couple who told him about a system of rewards they had set up for their son, which had produced much improved behavior at the dinner table. “He sits up straight and eats his peas and the Brussels sprouts and he is really very well behaved,” they reported. Until, that is, the first time the family dined at a nice restaurant. The child looked around, picked up a crystal glass from the table and asked, “How many points not to drop this?” A fine example, says Dr. Lepper, of the detrimental effects of over-reliance on rewards to shape children’s behavior.

On May 29, Dr. Mark R. Lepper, Chairman of Stanford’s Psychology Department, presented “Intrinsic Motivation, Extrinsic Motivation, and the Process of Learning,” an overview of the research into the role rewards play in children’s learning at the annual Bing Nursery School Distinguished Lecture.

At the time Lepper began his research, behavior modification programs were in their heyday. If kids were misbehaving, not studying enough, not learning, then the answer was, Lepper says, “good old-fashioned capitalism.” The children should be paid — with rewards, points, chips — for good behavior. Points could be redeemed for extra recess time or candy or even to buy your way out of tests. Conversely, points would be taken away for bad behavior. (That’s 50 points from Gryffindor!)

Such programs produced an instant effect. The rewards were very attractive and the children shaped up instantly. And as long as the program continued, so did the students’ behavior. That, says Lepper, was the wonderful positive effect and the reason for popularity of these programs.

But, Lepper asked, what happens when these children leave school? What happens when they go to a public school or a school that doesn’t have this kind of program? In fact, when such programs were discontinued, the children sometimes got much worse. They would work to get rewards, but if there was nothing in it for them, then there was no reason at all to pay attention or behave or study.

While looking more closely at a number of these programs — some of which had gone so overboard they were simply out and out bribery — Lepper observed that while the rewards produced instant compliance, they simultaneously seemed to undermine real motivation. There were hints in the literature of these effects, but no one had really studied them.

So, Lepper designed a series of studies to explore these effects. (Such a study, by the way, could only be done at a research school like Bing.) Over a three-week period, during the first hour of each class, the teachers put out on one particular table in front of the one-way observation mirrors a new activity — magic markers and drawing paper. Each day, when the children arrived during free play time, this was one of the many choices they had.

From behind the one-way mirror, the researchers could measure how much time during these free play periods each of the children chose to spend with this activity as opposed to others. The participants selected for the study were only those children who showed a high level of interest in the activity — in other words, children who were already intrinsically motivated.

Then, each of those children was taken into one of the game rooms, where they
were asked to engage in the same activity under three different conditions. Under one condition, a reward was offered: the child saw in advance the “Good Player” Award with its line for their name and agreed to draw with the magic markers in order to get it. Under another condition, when the child finished their drawing, they were unexpectedly given a reward. In the third group, children neither expected nor received any tangible reward, but did receive the same feedback on their work as the other children.

Two weeks later, the teachers again put out the magic markers in the classroom. From behind the one-way mirrors, the experimenters observed how much time the children chose to spend with the activity, when there was no longer any tangible reward available.

What happened? The children who had contracted to receive the “Good Player” award showed significantly less interest — in fact, half as much — as they had before the study. So, contracting for a reward to do this initially interesting and attractive activity subsequently had a negative effect on their interest. The misuse of rewards or the use of superfluous awards undermined intrinsic interests, turning an attractive activity into something the child would only want to do if there was a payoff.

Later studies varied conditions and rewards, but, the same basic effect was always noted — children expecting the reward during the experimental session showed less subsequent interest in the classroom and less interest than they had initially. In a related group of studies, the same effect was found when children had to complete activities under tight time deadlines. And in yet another related study, children’s art teachers were asked to rate the creativity, quality, and interest value of the paintings done during the experiments and found that children who were expecting the reward drew more pictures but of lower average quality.

So, how is it that children learn the principle that when somebody offers you a bribe for doing something, then what you’re being offered the bribe for is probably something that you’re not going to find very interesting? Lepper suggested looking at the classic dinner table debate, when Mom or Dad says you can’t have your dessert until you’ve finished your vegetables. Does the debate itself — the “means–end” condition — tell the children how they should feel about dessert as opposed to vegetables?

Lepper and his team set up an experiment in which this dinner table scene was described to forty four-year-old children at Bing, substituting the fanciful food names: gumblatts and snogworts. “We actually have samples of these two foods,” they told the children. “They’re under covered dishes so you can’t see or smell them. This one’s the gumblatts (the one you couldn’t have right away at the dinner table — the end) and this one’s the snogworts (the one you had to eat to get the other one — the means). Which one would you like to try?”

Ninety percent of the children immediately went for the gumblatts. Even the ten percent who didn’t all still showed that they understood the social script — remarking that the snogworts probably had more vitamins and minerals or the gumblatts had “more refined sugars” (a four-year-old participant whom Dr. Lepper dearly wished he had followed up on to see how he fared in later life). The upshot is that when children are told they have to do one thing in order to do the other, the thing presented as the reward becomes more attractive and the thing done to get the reward is less attractive.

All of this, however, does not mean that extrinsic rewards should never be used. Rewards, in fact, are neither good nor bad. There are good and bad uses of them. So, how can rewards be used most effectively, without undermining interest or in order to achieve other positive ends? It comes down to looking at rewards and intrinsic motivation from the standpoint of four questions, says Lepper. First, is intrinsic motivation relevant? For example, you might have a rule that your child take out the garbage, but you don’t expect that he will learn to enjoy it. You’re just happy if he does it on time without being prompted. So, if offering some kind of reward is helpful in such a circumstance, there is no problem. Second, is the reward necessary or superfluous? Is the reward needed to get the children to engage in the activity? In the original studies, activities were deliberately selected for which the reward was superfluous — the child was motivated to do the activity anyway without reward. But when a child will not engage in an activity without some reward, they may have a positive effect by getting children started in the task. Lots of tasks at first can be awful and dull and boring until you acquire enough competence to do them well, like the early stages of reading. If you start by doing things that encourage the child to engage in the activity enough to come to appreciate that it’s fun — even if those things are a little heavy-handed — that may be a legitimate use for rewards.
Third, does increased engagement in the task help build new skills? In the case of reading, if you can get kids to engage in activities that are relevant to eventually developing this skill, then in the end they will have acquired a skill that has intrinsic value that they didn’t have before.

Finally, if you have to use rewards in cases where you want to encourage children to do something, will the child perceive the reward as a bribe or a bonus? Ideally, there are times when rewards focus the child on a feeling of competence and accomplishment and can be used when we want to convey pride in a child’s accomplishments. That’s very different from using rewards for social control or as a technique of discipline.

As Lepper noted, the British philosopher John Locke first observed in 1693 in *Some Thoughts on Education* that in teaching a child, care must be taken that learning never be made a business to him. “I’ve always had the fancy that learning might be made a play and a recreation to children, they might be brought to a desire to be taught if only learning were proposed to them as a thing of delight and recreation,” Locke wrote. Teachers — and parents — often unwittingly turn play into work, the source of a further unintended effect on intrinsic motivation. The longer children are in school, the less they seemed to be intrinsically motivated. Certainly, trappings such as grades and test scores become more important as children progress in school, but overall, such extrinsic motivation or rewards, stay fairly level. So, the final direction Lepper’s research took was a look into how to turn work into play and led to what he calls “The Five C’s.”

The first “C” for turning work into play is **challenge**. There is a lot of evidence that children — as well as the the rest of us — will seek out challenges, that if you give children tasks of different levels of difficulty, they’ll look for one of intermediate difficulty — the one where they’re not certain they’re going to succeed, but it’s not impossible. They think they can improve and learn and become better. It’s fun.

For the next “C,” remember children search for **competence**, evidence that they’ve accomplished something at a high level, or that they’ve improved. And they like to feel that they are personally responsible for their success, that it wasn’t just luck or the ease of the task. Only when the task is challenging do they begin to feel competence when they succeed, when they feel like effort, skill and ability entered into the success.

The third “C” is that people of all ages like to be in **control**. They like to feel like they’re in charge, that they’re determining their own fates. This is a particularly American or Western European concept.

The fourth “C” is **curiosity**. We often seek out things because we’re curious, because they’re mysterious and complex, things we sort of understand but not quite. The incongruity makes us want to learn more. Good teachers are adept at bringing out this sense of wonderment.

And finally, the fifth “C” is **context**, which refers to the fact that we often get great pleasure from engrossing ourselves in imaginary environments — listening to stories, reading books, going to movies, watching TV, playing video games. It’s not clear in the literature, Lepper says, precisely what the rewards are of identifying with characters, but it’s clearly a very powerful effect.

The ultimate question is: do children learn better or differently when they’re intrinsically motivated? To find out, Lepper set up a study where a computer-based learning activity was presented as a game. The children who were participating were given a series of choices about aspects of the activity and allowed to personalize the game.

Three effects were observed. First, children were more interested and learned more when the activity was made into a game. They also learned more when they had a choice over trivial aspects of the game — such as choosing their game piece or naming their game character. Finally, it was found that in increasing the intrinsic aspect of the task, better learning resulted — the children got the answers more quickly. Extrinsic motivation interfered with learning. Further, it was found that intrinsically motivated children showed higher levels of perceived ability, causing them to desire more difficult tasks, basically generalizing the process of learning to other contexts.

In closing, Lepper pointed out that if you could create a child who was perfectly intrinsically motivated and absolutely uninterested in every extrinsic motivation, that person probably would not succeed very well in our society. In the final analysis, like many aspects of child-rearing, intrinsic motivation and the use of rewards are a balancing act.

Looking back over the span of all this research, Lepper feels he ultimately discovered what Mark Twain had found a hundred years earlier in *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, where Tom conned the other kids into whitewashing Aunt Polly’s fence by telling them it was such a special privilege to be able to do so. Twain wrote, “For Tom had discovered a fundamental law of human nature, that work is what a body is obliged to do, and that play is what a body is not obliged to do. And this should help explain why constructing artificial flowers or walking on a treadmill is work, whereas bowling ten pins or climbing Mont Blanc is merely amusement.” It’s kind of like the difference between gumbllats and snotgreens.

Professor Mark Lepper is a nationally known social and developmental psychologist. He received his B.A. from Stanford and his Ph.D. from Yale and has been a faculty member at Stanford since 1971, where he is today Chairman of the Psychology Department. His landmark research marked the beginning of the study of intrinsic motivation. His son is a graduate of Bing Nursery School. His wife, Jeanne Lepper, is the Director of Bing Nursery School.

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This is a door to get inside the house.
By Michael L., age 3
During spring quarter, thirty-two Bing children each had a turn sitting across a table from a silver-haired, soft-spoken man who read storybooks and drew pictures of the children. The man was John Flavell, professor emeritus of psychology at Stanford and a renowned developmental psychologist specializing in young children’s knowledge about the mind.

Flavell came to Stanford twenty-seven years ago, after teaching at the University of Rochester and the University of Minnesota. He originally trained as a clinical psychologist and studied developmental psychology with his mentor, Heinz Werner, at Clark University. At the time, developmental psychology in general and Jean Piaget, the Swiss psychologist, in particular were hardly recognized.

In the past ten years, Flavell has been examining what children know about the mind and mental experiences. Previous studies have indicated that preschool-age children do not realize that the mind is constantly active, that a person who is looking into empty space is also thinking. Most recently, Flavell, along with Adrian Wong, a Stanford graduate student, is studying what children know about private and inner speech. Speech is normally social (addressed to others) and overt (spoken out loud). However, overt speech can be private (not addressed to others) and speech can be covert (not spoken out loud) and therefore also private. Flavell and Wong seek to discover children’s awareness of these private and covert forms of speech.

In their study, Flavell and Wong presented children with three tasks. In the first, involving overt private speech, Wong sat next to a child across a table from Flavell and asked Flavell to draw the child’s face. Flavell looked at the child, talking aloud to himself as he drew: “Here are the ears. The eyes are up here…” Meanwhile, Wong asked the child, “John’s talking right now, isn’t he?” He then followed up with questions about who John was talking to.

Almost all of the four-year-olds and 77 percent of the three-year-olds understood that Flavell was engaged in private speech, though overt. This finding was surprising because two of the usual cues for social speech were present: eye contact (looking at the child) and audible, comprehensible speech. In addition, the speech was about the listener.

The second and third tasks, involving private covert speech, were similar to each other. In the second, Wong asked Flavell to read the first page of a story and then asked him to read the second page without making any noise. In the third task, Wong asked Flavell to count some crayons and then to count without making any sound. The questions to the child were whether John was saying story words and numbers to himself, inside his head. The children didn’t perform on these two tasks quite as well as they did on the first one but some children did well. The children answering no on these tasks apparently believed that Flavell was not engaged in any internal speech. Seeing no overt signs of talking, these children probably didn’t imagine that he was talking to himself inside his head.

In a follow-up study, Flavell and Wong presented children with the same tasks after asking him to count some crayons and then to count without making any sound. During the silent counting time, with Flavell still pointing, Wong asked, “Is John saying hiccup to himself?” Most of the children who had performed poorly on the inner speech task in the initial study did well on these two tasks.

Flavell concluded that preschool children do have some understanding of nontypical forms of speech (i.e., private overt speech, and covert speech). In favorable circumstances, with facilitated tasks, they are able to recognize both that speech can be private even when spoken out loud and that speech can be internal.

This study involved Flavell in direct work with children for the first time in decades. About his experience as a confederate in the study, Flavell smiles, saying, “I really enjoy it. It’s like a second childhood for me.”

John Flavell and Beverley Hartman, Head Teacher, co-authored What Children Know about Mental Experiences. The article has been accepted for publication in the journal Young Children.
In the early morning of September 11, 2001, at her home in the East Bay, Dr. Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall was readying her two sons for their first day at Bing Nursery School when she turned on the TV to check on the traffic on the Dumbarton Bridge and saw what was happening in the world — three airliners had crashed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, and another had crashed in the Pennsylvania countryside.

That morning every parent on the West Coast debated whether or not to send their children to school. No one knew what was happening. But, like most parents, Sherwood-Randall went ahead. She drove across the Dumbarton Bridge to Bing, where, she noted, the leadership of the school and its teachers exhibited an extraordinary presence of mind so that “the terrible things happening in the grown-up world would not poison the innocence and wonder of a first day of school for so many little children”.

On September 11, 2002, exactly one year later, Dr. Sherwood-Randall, a Bing parent and Senior Research Scholar at Stanford’s Center for International Security and Cooperation, spoke to the Bing community about the impact of 9/11 on national security and on Americans’ lives.

The past year, she noted, had been an eye-opening one for many Americans. With the end of the Cold War more than a decade ago, most believed there was no longer any need to worry about the world beyond our shores. With the United States the world’s sole remaining superpower, there were no real dangers to our security on the scale that had been posed by the former Soviet Union. For most of the 1990s, the foreign policy problems the United States concerned itself with were of no great consequence to Americans at home. The travails of Haiti or Rwanda or Bosnia were awful from a humanitarian point of view, but they did not threaten our very way of life.

In a sense, as terrible as it sounds, said Sherwood-Randall, what happened a year ago was a wake-up call for America. One of the hardest things in this new, uncertain time is the feeling of helplessness. But, she asked, is there anything that we can do, both individually and collectively, to make our world safer and more secure? Can we keep nuclear and biological weapons out of the hands of terrorists? And, if something terrible does happen, how do we minimize the consequences?

The single greatest threat to Americans today, she said, lies in the possibility that nuclear weapons would be used against us by terrorists. It’s hard to build nuclear weapons from scratch, but getting one from a country that already has them and doesn’t have an entirely secure system in place for keeping track of them, is less daunting.

Countries that have nuclear weapons, or have the potential to develop them, represent continuing challenges. In the case of Russia, which still has 25,000 nuclear weapons, the government has been generally cooperative, but there are a lot of hungry scientists and soldiers, and we know the Iranians and the Iraqis and al-Qaeda have been looking for opportunities to buy either the weapons or the technology or the scientists who can help them build nuclear weapons.

But progress can be made. At the end of the Cold War, when the Soviet Union collapsed, four new nuclear states emerged: Russia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus. Three of these four countries — Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus — were all persuaded to give up their nuclear weapons within five years of their independence through a major American initiative, and nearly 5,000 nuclear warheads were dismantled.

But a new phase of this cooperative activity urgently needs to be undertaken, to work with countries that have nuclear weapons, to address their remaining arsenals, to build a “global coalition against catastrophic terrorism.” This could be built on the coalition that has been forged to fight al-Qaeda and it would concentrate on keeping nuclear materials and their science out of the hands of terrorists. Fundamentally, this kind of work depends extremely heavily on international cooperation.

Prevention also requires that the United States military have the capability to deal with the new kinds of threats the country is facing. Sherwood-Randall believes decisive steps must be taken now to enhance military capabilities. She said that one of the very best ways to prevent attacks is to use the military as a deterrent, to use it to persuade people not to attack because they know the consequences will be dire for them. This strengthens United States diplomacy and allows us to compel behavior from adversaries without actually having to fight. In addition, much greater intelligence about the kinds of threats that we now face is required, because these threats are very different from the classic threats for which we’ve prepared to fight in the past.

Our general lack of preparedness is particularly true with respect to a new category of danger: the possibility of the use of biological weapons. The reality is that this threat is not very responsive to prevention. Unlike nuclear weapons, which offer significant opportunities for prevention, the options for prevention of biological agents are very limited. The material and the technology and the knowledge are already widely distributed, and with the genomics revolution, more
is happening every day. Deterrence doesn’t work in this context because there may not be a state against whom we can respond, and it will be extremely hard to identify perpetrators, in any case.

A more fruitful course of action, said Sherwood-Randall, involves improvements in domestic and international public health by significantly strengthening our event-monitoring capabilities so that outbreaks are recognized early and health care professionals know how to treat those outbreaks. A multi-layered, multinational network is needed so that information can be conveyed in real time across cities, states, and continents. Internationally, a much greater capacity for global public health monitoring is required to identify new and unfamiliar diseases and to be prepared to respond, which means much more work also needs to be done to develop both vaccines and antidotes. Domestically, our own public health system has been severely under-funded traditionally, and this needs to change, in order to build the necessary network of monitoring and response.

Preparation is something in which all Americans have a role. To adequately organize to face all these new threats, an effort will be required at federal, state, and local levels and in each and every home. The problem of homeland security has existed for many years — there are overlapping jurisdictions and competing entities. But, while defense traditionally has been a federal responsibility, much of what needs to be done now requires local governments to be on the front line of the national strategy, because they will most often be the first responders in a crisis. This means that people who have not had anything to do with national security issues are thrust into this role — doctors, police officers, even school teachers. Catastrophic terrorism is a probability. Sherwood-Randall thinks it is only a matter of time and that is why she thinks this work is urgently important. If we’re very effective in our efforts, the likelihood goes down. September 11 was a wakeup call but maybe one that will be useful if we can really marshal our resources to prepare for such terrorism and, whenever possible, prevent it.

We are in a new world. The paradigm that organized and defined our role in the world has been lost. Before the Second World War, this country was ambivalent about being engaged on a continuous basis in the world. Our founding fathers had advised us against entangling alliances, and largely what we did was go out and do things that needed to get done and then we’d come home and mind our own business. Then we realized that the Cold War was something we’d have to fight for the longer term, we had to mobilize resources to do it, and stay the course.

What we are seeing and feeling now is the discomfort of not having a new paradigm, explained Sherwood-Randall. Terrorism is just one element of a new picture that is taking shape, in which there are different dangers. And some of the norms that we have come to accept for human behavior seem to have disappeared — for example, the expectation that no one would fly a plane into a building and be cheered by his people for doing it. We are in a different era, and that’s scary. We can’t anticipate things, and, for national security specialists, it’s incredibly humbling, because they have to start from scratch.

But what can each of us do at home, as individuals? Sherwood-Randall says that the first thing to do is live our lives, and not be frightened or inhibited about doing the things that make our country great.

Second, be informed citizens. Learn about the world, participate in the debate about America’s role in it, support prevention and preparedness as important public policy goals. Read the newspaper. Read about these places in the world we need to understand better. Read about policy debates. Watch C-Span at night, instead of Entertainment Tonight. And then — and this is absolutely crucial and so important — vote! Be engaged in the process of choosing your leaders so we’ll have leaders who represent our views. Go to public forums. Write letters to your congressman about things you care about, and ask for answers. An informed citizenry really matters.

Third, help our children cope. Be a role model in crisis. Panic will terrify children, and set a negative example as they deal with their own crises in their own lives. Assure them that everything that can be done will be done to protect them and keep them safe. Don’t hide too much from them because they can detect an adult’s anxiety and become distrustful and suspicious, but don’t overload them with information they can’t process. Bing teacher Jane Farish has written an excellent pamphlet on this — *When Disaster Strikes: Helping Young Children Cope*. And, finally, take control by making emergency plans. Talk with your children about what to do in an emergency. Even the youngest child can know about dialing 911 and communicating their address.

How can parents cope? With the love of family, being a member of a supportive community, exercise, learning more about potential threats and understanding what we can do about it. If that’s not enough, Sherwood-Randall recommends *The September 11 Syndrome: Seven Steps to Getting a Grip in Uncertain Times* by psychologist Dr. Harriet Braiker, a very practical plan for dealing with “anxious days and sleepless nights.”

The world today is a scary place, says Sherwood-Randall, but Americans are not helpless and shouldn’t feel hopeless about it. There is much that can be done to diminish the dangers and there is the responsibility to do so, for the best reason of all: to ensure children’s futures.

At Stanford, Dr. Elizabeth Sherwood-Randall is working on developing innovative policy solutions to national security problems and to inspire young people to pursue public policy careers. She served as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia, Ukraine, and Eurasia from 1994-1996 and co-founded the Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.
On a visit to Bing, Dr. Jeanne L. Tsai, assistant professor of psychology at Stanford, explained her study of how acculturation affects parent-child relationships. Specifically, how do children from Asian immigrant families adjust to their American environment while being raised by parents whose values and beliefs may differ from those of most Americans? Tsai collected data from children with Chinese, American, and European backgrounds. She found that Chinese American youths who felt more Chinese than American were emotionally closer to their parents than those who felt more American. Conversely, Chinese American youths who felt less close to their parents also felt closer to their peers.

Little research looks at how acculturation might influence the relationship between parents and children, despite the increasing number of immigrant families in the United States. In the year 2000, 8.6 percent of US family households (9.05 million households) included a foreign-born member, usually a parent or other adult, and 16 percent of children were being raised in such households. Often in these families, the parents are oriented toward maintaining their ethnic culture in the home, while the children are oriented toward understanding and functioning in the culture outside the home. Not surprisingly, these differences can result in conflict between the generations.

To explore the roots of this conflict, Tsai examined the attitudes of Chinese American youths. She gave participants a questionnaire that probed their cultural orientation, producing ratings of how American or Chinese participants felt, and she administered the Inventory of Parent Attachment, which measures participants’ feelings about their parents. She went beyond participants’ self-reporting, studying videotapes for participants’ facial expressions and word choices as they described their parents.

The study did correlate parent-child conflict with children’s sense of being “American.” Surprisingly, however, the increased conflict did not appear to decrease children’s social and psychological well-being. Although standard psychological theory might predict more problems for children who felt more cultural conflict, in fact, neither emotional distress nor behaviors differed between the groups reporting conflict and those reporting little such conflict.

To account for this surprising finding, Tsai hypothesizes that it is normal and adaptive for groups adjusting to another culture to break some ties with some individuals in order to form ties with other individuals. In the case of these children, the severed ties were with parents and the new emotional bonds were with peers. In their everyday lives, the children found the cultural information of their peers more relevant, not that of their parents, so they adjusted and functioned in the new culture by aligning themselves with peers. Indeed, Tsai found in a follow-up study that children who felt more American, although less close to their parents, also felt closer to peers than other groups. In the future, Tsai may conduct longitudinal studies to chart how parent-child relationships change over time and to discover whether, given time, children re-form close bonds with their parents.

Being like Jeanne Tsai, a child of immigrant parents, I was naturally very interested in the effects of acculturation on family dynamics. It was satisfying to find my own experiences and feelings reflected in Tsai’s research, for my family relationships were also affected by the conflict I felt in acclimating to this new environment. Tsai’s research can help me understand strains and conflicts in immigrant families, including my own and others I encounter.

The Musical Instruments I Like to Play...
Beth Wise, Bing Music Specialist, talked to children about their music experience with her at Bing this past year.

I like to play with the instruments. I like the egg shakers. By Will C., age 4

Egg shaker.
Shake eight times.
Shake fast.
By Kieran G., age 3

This is me. I am playing the piano. I liked it when we did the piano game I made up. By Morgan T., age 4

continued on page 28
Since 1999, Bing Nursery School has been offering Parent Seminars. These seminars have focused on topics and issues in early childhood. This past spring the topics included, “How to Talk to Children” and “The Value of Basic Materials.” The aim of these seminars has been to help our parents and families better understand and support their children’s development by sharing with them the knowledge and expertise of the Bing staff.

Our Parent Seminar program is a result of the vision and sponsorship of Evan and Violet Brooks. The Brooks family came to Bing in 1995 when their oldest child, Lennon, was three years old. Since then, Lennon’s sisters, McKenzie and Peri, have also graduated from Bing. This year their youngest child, Mia, will begin in the Twos Program. They have spent many hours observing and participating in their children’s classrooms. Their experience led them to ask questions and explore early childhood issues and enhanced their parenting skills and knowledge of child development.

Recently Evan Brooks sat down with Chia-wa Yeh and myself to discuss what led him to sponsor these Parent Seminars and why he feels they are so important.

How did you initially get involved at Bing?
This school changed my son’s life; it was so eye opening. Lennon had been at another preschool whose teachers were not well prepared to handle a range of children’s personalities and behaviors. In an attempt to resolve the conflicts, the school administration concluded that their teachers were having difficulties because we were ineffective or even “bad” at parenting. While we were no experts, the label was inappropriate at best, and we started searching for another alternative.

When we came to Bing, we felt like this school saved Lennon’s life; it turned everything around for him 180 degrees. Lennon had a teacher named Allison in West PM who took him by the hand and almost adopted him. (Allison Thompson Esenkova now lives in Houston, Texas with her husband Oleg.) She made it her personal crusade to make Lennon feel safe, wanted and comfortable with who he is, while also teaching him appropriate behaviors, skills and responses. It was totally amazing what she was able to accomplish, and watching her was the beginning of our education as parents. Our son was always a very active child and he could get easily frustrated. Allison had this way of immediately getting down to his level (which was hard because she was so tall and he was so small) and talked to him so calmly, logically and repeatedly; nothing would ruffle her. Lennon thrived in the consistency, and it taught us so much about how to deal with our child and children in general. So, that was our introduction to it all. We were able to see someone relate to our child like we’ve never seen anyone else do, and with such amazing success.

So, was this the impetus for beginning the parent seminars?
The first thing we noticed when we adopted interacting with our child in this “face-to-face manner” was that other people weren’t doing it. You see parents talking to their children and you see absolutely nothing happening. Parents are doing the same thing that we used to do and it was not working. Sometimes we felt like going over to them and saying, “have you ever thought about getting down to your child’s level when you talk to them?” But you can’t really do that with grown-ups — adults don’t like to be

Violet and Evan Brooks, Bing parents and sponsors of the Bing Parent Seminar Series.

Having never had anyone model such behavior before, we had never considered interacting with our child in this way. Seeing Allison do it really empowered us to try it ourselves. Prior to this, our experience was that adults stood over the child and talked to him. We had no idea of the positive impact of getting down to the child’s level and talking to them in a calm, respectful and reasonable voice.

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**Bing Parent Seminar Series 2003**

**How to Talk to Children**
Presented by Bing Teachers:
Bonnie Chandler, Sue Gore, Quan Ho, Tom Limbert, Peckie Peters, Parul Roy, and Chia-wa Yeh
Moderated by Jennifer Winters

**The Value of Basic Materials**
Presented by Bing Teachers:
Nandini Bhattacharjya, Betsy Koning, Jenny Ludlow, Nancy Verdzabellaa, Jennifer Winters, Beth Wise, and Sarah Wright
told how to interact with their child by another parent — so we thought that hearing it from the teachers might be the best course. Really what the teachers do so well is model appropriate behavior. It occurred to us that teachers here are modeling behavior for us, so maybe they could model for others. Not every parent has the time to be in their child’s classroom and even if they are there, they are often worrying about things like having a successful separation with their child.

We felt parents could benefit if the teachers presented these little jewels of child development in a more obvious fashion, like a seminar series. We felt that if childcare was available, it would remove a big barrier for a lot of parents to attend. The idea was to have the teachers share gems with the parents and hopefully a few of the gems would stick. We’ve learned so many things here and about six of them have really stuck with us. We use them all the time and they are really important. It is our hope that everyone will have their own six that they would pick.

Parents really respect what the teachers at Bing have to say and there is a great deal to be learned from them. Each year, there has been a lot of interest in these presentations. That’s a good sign in itself and it really says that the families that come here are really truly interested in learning how to relate to their children and how to be the best parents they can be. That is really encouraging.

Could you give us other examples of what you found useful from observing the teachers at Bing?

Another gem is the way you talk to a child about their work. For instance, if a child is painting, instead of asking, “What’s that?” you might say “I see that you are making lots of straight lines or lots of red circles.” It’s a way of talking that lets the child know that you are interested and you value and respect their work.

Also, conflict mediation… you see the teachers here doing this all day and you don’t realize how special and important it is until you go home and try it and it works. For instance, there is a conflict and you bring the two children together. The adult or teacher might start the mediation by stating simply, “Sammy is trying to tell you that it hurts his body when you hit him on the head with the shovel” or the child may be able to verbalize his feelings himself. The teacher comforts and supports both children by creating a forum where they can both say what is on their minds. Both children can hear what each other has to say.

What do you see for the future of the Parent Seminars?

Over time the seminars have really improved the focus and delivery of the message. The problem is that it’s easy to succumb to information overload. That’s one reason why we have retained and used on a daily basis only a handful of the great things we have learned here. The challenge is to present these gems simply and succinctly, and in sufficient quantity to give parents a choice of what’s relevant or important to them, but not so many that none can be remembered. Since we tend to remember something the more we use it, some form of modeling or active participation at the seminars might really be helpful as well. An unexpected side benefit of the seminars is that it has become a forum for improving the presentation skills of the Bing staff. Given the amount of presentation and participation in national and international conferences that the Bing staff is involved in, honing both presentations and skills has been highly beneficial to the staff. The result is that we all benefit from better communication with a more highly trained staff.

In the end, as long as there are new parents who can benefit from the collective wisdom of Bing’s teachers, the Parent Seminars, or something similar, will always have a place in Bing’s philosophy of sharing the responsibility of educating our children.

Building with Blocks

Teachers facilitate and encourage block building by observing and listening to the children’s interests and following their leads, rather than telling them what to build or building for them. Teachers also challenge children’s building skills as they seem ready. In this example, the teacher might ask Yukiya (age 3), “Where else do you need to make your road longer?”
As Center AM embarked on the winter quarter, the children’s interest in drawing and painting and the teaching team’s interest in the visual arts led to a rewarding project, one using basic materials, having real-world application, and providing plenty of chances for the children’s questions and investigations to guide the work.

We began by providing painting opportunities in different areas of the environment. Children responded by expressing their feelings, ideas, and reflections through their artwork. Each painting revealed a story, personal and meaningful to the artist, and was showcased at story time. The children’s thrill at achieving their goals was contagious. Many paintings emerged, each with its own story.

We expanded this exploration by talking to the children about their art and their process, introducing new vocabulary and helping children reflect on and talk about their creations. We brought in reproductions of famous paintings and books on art. In small groups we discussed the children’s views about these works, prompting responses with questions such as “What do you think is happening in this painting?” “What colors were used?”

As the children extended their thinking, they used observational skills and verbalized their thoughts in both small and large groups.

CHIARA: “I see black sky. It’s night. It’s night here on houses.”
SAM: “I like it because it has some green grass and a blue sky and some yellow grass, too. I like it, too, because it has a person walking in the grass.”
SAWYER: “I like it because it has a nice blue sky. I also like it because there is a person walking, walking, walking in the grass.”
SADIE and ANNIE: “The artist used lots of colors, gray, brown, red, green, yellow, plain white, and purple.”

The children started out using familiar tempera paint and then tried watercolors, oil pastels, crayons, color and primer pencils, and ink. They used a variety of tools to paint with: soccer balls in trays, string, stamps, kitchen tools, brayers, brushes of different sizes, palette knives, popsicle sticks, pine needles, flowers, and, of course, fingers! Some of these tools were the children's own ingenious ideas.

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In groups the children used their whole bodies to make murals. They brainstormed ideas and worked closely together, taking ownership of a class project in which each individual felt validated and included as an important member of the group. Expanding on their understanding of the use of space, the children hung some of these murals at different heights and placed others on the ground as they painted. One of the children’s favorite murals, on a big canvas, was a two-week project that the children proudly displayed in their gallery.

Documenting the work was a valuable way to record and present information. On the patio children built a gallery to display their cre-
Music with Twos
By Kittie Pecka, Head Teacher

Music touches our lives in unique ways, a process that is particularly evident with two-year-olds. Many of the children in Twos come to school knowing numerous melodies, lyrics, and dance movements. We begin in this familiar realm to involve them in music with their new friends in a new environment. Recognizing familiar tunes spurs the children to participate on different levels and helps them adjust to the group. But singing is only one aspect of their involvement. Some children move while they sing, others emphasize the beat with body parts or instruments, and some make up songs and hum or sing as they work or play.

Teachers introduce new songs, instruments, and movements at formal group times and more spontaneous events throughout the day. Increasing their repertoire, children develop a group culture of songs and dances that they share. We try to expose them to the traditional songs of our culture that they will continue to use in the future, but we listen to their interests to choose songs and recorded music unique to the character of the group. At the end of the first quarter, all the families received a book of these songs to enjoy together. In return, some parents contributed songs from their own languages and cultures. Of course, many songs are familiar across cultures: melodies such as Frere Jacques and Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star have been significant to children through the centuries and have been passed down through many generations.

One reason to sing the songs of one’s own culture to children is that they have special meaning. Don Campbell, author of The Mozart Effect, observes that “information embedded in emotional context seems to stimulate neural circuitry more powerfully.” The rhythm and language of music transmits a vocabulary well before speech. When the children in Twos form a bond with teachers, this emotional content is also important. In the Tuesday-Thursday PM class, a child had been reluctant in his speech, but when his favorite teachers Quan and Angelica sang “Slippery Fish” with him, he not only learned much of the new vocabulary but sang the song in perfect pitch and with appropriate inflection and rhythm.

In Frames of Mind, Howard Gardner notes that music is one of the earliest intelligences to emerge. Nurturing this intelligence in infancy by singing to children and playing excellent music prepares their brains for making music. Mimicking the sounds a baby makes and then elaborating with simple tone changes encourages the child to sing more and increases the musical bond between parent and child. Soon children begin patterned movement to music or beat in any form. Their bodies move rhythmically and sounds can accompany these movements. These activities require complex brain connections that help form the corpus callosum, the connection between the right and left brain.

Music is based on intervals of sound that have been systematized in Western and Eastern cultures according to mathematical patterns. These patterns are introduced to the baby in the womb and later interact with the development of mathematical and spatial intelligences. Each child acquires musical responses differently and at an individual rate, but the development is undoubtedly influenced by encouragement and exposure.

My own experience with two-year-olds convinces me that music fosters communication, collaboration, and self-expression — the most important aspects of two-year-old learning. Before they can speak, they can sing. Before they can share, they form a chorus and a dance troupe. Before they can play an instrument methodically or master technique, they can sing their own song and dance their own dance accompanied by joyful, rhythmic percussion. Together we sing and dance in joy and sharing in the Twos room. Join us!
As the teachers discussed our project, I was impressed with their sensitive and careful responses to the children’s art. Cathy Weisman Topal explains in *Children and Painting* that “children go through fairly predictable stages as they develop abilities to use paint and express themselves.” Our goal was not to rush the process for any of the children, but rather to provide each one with the time and the means to explore each stage and each painting experience. For years, I had been taught not to force representational art onto a child by asking of a painting about their art” from *The Colors of Learning* by Rosemary Althouse, Margaret H. Johnson and Sharon T. Mitchell, who encourage teachers to focus on specific elements of children’s artwork and to help children focus on how they used the art media. It was enlightening to discover that asking children how they created their art invited them to reflect on the process — a useful cognitive challenge and a tool for the artists’ future endeavors. The children picked up on this vocabulary and the practice of discussing their artwork. At storytimes it was not uncommon to hear a child ask another child, “How did you make the wheels?” or “Why did you use blue on top?” When the artist answered plainly, “I just went like this with the brush” or “Because that’s my favorite color,” the children took another’s perspective for a moment and seemed to accept and understand.

Responding prudently, sensitively, and specifically to children’s artwork can be difficult, but the exchange is appropriate, necessary, and valuable for focusing on the children’s ideas and their work. Everything we teachers learned about responding to children’s art can be used by parents and caregivers as well. The next time a child hands you a painting, ask about the specifics, the details, the shapes, and the colors of the painting. At times, you’ll want to acknowledge the effort the child obviously put into the work. An older child may be ready to discuss the creation process. Just try to resist the judgment (“It’s beautiful”) or the call to representation (“What is it?”) or even the open-ended question (“Can you tell me about your painting?”) This last one may elicit an elaborate tale of knights and princesses, but it could also elicit the response I got from Venkat one afternoon: “Yes, you can put it here to dry.”

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East AM’s theme At Home in East Room encouraged children to consider how feelings of trust and acceptance help them become comfortable at school and ease adjustment to a new setting and the formation of a new group. In addition, they examined elements in the environment that are integral to productive participation. Exploring the culture in East Room fostered thought about the significant traditions and values represented in this community.

Edith Dowley, founding director, designed Bing Nursery School to be an outgrowth of the home rather than a shift to elementary school. Dramatic play is the focal point of the program, both indoors and outdoors. Children’s first play scripts are about the home because it is their primary experience and focuses on the importance of the family. Dramatic play that integrates the physical, social, emotional, linguistic, and cognitive realms helps children become at home both at school and in the world.

### Playing home is a primary experience.

Early in the school year the children cooperated on planning and building a neighborhood from hollow blocks, open-ended materials that lend themselves to favorite structures such as homes, a cement factory, a fire station, a roller coaster, Bing School, and the roads and tunnels that connect them. Travis said, “We need a one-way sign for the tunnel so the cars know which way to go.”

In addition, the children actively explored the sand area by building roads, rivers, and a home for dinosaurs. The large sand pool invited children to bake, build, and explore the properties of a medium they could poke, pat, and push into the many shapes of their imagination. They experimented with different combinations of sand and water to make “cement,” a tall volcano, or a deep river bed.

To expand on these discoveries in the sand, teachers facilitated the mapping of the East Room yard. Children looked at particular areas of the outdoor space and drew what they saw and felt about aspects of the environment. They also designed individual landscapes.

Anne Dresser, Michael’s mother and a landscape architect, helped the children to think about the elements they would like to include in an outdoor play space for children and brought tools such as tracing paper, a French curve, templates, an electric eraser, and a compass for the children to use in drawing their own ideas.

Caring for pets and gardens is another way children integrated their home experience into the school setting. Visiting Chou Chou, East Room’s beloved French Lop bunny, is often the first time children become comfortable in separating from parents. Children tilled the soil, planted bulbs, and watered the garden while sharing stories about their own gardens at home. Matthew said, “We have tomato plants as tall as me.” Nature provided a comforting link between home and school as a new community grew.

Children also had the opportunity to act out stories and thus make them their own. These plays began with the introduction or revisiting of a familiar story, and the children then took on roles to act out for the group with a teacher guiding the experience. The ideas were frequently extended into the program to become a common storyline to build dramatic play. Found materials became props and costumes, blocks and other items became the set, and music and movement were added to develop the performances further. June Fu, Jeremy’s mother, shared a story about the Chinese New Year that evolved into a week-long celebration with the creation of musical instruments and parades through the school.

The culminating activity for the first phase of the project was to collaborate on a group mural. The winter solstice inspired the children to paint a large sun that would serve as a transition to the second phase of the project by taking us inside to map the indoor space. The mural colors warmed the environment and reminded us of our warm feelings toward each other. The painting itself demonstrated the children’s ability to work together as a group and served as a symbol of their being at home in East Room.

### Children build a neighborhood from hollow blocks.

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Photo not available online.

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Aidan, Michael F., Grace, Michael D.

Photo not available online.

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Aidan, Michael F., Grace, Michael D.

Combine sand and water to make cement.

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Photo not available online.
Most people familiar with Bing Nursery School know to ask, “What project are the children in this classroom working on right now?” What may be less clear, however, is where these projects actually come from and how they develop into full-on investigations. For an example, look at the bread project undertaken in West AM this past winter.

Late in the fall quarter, family members were invited to join us in the classroom to share a favorite recipe from home. Cooking was an almost daily activity at the art table as children helped to create kugel, banana bread, and muffins and had the added pleasure of consuming their creations. With the arrival of the holiday break, we teachers wondered whether the children’s interest in cooking would continue after the almost three-week hiatus. The first day back we got our answer when Ellie asked, “How come we aren’t cooking today? Could we make some banana bread?” Christian was nearby and commented, “I remember that cinnamon bread we made before.” The teacher who overheard these remarks shared them with the rest of the team. Someone suggested that bread might be a topic of interest in our classroom, and the team discussed the viability of bread as a research topic. Would there be enough interest from children to sustain a project? Were the teachers interested? Was the project broad enough to allow children to pose questions and do an in-depth investigation? Would we be able to make significant connections between home and school? We thought it was worth a try.

We first wanted to get a sense of how much children already knew about bread and what their personal experiences with it were. At snack time children described what kind of bread they ate at home. “White bread. It’s gray inside and the top and on the side it’s brown. It’s kind of flat.” (Charley) “Bagels, gingerbread, brown and white.” (Morgan) “Cinnamon raisin toast and wheat.” (Meredith) “Wheat.” (Peter) Discussions followed about what people like with or on their bread, including strawberry jam, peanut butter, melted butter, just plain, and even marshmallow. The children were excited to share their own experiences and to hear their friends’ ideas.

To broaden the children’s repertoire of knowledge, expand their vocabulary, and stimulate further interest in bread, Beth Wise, Bing music specialist, wrote a song about bread. Throughout the quarter children could be heard singing or humming the catchy tune: “Bread, bread, different bread, including strawberry jam, peanut butter, melted butter, just plain, and even marshmallow. It’s kind of flat.” Other children could be heard commenting, “Oh, I eat that kind of bread.” Every day children had an opportunity to bake and eat bread. Teachers brought in examples of bread that children might not normally see for them to touch, examine, and smell. Words like croissant, lavash, baguette, and pumpernickel began to float freely from children’s mouths.

To take the investigation to a new level, teachers added a variety of new materials to the classroom. On the patio we set up wheat, rye, and blue corn flour for the children to sift. Library books placed throughout the environment showed wheat growing in fields, being processed in mills, and being ground into flour in preparation for its transition into bread. Doris Welch, a teacher in West PM, brought in her grinding stone so that the children could use a rock mallet to crush flakes of wheat. Play dough with food coloring was added to the dramatic play area. A letter was sent home asking parents and children to bring in samples of bread that the children could introduce to the class, tell about, or just display for others to investigate.

A shift occurred in the room. Children’s chatter contained numerous references to bread. “I’m making bread for my baby,” Eliza said to a passing teacher as she flattened play dough rolls and placed them in the muffin tin. Ellie and Caroline illustrated bread books containing examples of bread we had talked about. As they shared their books at story time, it was clear that the girls were beginning to see themselves as experts, knowledgeable about the topic they shared with their peers. In the outdoor area, children became scientists examining new materials. They pounded wheat flakes and sifted flour, alone, in pairs, and even in groups of four or five, passing and sharing tools and watching as the friends explored the material. The
children began to realize that flour is a primary ingredient in bread and that yeast is the white stuff you add when you want the bread to rise. This latter concept was reinforced by Mary Arnone, a parent, who spent several mornings experimenting with and discussing the function of yeast.

As the children manipulated materials, they made exciting discoveries. One day Erik R. experimented with putting wheat into the sifter before he had ground it. As he determinedly cranked the handle, nothing happened. “Why do you think the wheat flakes are getting stuck?” a teacher asked. “Oh, I need flour,” Erik said aloud, adding a handful of flour to his wheat mixture. He was surprised to see that flour came through the sifter, leaving the wheat flakes behind. “Oh, now I see,” he exclaimed as he threw down the sifter. “The holes are too little for the big stuff to go through.” Minutes later he ran to the swing area, ready to play and to share his discovery with anyone who would listen. Another day Sasha noticed that the flour he was sifting did not match the color of the flour in the book he was studying. A teacher suggested that he try grinding some wheat flakes to see if they might be the same color. Sasha recruited Erik S., and the two proceeded to grind the wheat and sift the flour. “Let’s make some bread,” exclaimed Sasha, and the two created their own recipe. Erik joined Sasha’s snack table to share their delicious creation, and the boys told their story to a very interested group of classmates at story time. The next day several others wanted to attempt their own recipes.

Concurrently, we again asked parents to share favorite recipes, this time for bread. The offerings sounded like items from a multicultural baker: focaccia, Russian rye bread, Vietnamese banana bread, fry bread, and nan. Parents were surprised to see how much children already knew about making bread. “You have to carefully measure ingredients.” “Yeast makes the bread get taller.” “The sifter makes the flour feel really light.”

James Evans, Ruth’s father, brought in an electric wheat grinder, and children could watch the grinding stone turn as it crushed the wheat into flour. We then used the flour to make tortillas, pizza dough, and even waffles. One day, the pizza dough took longer than expected and the pizza wasn’t ready in time for snack. No problem. The patio was transformed into a post-snack pizza restaurant complete with hot pizza and Motown music. Requests to make pizza came frequently after that day.

We wondered how long the children’s interest in bread would persist. Should we schedule time to visit a bakery? Could we examine other cultures more closely to understand why they eat certain breads? This time the answer was no. Warmer weather brought excitement about spring and a desire to be outside and on the move. Cooking had less appeal than finding bugs in the back forty. The teachers closed the project by compiling a book with the children’s bread recipes and the songs sung throughout the quarter. The book gave children another way to share their learning with those at home and provided a memento of the time when they were bread experts.

For a good project one must have, above all, an expectation. If that expectation can also be felt by the children, this is of vital importance. The expectation helps adults’ attentiveness, their choices and methods of intervention and their focus on the relationships in the project. The choice of project is important. We must listen as children continuously suggest what interests them, what they want to explore deeply. After much negotiation their different intelligences will produce a convergence, a great blooming of ideas, that become sharper and more selected. They construct a story that penetrates deeply toward the solution. This provides an objective which gives children extraordinary energies because they know where they must arrive.

Loris Malaguzzi, Founder, Preschools of Reggio Emilia

The preschooels of Reggio Emilia, Italy, are well known for their unique approach to early-childhood education, as described in The Hundred Languages of Children. Bing Nursery School is one of many American institutions to share much of the Reggio Emilia philosophy. We believe that children must be allowed to take some responsibility for their own learning, that they develop rich and complex theories about their world and possess the skills to represent their ideas in many different media. We negotiate a curriculum with the children, based on their interests, that allows them to test their ideas, expand their knowledge, and revisit their theories. We seek projects that promote collaboration among children, teachers, parents, and the community.

In East PM this past year, the flight project was launched during a windy day. The teachers observed the children chasing, catching, and sending leaves into the air to make them float down
again. We watched as children jumped and released the leaves only when their arms were fully extended.

We followed as children ran to the top of the hill, releasing leaves as they ran. We documented the different launching areas the children explored in the yard. At this point we teachers were observers, a role the children invited us to assume: “Watch mine.” “See how it goes up.” “My leaf went up forty feet.” “Look. It’s spinning!” “I’m going to the top of the hill to fly it.” Based on these observations, the teaching team hypothesized about the children’s interests, skills, and ideas, discussing what direction to take. Analyzing the children’s conversations, we noticed the recurring theme of levitation and decided to challenge the children to design a flying machine that would actually fly for a short time over a short distance.

A supply of popsicle sticks and masking tape on the table in the Neighborhood instantly motivated many children to explore and investigate the properties of the materials and promoted them to design and make flying machines. Bobby observed that one of his flying machines “spun around just like a Frisbee and flew eighty feet into the air!” Kylie discovered that her helicopter “only flew down. I need a high place to fly it.” She climbed to the top level of the tree house to drop her helicopter. “See, it flew down!” Nathaniel H. noticed that his plane “always went up and then down, landing on its nose every time.” Paperclips were supplied the following week so the children could explore weight dispersal.

As days passed, the children became more skillful at launching airplanes and flying machines — sometimes so skillful that the machines became entangled in tree branches. This presented a new problem to investigate. After a long discussion, everyone’s ideas were put to the test. Our first effort to retrieve a plane involved using a ladder, but it was too short. Next, a large group held and directed a long stick to nudge the plane out of the tree. Ultimately, the most successful idea involved knocking the plane out of the tree with a soccer ball.

The manufacture of flying machines expanded both outdoors and indoors. At the self-help table many children used a rich array of found materials to make simple kites. Their desire to make these kites fly higher with more control led to the making of paper airplanes. With adults helping on design, the children estimated, measured, and eagerly discussed how far and high their planes would fly. They discussed, practiced, and modified their own techniques for launching a plane and invented social rules for regulating safe launches.

Airplanes being launched on the hill triggered much interest in how and where flying things land. The children decided to construct a landing place for “airplanes, other people’s helicopters, and other things that fly.” Throughout the course of the week the children added what they considered to be the essential components of a landing place, including a fixing station for the broken airplanes, numerous takeoff areas, gas stations for both big and small planes, a parking garage for the cars that drop people off, and even an airport castle.

The flight theme was integrated into our language curriculum. The children created flying felt animals and then described the animals’ physical attributes and their imaginary habitats. As a further extension of this process, the children presented their animals to the class during story time.

Parents got involved in the project too, volunteering their time and expertise. One parent project entailed the design and construction of a control panel. Under close adult supervision, the children used handheld power tools. The control panel was used for an airplane flight deck, a spaceship control panel, and a helicopter’s controls.

As with any good project, the focus on flight taught the children much about themselves, each other, and their environment. At the same time, it allowed the teachers to gain a deeper understanding of how each individual child gained knowledge, developed critical thinking skills and acquired a better understanding of his/her world.
During the first weeks of school, as the children were getting to know each other, the teachers, and Center Room and its yard, the book area was one of the most popular spaces. There were always children on the couch, in the rocking chairs, on the carpet, absorbed in the books of their choice, looking over shoulders at the books their friends had selected, pointing out the books that they already knew.

The student observers in the room kept asking whether the children knew how to read. Brendan recited *Owl Babies*, rocking back and forth and turning the pages of the book that was resting in his lap. William and Juanito asked one another about their favorite book. “Did you see the sharks? Did you see the hole in the parachute?” Rachel often “read” a book at her snack table as the teacher cut the fruit.

The children’s natural inclination toward books and their desire to become readers led us to focus on books and bookmaking as a project that could involve all the children and be integrated into all areas of the classroom. In the fall quarter we keyed into the children’s particular interests — cooking, collecting leaves, painting at the easels — and put together books reflecting these activities with familiar sequences, events, ideas, and situations so that the children could associate meaning with text. These books appealed to the children in language as well, since they incorporated their own words.

The following books resulted from this bookmaking activity:

- **Easel Paintings** consisted of children’s paintings bound with a spine of bamboo sticks, with the names of children in alphabetical order as a table of contents. A group of children worked cooperatively in the redwood grove, making a bright cover for this book with paints and water-resistant crayons.
- **Cook Book** combined printed recipes used for classroom cooking with photographs of children cooking: making cardamom cookies with Lina’s grandma and banana bread with Hanna’s grandma, baking “cakes” in the sand, preparing “freshly caught fish” in the grove, and making “pasta and dumplings” out of play dough. With cooking activities as a springboard for a writing activity, the children dictated their own recipes to the teachers, creating a text in the children’s words.
- **Stories with Paintings** contained stories that the children dictated to teachers in the art area as they painted with watercolors. Stories evolved as the colors were mixed. The teachers made sure that what the children said was written down exactly so that the children would see writing become a record of their words.
- **Leaves of Gold**, a beautiful old volume in a leather binding, contained the sequences of activities and objects familiar to children: collecting leaves, jumping in leaf piles, projecting a leaf onto the wall on the patio and tracing its shadow, painting leaves and making prints with them on paper and in clay. Leaves became a recurring theme in our environment, and the book provided opportunities for children to talk about activities centered on leaves, helping them recognize and organize new vocabulary. As Peri B. was leafing through the book with Will T. by her side, she said, “I am looking for the leaf I painted. I did not want to take it home; I wanted it in this book. When I go to kindergarten, I will take it with me. If you want to paint one, you can find it on the ground. I found this [the leaf in the book] near my house.”
- **Accordion Books**. The children’s masterpieces surprised us with unfolding pages of colorful prints, drawings, words, and musical notes. The children liked that accordion books could stand up and all the pages could be viewed at once. With the help of these books, children gradually realized that stories have a beginning, middle, and end.
- **Felt Book** came about after teachers...
noticed the children’s interest in the felt props used to tell stories and gave the children a chance to cut out pieces of felt, dictate stories to go with them, and proudly move the felt props as the stories were read during story time. Denise Rodriguez, a Psychology 147 student, thought that the felt boards seemed small, so that the children had to crowd the felt onto the boards. To provide more space for deeper and longer stories, Denise created a large blank felt book that the children could reuse over and over again.

The book helped the children elaborate on their stories, expanding them over the entire book. The cover of the felt book had a clear pocket so that the title could change according to the author’s wish. The children enjoyed filling the felt book and spent long periods playing with it and then listening to their own stories as recorded by Denise.

- Jason McBride, another Stanford student, also contributed to the project by taking note of the books read during story time and putting together a board game with characters from these books.
- Albums containing photos and words entered in chronological order became a running diary of events in Center Room as the year progressed and the children made new friends and acquired new skills. They reflected day-to-day experiences such as taking care of the bunnies, gardening, learning to use woodworking tools, getting better at cooperating, and establishing friendships. These books of collective memory helped us to reflect on the year, and new pictures were added as in the winter the children turned their attention to flying.

During the project we visited the school library, which was undergoing renovation and had all the books removed and new shelves installed. We concentrated then on building our own library inside the classroom. The themes of the books we kept in the classroom and used for story time continually re-emerged in dramatic play, puppet shows, sand play, block play, and conversations. In reading play, the children pretended to read, taking on the identity of readers. They loved re-enacting story time and taking turns with the role of the story time teacher. During snack time they enjoyed “reading” the story and alternating pages and taking turns with the books.

Over time, the children started to recognize books by their covers and developed a sight vocabulary to read the titles of many books. We made use of oversized books (referred to as “big books”) with enlarged print and illustrations so that all the children could see as the books were being read to them.

Our library grew organically as we added more and more pages to the books about children’s activities. Children’s curiosity grew as they looked at the photos, identifying children, adults, and activities they knew and constructing stories from memory of that day’s events. Unlike spoken words, pictures and printed words remain physically present long after initial use, so the children could return and explore at their leisure. They could pursue concepts that they were interested in when picking up a particular book, for information or for pleasure. Every day the children acted as tour guides and book interpreters to the parents and to one another, walking among the books displayed throughout the room.

Parents participated in the project, too. Isabel’s mother, Jean, brought an alphabet book called Bembo’s Zoo that inspires her work as a graphic designer. The children were fascinated by the possibility of making animals out of letters, and the book’s artwork became so popular that it was framed and hung over the piano to becoming an integral part of Center Room. Larkin’s mother, Karen, played her flute to Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See? and showed the possibility of representing characters with music. All the children were familiar with the book, so the music allowed a new reading of it while the children chimed with each page turned, “I see . . . looking at me.” During story time one day, Kathy, mother of Emma U. and Kenzie U., showed a collection of miniature books published by her grandfather and read from one of them, the Mother Goose rhymes. In very soft voices (“Because the book is so small,” according to Emma R.), the whole class sang “Hickory dickory dock, the mouse went up the clock.” As Will T. examined the miniature books he said, “I can make books smaller than this, and they have pictures and words. And they are my words and I decide when to say ‘The End.’”

This project cultivated the children’s interest in reading. Through book-sharing activities, children learned that reading has a variety of purposes and is fun. They expressed their thoughts and feelings about the stories they shared. They felt that what they were doing was important — it can become part of a book. They learned connections between speech and pictures and print: what is said can be written down, what is written down can then be read, what can be read can be put into a book, and the child becomes the author!

CLaire: “I like to make books. Some of the stories I know are true. I like to draw them and write them down and then I like to show them. If people like it a lot, they can buy my book. I can make lots of books, and I can sell some.”
A child stood at the easel looking very engaged in his painting. The brush swept across the easel paper with rapid strokes. The child laid the brushes next to the paint pots and listened to his creative voice, smiling from ear to ear. With a quick swoop the child dipped both hands, simultaneously, into the red and blue paint pots. All the while, the teacher observed at a close distance, watching as the boy smeared the paint on the palms of his hands and then on his wrists. With quick movements, the child’s arms bathed in paint. With a look of extreme satisfaction on his face, the child watched his hands as the paint swished and gushed through his fingers and his clenched fists. He then looked at the easel, spread out his fingers, and preceded to paint with his hands in a “wax on, wax off” motion. The child finished his painting with a soft head-butt on the easel and spread out “pretty or beautiful”? When the two minutes were up, Zimmerman addressed the questions in our heads by defining the state of creativity:

- Creativity is a willingness to continue despite personal judgment.
- Creativity is risk, a chance to violate your own status quo.
- Creativity is curiosity, passion, playfulness, and experimentation.
- Creativity is tolerating ambiguity.
- Creativity is a period of indecision or not knowing.

As the opening anecdote demonstrates, children are intrinsically motivated to be creative, feeling free to express themselves regardless of personal and external judgments. For teachers, working with children is a daily re-education in appreciating and accepting the creativity and spontaneity of children. At the same time, we have to recognize that children will be influenced by adults’ reactions, whether positive or negative. In using verbal tactics to “redirect” a child’s artistic expression, we need to foster, not inhibit or narrow, a child’s intrinsic motivation. After all, we are defining and setting the boundaries for a child’s creativity.
Teachers Teaching Teachers
By Betsy Koning, Teacher

On Friday, February 28, 2003, Bing Nursery School did not hold children’s classes, but the staff had an opportunity to learn a great deal. The winter staff development day began with presentations from each teaching team on their curriculum projects. There was much opportunity for discussion and sharing of ideas among the staff. West AM presented their bread project, which included an in-depth study of flour and experimentation with recipes. East PM and Center PM introduced their projects on flight, including studies of birds, insects, aircraft, and kites. East AM shared their project on East Room itself, which involved detailed mapping of both the indoor and outdoor environments. Center AM and West PM presented their projects on art and painting and explained their use of basic materials (mainly paint) as a method of communication. The Twos classes gave updates on the children’s growing skills in social interaction, problem solving, and use of basic materials. Our music specialist, Beth Wise, showed examples of the activities she introduced in each class to expand and enrich the projects. Sharing of these projects made us aware of many opportunities for collaboration among teams and made us proud of our creative and resourceful colleagues. Everyone was inspired.

In the afternoon, Vikram Jaswal, a researcher from Stanford’s Psychology Department, discussed research with children. He explained how he develops rapport with children, defined “game room etiquette,” for example, how researchers are to behave toward children, gave examples of the games used in studies, and elaborated on how studies are designed. Jaswal will start as an assistant professor at the University of Virginia in the fall after six years of conducting research at Bing School. The last sessions of the day dealt with the use of technology in documenting children’s work. Tom Limbert demonstrated how to use QuarkXpress, a graphic design program, that helps in making page layouts for books and newsletters. Then, Jennifer Winters introduced the PowerPoint program for making slide presentations of work in the classroom.

Bing Children’s Fair

Bing Children’s Fair is a community event held at Bing Nursery School every May. Parent volunteers, Bing staff, and Stanford undergraduate volunteers work together to provide activities and foods for hundreds of families attending the event.

From clockwise, left: Mariachi Cardenal de Stanford strolled through the yards. Fishing off the West Room bridge, one of the children’s favorite activities. Bing Alumni Breakfast: children, parents and teachers visit with one another. American Foods at the Fair, headed by Bing parent Jaspi Sandhu, left, and staffed by Bing teacher Seyon Verdibella, seated, and two Stanford undergraduates.
Illustration Investigation
By Jenny Ludlow, Teacher

Sara Coppeto and others from Bank Street College gave an in-depth look at ways to integrate illustration investigation, or the exploration of book illustrations and other works of art, into an early-childhood classroom. Coppeto experimented with different ways of encouraging children to explore and immerse themselves in illustrations. The approaches she devised — exploring the physical characteristics of a work, making personal connections, and using and introducing descriptive vocabulary about the work — derived from Howard Gardner’s ideas about multiple intelligences and children’s different “entry points” for learning. Providing a child with the opportunity to explore an area, in this case an illustration, from many different viewpoints increases the likelihood of accessing the child’s entry point.

Most examples given during the session came from the book A Year with Grandma Moses, which follows the changing seasons throughout a year. Children were encouraged to discuss the illustrations both as a large group and in more intimate peer groups. Although the specific lesson plans suited an older age group than Bing’s, the principles of observation, expression, and drawing personal connections can most certainly be applied to all ages.

Bing presentations at the NAEYC conference

Block Building: A Lost Art?
Presented by Jeanne Lepper and Jennifer Winters

The Worm Project — An Environmental Study of Worms and Their Homes
Presented by Sarah Wright, Chia-wa Yeh, and Paula Smith

Using Simple Percussion Instruments to Make Music
Presented by Kitti Pecka and Jeremy Smart

Eighteen Bing staffers traveled to New York City in November 2002 for the seventy-sixth annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Thousands of early-childhood educators, caregivers, and advocates met to improve early-childhood professional development and programs for young children. Some of the Bing participants shared their impressions.

Children’s Interactions and Children’s Media
By Andrea Hart, Teacher

Nancy Balaban, Betsy Grob, and Carla Poole, all of Bank Street College of Education, led discussions of children’s interactions which we viewed in short video clips of children and teachers at Bank Street Lab School. They showed a clip of child-environment, child-child, or child-teacher interaction then opened a discussion on what we, the viewers, observed in this interaction. After about ten minutes of discussion, they repeated the process with a new clip. These clips, which at first glance seemed to depict simple interactions, took on great meaning and complexity because of the wide-ranging observations and insights of the many viewers, early-childhood teachers from across the country. This session proved that in observing children’s interactions we can find great depths of things to learn.

The theme of a session by Nancy Carlsson-Paige, professor of education at Lesley University, and Diane Levin, professor of education at Wheelock College, is evident in its title: “The Commercial Culture of Childhood: How Disney and Other Media Giants Shape Young Lives.” In an eye-opening if somewhat overdrawn presentation, Carlsson-Paige and Levin discussed Disney as the most notable of many corporations that are making mass consumers of young children. Disney is undoubtedly the main storyteller for children, and unfortunately it has capitalized on this role to sell mass quantities of merchandise to children: figurines, costumes, backpacks, shoes, and even dinnerware represent the characters in Disney movies. (It was the prevalence of Disney-wear among children at Bing that drew me to this session — it is in their clothes as well as in the storylines of their play.) Disney advertises their merchandise repeatedly to children through their television stations, radio stations, and magazines, and it even places several minutes of commercials at the beginning of all its videos. Children do not have the skills to see through or resist these ads and want each item advertised.

The problem with Disney’s ubiquity, Carlsson-Paige and Levin stressed, is that videos and merchandise, by reinforcing each other, keep children constantly thinking about and reenacting the same storylines. (The appropriateness of the storylines is another matter.) With so many attractive and familiar props on their bodies, toy shelves, and dinner tables, children are less likely to make their own props, to move the storylines in new directions, to create their own storylines, to engage in their own storylines.
Leave No Child Behind — A Cutting Edge Session!

By Jennifer Winters, Assistant Director

Marian Wright Edelman is the founding director of the Children’s Defense Fund, Washington, D.C. “The mission of the fund is to ensure every child a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities.”

Edelman began her talk with these powerful quotes:

Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children… I continue to struggle against this universe in which children suffer and die.

Albert Camus speaking at a Dominican Monastery in 1948

The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, German Protestant theologian

Marian urged those attending her session to be advocates for protecting children and truly leave no child behind. She pointed out that while the Bush administration adopted the CDF slogan “Leave No Child Behind” during their campaign, they have not lived up to that promise. She went on to give some grim statistics.

- An American child is reported abused or neglected every 11 seconds; 581,000 children are in our foster care system — 127,000 are waiting for adoptive families.
- An American child is born into poverty every 43 seconds; one in five children is poor during the first three years of life — the greatest time of brain development.
- An American child is born without health insurance every minute — 90 percent of our nine million uninsured children live in working families.
- An American child or teen is killed by gunfire every 2 hours and 40 minutes — nine every day; 87,000 children and teens have been killed by guns since 1979. It is safer to be an on-duty police officer than a child under 10 in America.
- Millions of American children start school not ready to learn, and millions more lack safe, affordable, quality child care and early childhood education when their parents work.
- A majority of American fourth graders can’t read or do math at a proficient level.
- Seven million children are home alone on a regular basis without adult supervision often after school when they are at greatest risk for getting into trouble.
- Nearly 12 million children are poor, and millions are hungry, at risk of hunger, living in worst case housing, or homeless. Almost 80 percent of poor children live in working households.

While these statistics are disturbing, Edelman pointed out that they are facts…not acts of God. Thus, it is up to us to change them: “we have the power, the money, the know-how, the experience, and the vision.”

The Importance of Outdoor Environments

By Nancy Verdizabella, Teacher

On Friday afternoon I attended a very crowded presentation by Mary Rifkin on outdoor environments for children. Rifkin is an educator at the University of Maryland as well as a specialist in outdoor environments. Her presentation began with a song by her good friend Tom Hunter, who is also an advocate of children and teachers. He greeted the crowd with one of his many refreshing songs about nature. This particular song was enticing to the crowd and had us eager to hear what she had to say.

Rifkin talked about the simplicity of nature, yet how rich it is for children. Slides were shown from a school in Connecticut where the “playground” is the woods behind the school building. Although a fancy playground with state-of-the-art structures can seem impressive, a natural environment is all that is needed for a child to develop healthy muscles. In order to climb a tree, a variety of muscles are used. And since tree climbing is less predictable than a man-made climbing structure, the amount of muscles used usually increases. Muscle development also occurs when climbing hills, walking/running on uneven ground, and when bending down to explore the life below a child’s feet.

Mary encouraged outdoor exploration regardless of the weather. “There is no bad weather, just bad clothes.” It was suggested that a box of boots and raincoats, gloves, etc be available so that all children can investigate all the outdoors has to offer.

The activities that can take place outside are endless. For starters, easels and art materials can be brought outdoors (adult artists do it all the time), as well as magnifying glasses and binoculars. There is also insect exploration, bark rubbings, leaf collecting, seed planting, flower picking, harvesting fruit and vegetables, water puddle exploration, singing, reading, picnicking, tree climbing, ball kicking, bird watching, etc. The reality is that the natural outdoors can bring lifelong enjoyment and learning to young children as well as adults.

In conclusion Rifkin stressed the importance of caring (and allowing the children to contribute as well) for the preservation of our precious outdoor environment so that future generations can also benefit from its gifts. Her last words were “You can’t expect a child to grow where nothing else does”.

Tire Swing.
By Cameron S., age 4
In a session on “The Role of Atelierista in an American Context,” Lella Gandini of Reggio Children, Patricia Hunter-McGrath of Evergreen Community School in Santa Monica, Louise Cadwell of the College School in St. Louis, and others discussed viewing one’s entire school as an atelier where children can experiment and have their art documented, interpreted, and displayed. One school provided children with 150 pounds of clay to explore and use for months, first inside and then outside the classroom.

To be successful in integrating the visual arts, the speakers maintained, teachers need the guidance of experts in arts education to acquire the knowledge and skills for working with the arts and to experience a wide range of art materials, methods, and processes.

Nancy Close of the Yale Child Study Center discussed “Listening to Children: Talking about Sensitive and Difficult Issues.” A specialist in working with young children, Close stressed that children who feel comfortable talking and asking about any topic also feel understood, and the possibilities for communication are endless. Two- to five-year-olds may need particular help talking about fears, siblings, birth, angry and aggressive feelings, disappointments, wishes, self-esteem, and reactions to death, separation, and loss.

“Building a Foundation for Science and Mathematics: The Development of ‘Logico-Mathematical Knowledge’” was the topic of Constance Kamii, professor of early-childhood education at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. Kamii studied under Jean Piaget for a dozen years and developed a preschool curriculum based on Piaget’s theory, especially in science, mathematics, and the sociomoral realm.

Kamii emphasized that it is important to differentiate between two kinds of mathematical knowledge identified by Piaget. The first, social knowledge, is transmitted socially through person-to-person teaching, books, or other media. For instance, the symbol 5 is taught as representing a collection of five items or the fifth item in a sequence. Children cannot construct such knowledge on their own. In contrast, the second kind of knowledge, logico-mathematical, cannot be transmitted but must be constructed by children themselves. Logico-mathematical thought is abstract, dealing with relationships and problem solving. For instance, children come to see a set of five items as open to partition in various ways: one and four, two and three, two and two, and one, and so on.

Both kinds of knowledge are important, but the first tends to be emphasized over the second, perhaps because the first is better understood or because basic skills are seen as having priority over higher-order thinking. Understanding the differences helps teachers decide when it is appropriate or necessary to “tell” young children and when it is appropriate or necessary to “let them puzzle it out.” For example, if children are engaged in working with a light bulb, a battery, and a wire, trying to get the bulb to light, the teacher leaves them alone and lets them work. If the children seem frustrated or disengaged, the teacher might approach with a gentle “Tell me what you have tried.” After listening carefully and echoing for clarification, the teacher might ask, “What do you plan to do next?” or “What else could you try?” He or she might even offer to stay and “help,” but the help might involve only holding a wire or bulb as directed by the children. What the teacher does not do in this situation is to show the children how to connect the bulb and battery to light the bulb. This approach robs the children of the opportunity to puzzle the solution out for themselves and own it. It takes what is fundamental logico-mathematical knowledge and treats it as social knowledge. It also risks teaching the children that they are not good at science and cannot figure it out on their own.

Many of us learned mathematics as if it were social rather than a logico-mathematical knowledge. We memorized someone else’s tricks and short cuts for specific types of problems and felt insecure when required to puzzle out a story problem (a real-life application) on our own. We were not given the opportunity to think for ourselves, developing our own logico-mathematical thinking. Instead of mathematical sense, we may have learned mathematical insecurity or even phobia.

At root, Kamii said, mathematics is the science of relationships. The young child’s world, like the teacher’s and caregiver’s, is a world of relationships, so mathematics is present in every situation. It could be argued that teachers and caregivers are “teaching” mathematics in any social interaction with a child, whether they are aware of it or not.

Tom Hunter Concert at Bing

On May 3rd, Bing Nursery School hosted a family concert featuring Tom Hunter. Hunter is a noted folk singer, song writer, and educator. The concert was a very special thank you to all Bing families for their support of the school. Hunter shared many songs that delighted and inspired children and adults.

Photo not available online.
For the fourteenth consecutive year, the Bing community benefited from Kindergarten Information Night. This year, in a variation on the traditional format, a panel discussion gave parents the chance to express their concerns and to hear multiple responses from the panelists. The panel included two guests from previous years — Rick Lloyd, a pediatrician with the Palo Alto Medical Foundation, and Susan Charles, principal of Ohlone Elementary School — as well as three Bing staffers who are also former kindergarten teachers: Beth Wise, music specialist; Peckie Peters, head teacher, and Jeanne Lepper, director. Jennifer Winters, Bing assistant director, served as the moderator.

Rick Lloyd began the evening’s discussion with a portrait of the five-year-old, in most cases a delightful child, filled with enthusiasm for friends, family, and learning. Generally optimistic, five-year-olds look to please the adults in their lives. Though their mothers are still the center of their universe, the children begin to need more autonomy. They are also becoming increasingly aware that other people’s views differ from their own.

Most five-year-olds are fascinated by magic. This is the time in which children most enjoy the world of fantasy and imagination and do not yet distinguish clearly between what is reality and what is not. Almost anything is possible to them. While this attitude can feed their imagination and creative thinking, it also affects their response to video games, television, movies, and other media of the popular culture. No matter how fantastic they are, violent, aggressive, and scary images can be very real to children.

Rick Lloyd warned about two prevalent yet unnecessary pressures on children in our society: academic achievement and the miniaturization of adulthood. All the panelists concurred that academic achievement is stressed too much for young children. Some parents, for example, push their four-year-olds to read in the mistaken assumption that children should read on entering kindergarten. But reading is developmental — it is a skill acquired at different phases for different children — and children who read early are not more likely to be academically successful. At the same time, children are becoming more and more encumbered with adult concerns and worries, which can lead to psychosomatic conditions. “Let children be children” should be the guiding principle.

So how can parents support their five-year-old children? First, their physiological needs should be attended to. Toileting will no longer be an issue, although bedwetting may still occur, more often with boys than with girls. The importance of a good night’s sleep can’t be overestimated: the average five-year-old needs around eleven hours. To succeed in school, he or she also needs a healthy, well-balanced diet, even if that requires sticking to simple food choices and providing constant encouragement.

Children also need to feel loved and competent. Five-year-olds should have responsibilities at home so that they see themselves as part of a working community to which they can make a valuable contribution. They should also be exposed to various experiences and activities while being reminded that they do not need to be the best at everything. Parents should allow their children’s interests to unfold, not only accepting but also supporting them even if the interests differ from the parents’ ideals. Children will be healthier if given the opportunity to follow their own way.

Finally, parents must spend quality time with their five-year-olds. In our community, with a myriad of programs for children and parents, finding ways to enjoy children’s interests together is not difficult.

Following Rick Lloyd’s talk, listeners asked questions about kindergarten readiness and “young fives” (children born later in the year). Many parents have received mixed messages about what children should be able to do on entering kindergarten and how old they should be in order to do well. Bing director Jeanne Lepper commented that worries about age and skill level used to not figure in kindergarten entry and may owe more to competitiveness in society today than to the reality of children. She believes that schools should accept and support all levels and learning styles, and she concurs with Deborah Stipeck, dean of the School of Education at Stanford, that the birthday cut-off for kindergarten should remain right where it is at December 2, not be pushed back to September.

Seconding Jeanne Lepper’s thoughts on the appropriate age for kindergarten, Susan Charles, the principal at Ohlone School, added that parents should “let teachers do their job.” Teachers will give children the appropriate skills for their appropriate age and will address any concerns about the level of a particular child. Rarely, though, will a teacher feel that a child can benefit from additional time in

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I like the little tiny room at music. I like the books and the sand blocks. I like the game where the bear hides the instruments and we have to guess which instrument the bear took. By Lauren A., age 4

I like the bells. By Lina K., age 5

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school. “Teachers are professionals,” Charles commented. “They know children very well.” They are parents’ best outside resources for determining what children need for success in school.

Beth Wise, Bing music specialist, brought laughter to the discussion with a tale from her former kindergarten classroom. She had sensed tension among the children when one child desperately asked aloud, “Can anyone here teach me how to read?” She brought the children together to explain that different doors in our minds open at different times, but this does not make one child smarter or better than another. The doors will open naturally when they are ready to open. Days later, one of the children exclaimed, “Teacher! Teacher! My reading door opened last night!”

But what if the interest in reading early comes from the child? Ms. Charles encouraged parents to support the child’s interests. “It is when the child is not particularly interested in reading and the parents put on the pressure that we are concerned about.” Bing head teacher Peckie Peters spoke up to remind listeners that children need to be regarded for who they are and not for what they achieve.

Some parents asked about choosing the right school for their children. How does one decide between a creative arts school and a more academic one? Are parents really able to see their children’s interests, strengths, and weaknesses at age four or five, or are they just projecting? Panelists urged parents to trust their own instincts but also to consult their children’s teachers.

So what is expected of children entering kindergarten? Although play and socialization are still emphasized, Peckie Peters and Beth Wise commented that most programs do have expectations for academic knowledge. For instance, children should be able to name the numerals 1 to 30, recognize the letters and their sounds, and understand concepts of print. The evening concluded with all the panelists stressing the value of unstructured learning, through which people of any age are most likely to create, invent, and generate new ideas.

It Feels Good to Be Let In
By Karen Robinette, Teacher

A Stanford student has written a book especially for the children at Bing. Ilyssa Silverman wrote and illustrated It Feels Good to Be Let In as a project for a psychology course involving classroom participation in the nursery school. Thanks to the generosity of Helen Bing, the book is available for all to enjoy.

Ilyssa Silverman grew up in Pearl River, New York, a suburb of New York City, with her parents and her younger brother. She has worked with children since she began babysitting at age eleven. While in high school, she worked as an intern at a preschool located at a community college (she finds Bing a utopia in comparison) and was a summer camp counselor for three-to-five-year-olds. She also worked with eight-to-twelve-year-old underprivileged and/or disabled children.

Silverman came to Stanford as an undergraduate and encountered Bing as part of a psychology course in her first quarter. Later, taking the Psychology 147 course at Bing, Silverman decided to write a children’s book for her final project. It seemed a natural extension because her mother had written a book for her when she was two years old (about her first tantrum) and one for her brother on being adopted.

Silverman is actively involved in drama and improvisation, skills that go hand in hand with storytelling. Practicing storytelling at snack and large group times at Bing, she noticed what interested children and which story elements they liked. She chose to focus on exclusion, a developmental issue for all children of preschool age. She illustrated the book with construction-paper cutouts and read it to children at Bing. Her favorite response came from a boy in Center AM. “Ilyssa, let in really isn’t a word, is it?” he asked. “Well, no, I guess it’s not,” she replied. “I was trying to think of something that would be the opposite of left out.” The boy responded, “INCLUDED?!”

Following her quarter at Bing, Silverman left for the spring quarter at Stanford in Washington, D.C., where she met Helen Bing. They exchanged news of the nursery school, including book projects: Mrs. Bing showed her the newly published Alphabing, and Silverman brought out It Feels Good to Be Let In. Over the summer, Mrs. Bing offered to publish the book for all the children at the nursery school.

Silverman graduated from Stanford in June 2003 with an undergraduate degree in psychology and a graduate degree in sociology. She will be teaching at Bing in the fall. Later, she hopes to teach drama at an inner-city school. Eventually, she aims to work in child advocacy and foster-care reform.

Ilyssa Silverman read her book It Feels Good to Be Let In to Elle and Claire. Helen Bing published the book for all children attending Bing Nursery School.
On February 21, 2003, Bing School entertained eighteen early-childhood educators from Seoul, South Korea: ten from the Ehwa Women’s University and eight from the Duksum Women’s University. Last summer Bing received a short visit from the group’s leaders: Dr. Kee-Sook Lee, director of the Ehwa University Demonstration Kindergarten (Korean kindergartners are equivalent to U.S. preschoolers), and Dr. Dong-Ju Shin, director of Duksum Women’s University Kindergarten. This time they brought their entire staff.

The South Korean delegation came on a study tour, visiting preschools in the San Francisco Bay area and Los Angeles. After seeing three outstanding preschools in San Francisco and Oakland, the educators spent a morning at Bing. Welcomed by Helen Bing, who hosted the visit, and director Jeanne Lepper, they were very interested in the natural environment at Bing as well as the activities for children. Some focused on the water table set-up. Some were drawn to the many unit blocks available in each classroom and children’s building structures. Some wanted to know about the different musical instruments in the music rooms. The visitors marveled at the recently renovated brick patio, children’s library, seminar room, staff lounge, and bathrooms. They were delighted to see that the children had been reading Yellow Umbrella, a beautifully illustrated picture book by the Korean author Jae Soo Liu that Helen Bing discovered.

After the tour of the school, assistant director Jennifer Winters gave a presentation of a project centering on Stanford’s Rodin Sculpture Garden. She showed slides of children visiting the garden, recounting the children’s comments and how their skill with clay sculpture progressed over additional visits.

After the presentation, the Korean visitors and the Bing staff exchanged ideas and thoughts in a question-and-answer session that revealed both similarities and differences in approach. For example, a Korean educator asked about dirt being tracked indoors as a result of wearing the same shoes indoors and outdoors. She noted that it is customary in Korea to use indoor slippers to keep classrooms clean. Another Korean teacher, interested in encouraging children’s in-depth investigation through project work, asked how Bing staffers integrate children’s interests into the curriculum on an ongoing basis. The culminating event of the morning was joining West Room for story time. Sitting in the back, the visitors listened attentively as the children sang the “Popcorn Song” and recited nursery rhymes and as teacher Michelle Kellebrew read Eric Carle’s Walter the Baker. Then head teacher Tom Limbert paid a special tribute to the guests by singing the Korean song “Dang Sin Eun Noogoo Shimnika,” incorporating children’s names in the song. With smiles from ear to ear, the delegation sang along. They were impressed by Tom’s singing and the effort to acknowledge and include the Korean-speaking children who attend Bing.

In the afternoon, Helen Bing led the group on a walking tour of the art on display at Stanford Hospital and Lucille Packard Children’s Hospital, providing information on various paintings, artists, and artifacts. The group also stopped at the hospital garden to appreciate the many blooming flowers. The tour then continued on to the Rodin Sculpture Garden, the Stone River sculpture by Andy Goldsworthy, and Timetable by Maya Lin.

After their full day, as the visitors boarded their bus, Dr. Kee-Sook Lee said, “I’m very impressed by Bing’s beautiful play yards and the teachers’ passion in early-childhood education. On top of that, I’m most impressed by the dedication of Mrs. Helen Bing and Mrs. Jeanne Lepper.”

We heard from our guests not long after they arrived back in Korea. They sent a set of thoughtful gifts — traditional Korean child’s outfits — to share Korean culture with all the children. Their bright colors and design attract the children, and they enjoy donning the outfits. It had truly been a fruitful cultural and educational exchange.
2002 Harvest Moon Auction: “Fiesta de Bing”
By Jennifer Winters, Assistant Director

This past year’s Harvest Moon Auction, “Fiesta de Bing,” had the lively spirit and flavor of Mexico. Held at the beautiful Schwab Residential Center (the first time the annual auction was held away from the Bing campus), it turned out to be a very enjoyable and successful event.

The Schwab Center’s banquet hall was festively decorated in south-of-the-border style, and the walls were adorned with large photographs of Bing students. As guests enjoyed Mexican foods and beverages, they circulated in the expansive room for the silent auction, which offered fantastic getaways, children’s items, restaurant dinners, art, wine, and sports items. A very spirited live auction followed, emceed by Michael Olmstead and featuring a Pro Bowl VIP package, a 49ers VIP package, a month of meals, a Bing bunny, an extraordinary playhouse, a lunch with Professor Emeritus Eleanor Maccoby; a perfect night in Napa, a San Diego vacation package, five nights at the Orchid at Mauna Lani, a Bentley for three days, and a beachfront villa in La Mission, Mexico. All the wonderful items auctioned for a worthwhile cause combined with the delicious Mexican foods and beverages to make for a very memorable evening.

More than just a party, of course, “Fiesta de Bing” also raised nearly $150,000 for the Bing Scholarship Fund, once again enhanced by a $50,000 gift from Helen and Peter Bing. Bing is one of the few nursery schools in the country to fund a substantial financial-aid program, which enables the diversity and outreach that are important parts of our mission and contribute significantly to the positive experience of the children at Bing.

The auction owes its success to its participants and also to the hard work, dedication, and generosity of a great many volunteers and contributors. Within the Bing community, the auction co-chairs, Michael Olmstead and Lynn Brown, and the committee chairs win kudos for their tireless commitment:

Auction committee chairs
- Auction co-chair: Michael Olmstead
- Auction co-chair: Lynn Brown
- Class gifts: Hilary & Charlie
- Graphics: Dory Bleich
- Solicitations: Julie Sternfield
- Solicitations: Tamara DiGregorio
- Set-up/clean-up: Leah Elkins
- Finance: Randy Joss
- Invitations/catalog: Carmen Dowley
- Display: Laurie Quinn
- Food and beverages: Deborah Risi
- Food and beverages: Michelle Olmstead

Minister of Education in Singapore Visits Bing

Left to right: Robert Chua, Singapore Consulate-General in San Francisco, Eve Clark, Professor of Linguistics at Stanford, Tharman Shanmugaratnam, Senior Minister of State for Trade and Industry, Senior Minister of State for Education, Jeanne Lepper, Assistant Director Jennifer Winters, Assistant Director, Wong Siew Hoong, Headmaster of Raffles Institution.

The Senior Minister of State for Education in Singapore visited Bing Nursery School in the fall of 2002. Minister Shanmugaratnam’s visit to Bing was part of an educational tour of exemplary schools in the United States. Director Jeanne Lepper, Assistant Director Jennifer Winters, and Professor Eve Clark discussed education practices with the guests.

2002-2003 Annual Fund Report

Thanks to the contributions of Bing parents, friends, and staff members, we were able to raise $205,000 during the annual fund year from September 1, 2002 to August 31, 2003. The participation of our current Bing families reached 43%, an increase from 34% the previous year. In 2003-2004, we are striving for 100% participation!

The Annual Fund is an important part of the school budget. We depend on the Annual Fund to support staff development, specialists, the additional assistant teachers in each classroom, and scholarships for children who would otherwise be unable to attend the school. No gift is too small or too large. Our goal is that every family participates in supporting the school to help us continue the level of excellence that makes Bing such a special place for young children. A big thank you to all!
Bing sotto la Bella Luna
Harvest Moon Auction 2003 Benefiting the Bing Nursery School Scholarship Fund

Save the date of November 15, 2003 at 6:00 pm for the 15th annual Harvest Moon Auction!

This year Bing will celebrate the auction with an extraordinary Italian extravaganza at the Schwab Residential Center on the Stanford campus. Come enjoy a fabulous evening of food, entertainment and exciting auction offerings while you help fund Bing’s scholarship program. For more information or to find out how you can participate, please contact us at 650-208-8362 or email jaspi@lycos.com. Thank you! Jaspi Sandhu and Corina Martinez (Auction Co-chairs).